

## **Reading II 5 C Commentary**

[1 Cor 15:1-11](#) or [15:3-8, 11](#)

I am reminding you, brothers and sisters,  
of the gospel I preached to you,  
which you indeed received and in which you also stand.  
Through it you are also being saved,  
if you hold fast to the word I preached to you,  
unless you believed in vain.

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received:  
that Christ died for our sins  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
that he was buried;  
that he was raised on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.

After that, Christ appeared to more  
than five hundred brothers at once,  
most of whom are still living,  
though some have fallen asleep.

After that he appeared to James,  
then to all the apostles.

Last of all, as to one born abnormally,  
he appeared to me.

For I am the least of the apostles,  
not fit to be called an apostle,  
because I persecuted the church of God.  
But by the grace of God I am what I am,  
and his grace to me has not been ineffective.  
Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them;  
not I, however, but the grace of God that is with me.  
Therefore, whether it be I or they,  
so we preach and so you believed.

**or**

Brothers and sisters,  
I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received:  
that Christ died for our sins  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
that he was buried;  
that he was raised on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.  
After that, he appeared to more  
than five hundred brothers at once,  
most of whom are still living,

though some have fallen asleep.  
After that he appeared to James,  
then to all the apostles.  
Last of all, as to one abnormally born,  
he appeared to me.  
Therefore, whether it be I or they,  
so we preach and so you believed.

### Jerome Biblical Commentary

(d) ON THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD (15:1-58). It is not clear whether Paul is answering questions about the resurrection asked by the Corinthians in their letter to him or whether he treats of this subject because of reports he has received from Corinth. In any case, he knows that some Corinthians deny the resurrection of the body. This denial, it seems, was due to their concept of the body as a hindrance to the soul's activity,—a characteristic Greek and Platonic concept. Paul answers by declaring that the bodily resurrection of Christ, which lies at the very heart of the apostolic preaching, is a fact duly attested by chosen witnesses (vv. 1-11). If, as some Corinthians assert, the dead do not rise, then it would follow that Christ, who died, did not rise, and there has been no redemption. Faith in Christ would be fruitless; the faithful, who lead self-sacrificing Christian lives, would be the most pitiable of all men, and the apostles would be liars (vv. 12-19). But Christ has risen, and his resurrection guarantees the bodily resurrection of those who are united to him by baptism. The glorious resurrection of the body is a consequence of incorporation into the Risen Christ. This final fruit of redemption will manifest the perfect victory of Christ over mankind's enemies and inaugurate his supreme triumph (vv. 20-28). Faith in the resurrection of the body is confirmed by some arguments *ad hominem* (vv. 29-34). Finally, the Apostle deals with the difficulties attending a materialistic conception of the resurrected body that the Corinthians had probably acquired from Jewish speculation on the subject. The resurrected body will be transformed into a perfect instrument for the new conditions of the life of glory (vv. 35-58).

**83** (i) *Christ has risen* (15:1-11). **1-2**. The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ are fundamental doctrines of the paradosis, the "tradition" that Paul faithfully transmitted to the churches he founded (→ Pauline Theology, 79:15-17). **3-4**. *according to the Scriptures*: For the passion, death, and burial of Jesus, the primitive kerygma cited Is 53 on the "Suffering Servant of Yahweh" (Lk 20:37; Acts 8:32-35; 1 Pt 2:22-25); for the resurrection, the apostles appealed to Ps 16:8-11 (Acts 2:25-28; 13:34-35). perhaps Paul also has in mind Jon 2:1 (Mt 12:39-40) and Hos 6:2 (see J. Dupont, *Bib* 40 [1959] 742-61). **5-11**. Paul appeals to the testimony of those who saw the Risen Christ. He omits the apparitions to the holy women, mentioning only those to persons whom Jewish law would accept as responsible witnesses. Peter and the Twelve rank first; they

are the chosen, official witnesses. *the twelve*: The consecrated designation of the apostolic college (→ Aspects NT Thought, 78:173). **7. to all the apostles**: Is this a synonym for the Twelve? Or does it refer to a larger distinct group of authorized witnesses of the resurrection chosen from among the immediate disciples of Jesus? See L. Cerfaux, *Church*, 202; H. Lietzmann, *HNT* 9, 78; these prefer the second opinion; for the first opinion see R. Cornely, E.-B. Allo, and J. Sickenberger. Apparitions to the Twelve are found in the different traditions recorded in the Gospels; we do not know to which Paul is referring, nor do we know from the Gospels about appearances to James, to all the apostles, or to more than 500 brethren (→ Aspects NT Thought, 78:152-55). The apparition to James is described with legendary trimmings in the apocryphal *Gospel According to the Hebrews* (cf. Jerome, *De Viris Illustr.* 2). Christ's apparition to Paul at his conversion has constituted him an official witness to the resurrection. *one untimely born*: Lit., "an aborted fetus"; when applied to an adult, the Gk *ektroma*, like the Fr *avorton*, has a secondary meaning, "an object of horror and disgust." It is somewhat similar to our Eng expression, "monster". This probably is the sense in which Paul, recalling his persecution of the Church, uses the term, "the monster of the apostolic family" (see G. Björck, *ConNeot* 3 [1939] 3-8).

**84** (ii) If *Christ has not risen, the apostolic preaching is a waste of time and Christian faith is fruitless* (15:12-28). Christ's resurrection is the crowning event of salvation history and man's victory over sin, Satan, and death. As Adam brought death, Christ brings resurrection from the dead. The Christian who is incorporated in Christ by baptism shares in his risen life. This final fruit of redemption in Christ will be realized for the Christian at the Lord's parousia when the dead rise in glory. **20. first fruits**: This denotes more than first in time. It is a Jewish cultic term. The offering of the *aparchē* (first fruits) was the symbol of the dedication of the entire harvest to God. So, the resurrection of Christ involves the resurrection of all who are in him. **21-22**. This parallelism and contrast between Adam and Christ is a favorite Pauline teaching (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:45-49). **24. then comes the end**: The consummation of time when Christ, having completed his redemptive mission and brought all the elect to the glory of his resurrection, manifests his total victory over the evil spirits. Then, having completed his work, he hands over to his Father the royal authority that was conferred on him as Savior of the world and Head of the Church. (Concerning the interpretation of H.

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NT New Testament

Or *Orientalia*

HNT Handbuch zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen)

Gk Greek

Fr French

Eng English

*ConNeot Coniectanea Neotestamentica*

Lietzmann who sees in *eita to telos* (then the end) an allusion to an interval of messianic wars and a terrestrial millennium, see E.-B. Allo, *RB* 41 [1932] 187-209; J. Leal, *VD* 37 [1959] 225-31). **25-28**. Paul applies to Christ, the new Adam, “the Son of Man,” what is predicated of Adam and mankind in general in Ps 8:7. The Father has subjected all created things to his Incarnate Son who was sent to redeem the world and establish divine sovereignty. Since his glorious resurrection, Christ reigns in glory; he is the Lord (Ps 110:1). At his parousia, his royal majesty will be manifested to all. Death is personified as in Rom 7. With the resurrection of the dead at the end of time Christ’s victory will be complete: “everything [death included] has been placed under his feet.” **27**. This verse is a parenthesis. Paul notes that Scripture does not include in “everything” the Father who has made all things subject to Christ. *it says*: The subject is not expressed; probably we should supply “the Scripture.” But God, or even Christ, may be the understood subject. **28**. The submission of the Son to the Father refers to the homage that the Incarnate Son, the Savior of redeemed humanity, will render to his Father together with all redeemed creation. With the completion of Christ’s redemptive mission, God the Father will be manifested as the first principle of all life and the final end of all creation and of salvation history.

**85** (iii) *Otherwise the full life of Christian sacrifice is foolish* (15:29-34). After the digression of vv. 23-28 Paul returns to his argument about the resurrection of the dead. He appeals to what he and other Christians have been struggling and laboring for; all this would have no sense if there were no resurrection. Again, the Apostle alludes to a practice of the Corinthian community as evidence for Christian faith in the resurrection of the dead. **29-30**. It seems that in Corinth some Christians would undergo baptism in the name of their deceased non-Christian relatives and friends, hoping that this vicarious baptism might assure them a share in the redemption of Christ. Paul sees in this strange practice an implied faith in the resurrection of the dead. The passage is obscure, and many hypotheses have been proposed (see B. M. Foschini, *CBQ* 12 [1950] 260-76, 379-88; 13 [1951] 46-78, 172-98, 276-85; M. Raeder, *ZNW* 46 [1956] 258-60). **32**. *I fought with beasts at Ephesus*: A metaphor for the bitter opposition he had encountered; his life was endangered. Neither Acts nor 2 Cor 11:23-29 mentions a condemnation to beasts in the arena among Paul’s sufferings. **32**. *let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die*: Isaiah (22:13) places these words on the lips of the selfish pleasure-seeking people of Jerusalem who gave no heed to the misfortune of their countrymen. In Wis 2:6 similar words are put in the mouths of the materialists who have no faith or hope in an afterlife. If there is no resurrection of the dead, concludes Paul, we are fools not to follow this selfish advice. If the dead do not rise, Christ has not risen; there has been no redemption; Christian faith and hope are a chimera. **33**. Paul warns

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*RB Revue biblique*

*VD Verbum domini*

*CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

*ZNW Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*

the Corinthians, citing a popular proverb taken from Menander's *Thais* (cf. LCL 356), to guard themselves against those who would corrupt their faith and morals. *shake off your drunken stupor*: This suggests that the deniers of the resurrection were being heeded by some of the community.**34. Ignorance of God**: This expression characterizes the pagans in Wis 13:1 and 1 Pt 1:13-14. Paul here uses it to stigmatize the deniers of the resurrection. They are no better than pagans!

**86** (iv) *The manner of the resurrection* (15:35-53). The Jews engaged in much speculation about the resurrection of the dead. Some entertained hedonistic conceptions of the life of the resurrection similar to the Mohammedan teachings about Paradise (see J. Bonsirven, *Le judaïsme palestinienne* [Paris, 1934], 1, 483-85). Such materialistic conceptions seem to have influenced some Corinthians to deny the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. The Apostle shows that God wisely provides each being with a "body" adapted to the conditions of its existence. He can provide glorified man with a body suited to his glorious state. **35-36**. Paul employs the Gk mode of argumentation called *diatribē*, imagining an objector whom he refutes with an epithet common to that literary form—"foolish fellow!" (→ Pauline Theology, 79:11). Nature itself shows that the death of a seed is not an obstacle, but the condition for its passage to a higher and richer life.**37. naked kernel**: Without leaf or blade, it becomes a plant with a full ear of grain, for God provides each seed with its proper "body."**39-41**. God provides every being with a body adapted to the circumstances of its existence. The earthly bodies of fish, birds, animals, and men have each their proper flesh; each of the heavenly bodies has a glory proper to itself. The sun, moon, and stars all have their own "brightness" (*doxa*), just as earthly bodies have their proper splendor.**42-44**. The analogy is applied to the resurrection of the dead. Four antitheses illustrate the new qualities of the risen body. In this life, man's body is *psychikon*, the instrument of the *psychē*, which is the principle of mortal existence. The risen body will be *pneumatikon*, the perfect instrument of man's *pneuma*, which in the life of glory will be completely possessed by and perfectly docile to the divine Spirit.**45-49**. The model of this "spiritual body" is the risen body of Christ, "the heavenly man." Just as the first Adam is the source and model of natural *psychic* life, so the Risen Christ, the new Adam, is the model and source of "spiritual" life. Gn 2:7 says that God made Adam "a living being" (*psychē* in the LXX). The new head of humanity, Christ, became in his resurrection a life-giving spirit, who sends the Holy Spirit and makes men sharers in his risen, glorified life.**46**. Perhaps Paul has in mind and rejects the Hellenistic Jewish interpretation of the two accounts of man's creation, which saw in Gn 1:27 the creation of "the ideal man" and in Gn 2:7 the creation of the earthly man, Adam, the sinner and father of humanity. According to this Philonic theory the perfect, "the ideal," would be prior to the earthly. Paul insists that the opposite is true.**47**. First came Adam, formed from the earth, and long afterward came the second head of humanity, the glorified Risen Christ.**48-49**. From the first Adam mankind inherited a mortal and corruptible body; from "the heavenly man," the glorified Christ, the baptized inherit his life and glory. Even now they

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LCL Loeb Classical Library (London and Cambridge, Mass.)

LXX Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT)

share in the life of the Risen Lord; by the action of the indwelling Spirit whom he has sent to them they are being transformed ever more perfectly into his image (2 Cor 3:18), until at the parousia their bodies will become like his risen body, incorruptible and glorious. **50.** *flesh and blood*: The corruptible body of man must be transformed in order to participate in “the kingdom of God,” i.e., in the life of glory. **51.** The Apostle solemnly announces a mystery, a truth of God’s revelation. The faithful living at the parousia will not die (will not fall asleep), but they will be transformed. The dead will rise, and the bodies of those still living at the Lord’s coming will be transformed instantly into glorified, incorruptible, “spiritual” bodies. Paul alludes to the traditional apocalyptic scenario (the sound of the trumpet) and shows by his use of the first person plural that he still entertained the hope of witnessing the Lord’s coming during his own lifetime. The false rendering of the Vg *omnes quidem resurgemus, sed non omnes immutabimur* introduces a contradiction into vv. 51-52. The mystery announced here, that the just who are living at the parousia will not die, is also found in 1 Thes 4:15-17 (see F. Prat, *Theology of St. Paul*, 1, 76-77; 2, 364-69).

**87** (v) *Hymn of triumph over death* (15:54-58). Paul ends his discussion of the resurrection of the dead with a hymnic passage. **54.** When the bodies of the elect by resurrection or change become incorruptible and immortal, the last enemy, death, will have been vanquished and Scripture fulfilled. Paul cites Is 25:8 according to a text that differs from the LXX but is similar to the versions of Theodotion and Aquila. **55.** Is this a citation from Hos 13:14, or simply an exclamation of Paul’s in phrases borrowed from Scripture? If a citation, it is a very free accommodation of the prophet’s words (see J. Bonsirven, *Exégèse rabbinique et exégèse paulinienne*, 327). **56.** *sting*: That is, the sting of a serpent. Sin has been vanquished by Christ the Redeemer. Thus death, like a serpent deprived of its venomous sting, can no longer harm those who are in Christ. Paul suggests this is due to the abrogation of the Law that gave sin its power by giving a knowledge of God’s commandments and threatening death to the sinner, without giving the poor man the strength to keep them (Rom 7:7-25). **57-58.** The hard work (*kopos*) of Christian life is not in vain, because the Christian is “in the Lord,” who has already won the victory.

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## Douay-Rheims Text and Haydock’s Catholic Commentary

*Christ’s resurrection and ours. The manner of our resurrection.*

1 Now I make known unto you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you have received, and wherein you stand; 2 By which also you are saved, if you hold fast after what manner I preached unto you, unless you have believed in vain. 3 For I

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Vg Vulgate (common Latin version of the Bible)

<sup>1</sup>Brown, R. E., Fitzmyer, J. A., & Murphy, R. E. 1968]; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. *The Jerome Biblical commentary* (electronic ed.). Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ

delivered unto you first of all, which I also received: how that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures: 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day, according to the scriptures: 5 And that he was seen by Cephas; and after that by the eleven.

6 Then he was seen by more than five hundred brethren at once: of whom many remain until this present, and some are fallen asleep. 7 After that, he was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 8 And last of all, he was seen also by me, as by one born out of due time. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God, I am what I am; and his grace in me hath not been void, but I have laboured more abundantly than all they: yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

11 For whether I, or they, so we preach, and so you have believed. 12 Now if Christ be preached, that he arose again from the dead, how do some among you say, that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen again. 14 And if Christ be not risen again, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. 15 Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God: because we have given testimony against God, that he hath raised up Christ; whom he hath not raised up, if the dead rise not again.

16 For if the dead rise not again, neither is Christ risen again. 17 And if Christ be not risen again, your faith is vain, for you are yet in your sins. 18 Then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ, are perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. 20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, the firstfruits of them that sleep:

21 For by a man came death, and by a man the resurrection of the dead. 22 And as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But every one in his own order: the firstfruits Christ, then they that are of Christ, who have believed in his coming. 24 Afterwards the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God and the Father, when he shall have brought to nought all principality, and power, and virtue. 25 For he must reign, until he hath put all his enemies under his feet.

26 And the enemy death shall be destroyed last: For he hath put all things under his feet. And whereas he saith, 27 All things are put under him; undoubtedly, he is excepted, who put all things under him. 28 And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then the Son also himself shall be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all. 29 Otherwise what shall they do that are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not again at all? why are they then baptized for them? 30 Why also are we in danger every hour?

28 "The Son also himself shall be subject unto him"... That is, the Son will be subject to the Father, according to his human nature, even after the general resurrection; and also the whole mystical body of Christ will be entirely subject to God, obeying him in every thing.

29 "That are baptized for the dead"... Some think the apostle here alludes to a ceremony then in use; but others, more probably, to the prayers and penitential labours, performed by the primitive Christians for the souls of the faithful departed; or to the baptism of afflictions and sufferings undergone for sinners spiritually dead.

31 I die daily, I protest by your glory, brethren, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord. 32 If (according to man) I fought with beasts at Ephesus, what doth it profit me, if the dead rise not again? Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die. 33 Be not seduced: Evil communications corrupt good manners. 34 Awake, ye just, and sin not. For some have not the knowledge of God, I speak it to your shame. 35 But some man will say: How do the dead rise again? or with what manner of body shall they come?

32 "Let us eat and drink"... That is, if we did not believe that we were to rise again from the dead, we might live like the impious and wicked, who have no belief in the resurrection.

36 Senseless man, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die first. 37 And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be; but bare grain, as of wheat, or of some of the rest. 38 But God giveth it a body as he will: and to every seed its proper body. 39 All flesh is not the same flesh: but one is the flesh of men, another of beasts, another of birds, another of fishes. 40 And there are bodies celestial, and bodies terrestrial: but, one is the glory of the celestial, and another of the terrestrial.

41 One is the glory of the sun, another the glory of the moon, and another the glory of the stars. For star differeth from star in glory. 42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it shall rise in incorruption. 43 It is sown in dishonour, it shall rise in glory. It is sown in weakness, it shall rise in power. 44 It is sown a natural body, it shall rise a spiritual body. If there be a natural body, there is also a spiritual body, as it is written: 45 The first man Adam was made into a living soul; the last Adam into a quickening spirit.

46 Yet that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; afterwards that which is spiritual. 47 The first man was of the earth, earthly: the second man, from heaven, heavenly. 48 Such as is the earthly, such also are the earthly: and such as is the heavenly, such also are they that are heavenly. 49 Therefore as we have borne the image of the earthly, let us bear also the image of the heavenly. 50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot possess the kingdom of God: neither shall corruption possess incorruption.

51 Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall all indeed rise again: but we shall not all be changed. 52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall rise again incorruptible: and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption; and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 And when this mortal hath put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is

written: Death is swallowed up in victory. 55 O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?

56 Now the sting of death is sin: and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast and unmoveable; always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

This chapter is addressed to some among the Corinthians who denied the resurrection: St. Paul, therefore, in order to cure this philosophical opinion, gives them his counsel and advice in this chapter; and lest he might be thought to preach up a new doctrine, in the beginning of his admonitions he informs them that he is preaching no other gospel than what he has always taught, and wherein they believe. (Estius)

**Ver. 7.** *He was seen by James.* The time is not mentioned in the gospels. (Witham)

**Ver. 8.** *As by one born out of due time;* not born at the ordinary term, meaning after Christ's ascension. He calls himself so out of humility, abortives being commonly imperfect and less than others. (Witham)

**Ver. 10.** *I have laboured more abundantly.* He does not say better, or that he excelled them; and even as to his labours, he gives the honour to God: *Not I, but the grace of God with me.* (Witham)

**Ver. 13-23.** He brings many reasons to convince them of the resurrection. 1. *If there be no resurrection for others, Christ is not risen again:* but his resurrection (as he tells them ver. 4) was foretold *in the Scriptures.* 2. *And if Christ be not risen again,...your faith is also in vain,* this being one of the chief articles of your belief. 3. We shall be found guilty of lies and impostures; and yet we have confirmed this doctrine by many miracles. 4. It would follow that you are not freed from your *sins*; i.e. unless Christ, by his resurrection, has triumphed over sin and death. 5. Without a resurrection we Christians, who live under self-denials and persecutions, would be the most miserable of all men, neither happy in this world nor in the next, for the happiness of the soul requires also a happy resurrection of the body. 6. Christ is *the first-fruits*, and the first begotten of the dead, of those *who have slept*: and by his being the first-fruits, it must be supposed that others also will rise after him. 7. As death came by the first man, (*Adam*) so the second man (Christ) came to repair the death of men, both as to body and soul; and without Christ's resurrection, both the souls of men have remained dead in their original sins, and their bodies shall not rise again. (Witham)

**Ver. 24. &c.** *Afterwards the end;* i.e. after the general resurrection of all, will be *the end* of the world. Then Christ shall *deliver up his kingdom*, as to this world, over all men, over the devil and his apostate angels, signified by *principalities* and *powers*; not but that Christ, both as God and man, shall reign for all eternity, not only over his elect but over all creatures, having triumphed by his resurrection over the enemy of mankind, the devil, over sin, and over death, which is as it were the *last enemy* of his elect. At the general resurrection, Christ will present these elect to his heavenly Father, as the fruits of his victory over sin and death; and though as man he came to

suffer and die, and was also made *subject* to his *eternal Father*, yet being God as well as man, he is Lord of all, and will make his faithful servants partakers of his glory in his heavenly kingdom. (Witham)

**Ver. 28.** *The Son also himself shall be subject to him.* That is, the Son will be subject to the Father, according to his human nature, even after the general resurrection; and also the whole mystical body of Christ will be entirely subject to God, obeying him in every thing. (Challoner)

**Ver. 29.** *Who are baptized for the dead.*[1] He still brings other proofs of the resurrection. This is a hard place, and the words are differently expounded. 1. Several late interpreters understand a metaphorical baptism, and that to be *baptized for the dead*, is to undertake self-denials, mortifications, and works of penance, in hopes of a happy resurrection; and this exposition agrees with what follows, of *being exposed to dangers every hour*, of *dying daily*, &c. But if this had been the apostle's meaning, he would rather have said, Who baptize themselves. Besides, this exposition is not so much as mentioned in any of the ancient interpreters. 2. Some think that St. Paul tells the Corinthians that they ought not to question the resurrection of the dead, who had a custom among them, if any one died without baptism, to baptize another that was living for him; and this they did, fancying that such a baptism would be profitable to the dead person, in order to a happy resurrection. Tertullian mentions this custom in one or two places, and also St. Chrysostom on this place. But it does not seem probable that St. Paul would bring any argument of the resurrection from a custom which he himself could not approve, nor was ever approved in the Church. 3. St. Chrysostom and the Greek interpreters, who generally follow him, expound these words, *who are baptized for the dead*, as if it were the same as to say, who receive baptism with hopes that they themselves, and all the dead, will rise again; and therefore make a profession, when they are baptized, that they believe the resurrection. So that St. Paul here brings this proof among others, that they who have been made Christians, and continue Christians, cannot call in question the resurrection, which they professed to believe in their creed at their baptism, the creed being always repeated before they were baptized. 4. Others, by being *baptized for the dead*, understand those who begged and called for baptism when they were in danger of death, and would by no means go out of this world without being baptized, hoping thereby to have a happy resurrection of their bodies; so that to be baptized for the dead is the same as on the account of the state of the dead, which they were entering into. See St. Epiphanius, hæc. viii. p. 114. Edit Petavii. (Witham) Some think the apostle here alludes to a ceremony then in use: but others, more probably, to the prayers and penitential labours performed by the primitive Christians for the souls of the faithful departed: or to the baptism of afflictions and sufferings undergone for sinners spiritually dead. (Challoner)

**Ver. 31.** *By your glory.*[2] He seems, especially by the Greek text, to call God to witness, and to protest by the reasons he has to glory or boast in their conversion, that his life is as it were a continual death. Other expound it, I die daily *for your* glory; or, that I may have reason to glory for the progress of the gospel. (Witham)

**Ver. 32.** *With beasts at Ephesus.* He seems to mean, with men as cruel and brutal as beasts: for there is not sufficient reason to think that at Ephesus he was exposed to beasts in the amphitheatre. (Witham) --- Interpreters are divided upon this passage. Calmet is of opinion that St. Paul was exposed in the amphitheatre at Ephesus, but was secured from all injury by the all-

powerful hand of God: he produces the testimony of St. Chrysostom, Theo., St. Ambrose, St. Cyprian, and St. Hilary, all of whom understand this passage in the literal sense. Nicephorus cites a book, entitled *The Travels of St. Paul*, in confirmation of this fact, wherein (he informs us) there is a long account of this transaction. St. Jerome says, that St. Paul was condemned by the governor of Ephesus to be devoured by beasts. Estius seems to maintain the same opinion as Challoner. To inspire us to combat, it is advisable to turn our eyes frequently to a future life. The brevity of the present is a principle common to the morality of Jesus Christ, and to that of Epicurus. But how contrary are the conclusions! Why should we not rather say: "Let us watch, and fast, and pray, and do penance, for to-morrow we die; and after that, judgment." --- *Let us eat and drink, &c.* That is, if we did not believe that we were to rise again from the dead, we might live like the impious and wicked, who have no belief in the resurrection. (Challoner)

**Ver. 33.** *Evil communications* (or discourses) *corrupt good manners.* He hints that this error against the resurrection, and the other faults into which they had fallen, were occasioned by the heathen philosophers and other vain teachers among them. (Witham)

**Ver. 35-50.** *How do the dead rise again?* He now answers the objections these new teachers made against the resurrection. St. Chrysostom reduces them to these two questions: how is it possible for them to rise? and in what manner, or with what qualities, will they rise? To shew the possibility, he brings the example of a grain of wheat, or of any seeds, which must be corrupted, and die as it were in the ground, and then is quite changed, comes up with *a blade*, a stalk, and an ear quite different from what it was when sown, and yet comes to be wheat again, or to be a tree that produces the same kind of fruit: so God can raise *our bodies as he pleaseth.* He also tells them that there are very different bodies, *terrestrial*, and *celestial*, some more, some less glorious, differing in beauty and other qualities, as God pleaseth. As the *sun* is brighter than the *moon*, and as one *star* is *brighter* than another, so shall it be at the general resurrection. But all the bodies of the elect shall be happily changed to a state of *incorruption.* (ver. 42.) Here the bodies even of the just are subject to corruption, to decay, liable to death, but they shall then rise to a state of incorruptibility and immortality: And so he answers the second question, that here every one's body is a weak, sensual, *animal* body, clogged with many imperfections, like that of Adam after he had sinned; but at the resurrection, the bodies of the saints shall be spiritual bodies, blessed with all the perfections and qualities of a glorified body, like to that of Christ after he was risen. --- St. Paul also, comparing the *first man (Adam)* with Christ, whom he calls the second or the *last Adam*, (ver. 45) says that the first Adam was made a *living soul*, (i.e. a living animal, or a living creature, with a life and a body that required to be supported with corporal food) but that Christ was made a *quickenings Spirit*: he means, that though he had a true mortal body by his nativity of his Virgin Mother, yet that by his resurrection he had a glorified body, immortal, that needed no corporal food, and that he would also give such spiritual and immortal bodies to those whom he should make partakers of his glory. --- *But not first that which is spiritual, &c.* (ver. 46) that is, both in Adam and in us, and even in Christ, the body was first mortal, which should afterwards be made spiritual and immortal by a happy resurrection. --- *The first Adam* (ver. 47) *was of the earth, earthly*, made of clay, and with such a body as could die, *but the second man (Christ) was from heaven, heavenly*: not that he took a body from heaven, as some ancient heretics pretended, but he was heavenly not only because he was the Son of God, but in this place he seems to be called heavenly even as to his body, after his resurrection, his body being then become spiritual and immortal. --- *Such as is the earthly man, &c.* (ver. 48) that

is, as the first man, Adam, was earthly by his earthly and mortal body, so were we and all his posterity *earthly*; but such *as the heavenly* man, Christ, *was heavenly*, and rose with a heavenly and immortal body; so shall all those be heavenly, to whom he shall give a spiritual, a heavenly, and an immortal body at their happy resurrection. --- *Therefore*, (ver. 49) *as we have borne the image of the earthly* man, (that is, have been made mortal, and also by sin subject to the corrupt inclinations of this mortal body) *so let us bear also the image of the heavenly* one, by a new life imitating Christ, by which means we shall be glorified with him, both as to soul and body. --- *Now this I say*, and admonish you, *brethren*, (ver. 50) *that flesh and blood cannot possess the kingdom of God*; i.e. those that lead a sensual and carnal life, nor the corruption of sin, deserve the state of incorruption in glory. (Witham)

**Ver. 51.** *We shall all indeed rise again, but we shall not all be changed.*[3] This is the reading of the Latin Vulgate, and of some Greek manuscripts, and the sense is, that all both good and bad shall rise, but only the elect to the happy change of a glorified body. The reading in most Greek copies at present is, *we shall not all sleep*, (i.e. die) *but we shall be all changed*: so also read St. Chrysostom: and St. Jerome found it in many manuscripts from which divers, especially of the Greek interpreters, thought that such as should be found living at the day of judgment should not die, but the bodies of the elect (of whom St. Paul here speaks) should be *changed* to a happy state of immortality. This opinion, if it deserve not to be censured, is at least against the common persuasion of the faithful, who look upon it certain that all shall die before they come to judgment. Some expound the Greek only to signify, that all *shall not sleep*, i.e. shall not remain for any time in the grave, as others who die are accustomed to do. (Witham)

**Ver. 52.** *In a moment, &c.* By the power of the Almighty all shall rise again in their bodies, either to a happy or a miserable resurrection. (Witham)

**Ver. 54.** *Death is swallowed up in victory*, in regard of the saints and the elect, so that it may be said, *O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?* over which the saints shall triumph, and also over sin and hell. (Witham)

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[1] Ver. 29. *Qui baptizantur pro mortuis, oi baptizomenoi uper ton nekron*. See St. Chrysostom, *om. m.* p. 154. *epi te pistei taute, &c.*; see Tertullian, lib. de resurrec. carnis chap. 48. and lib. v. contra Marcion. chap. 10. and the notes of Rigaltius on these places. See St. Epiphanius, hæ. viii. p. 114. *epi taute te elpidi, &c.*

[2] Ver. 31. *Morior per vestram gloriam, ne ten umeteran kauchesin*.

[3] Ver. 51. *Omnes quidem resurgemus, sed non omnes immutabimur*; and so some Greek manuscripts have, *pantes anastesomen*, but in most Greek copies we find, *pantes men ou koimethesometha, pantes de allagesometha*. See St. Jerome (Ep. ad Minervium Alexandrium, tom. iv. p. 207. et seq. Ed. Ben.) where he gives at large the different opinions and readings. See also his Epist. to Marcella, (tom. iv. p. 166) where he says: *Deprehensi in corpore in iisdem corporibus occurrent ci (Christo)*.

## King James Text and William Barclay Commentary (non-Catholic)

### 1 Corinthians 15:1–11

Brothers, I want to make clear to you the nature of the good news that I preached to you, that gospel which you also received, and in which you stand, and through which you are saved. I want to make clear to you what account I gave you of the good news, an account which can save you if you hold fast to it, unless your belief is a random and haphazard thing. In the very forefront of it I handed on to you what I myself received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was laid in the tomb, and that he was raised up on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he was seen by Cephas and then by The Twelve, and that then he was seen by more than five hundred brothers all at the one time, of whom the majority are still alive, although some have fallen asleep. After that he was seen by James, and then by all the apostles, and last of all, as if by the abortion of the apostolic family, he was seen by me too. For I am the least of the apostles; in fact I am not fit to be called an apostle because I persecuted the Church of God. It is by the grace of God that I am what I am, and his grace to me has not proved ineffective, but I have toiled more exceedingly than all of them; but it was not I who achieved anything but God's grace working with me. So then, whether I be the preacher or they, this is what we preach and this is what we have believed.

PAUL is recapitulating the good news which he first brought to the Corinthians. It was not news which he had invented but news which had first been delivered to him, and it was news of a Risen Lord.

In verses 1 and 2 Paul says an extremely interesting series of things about the good news.

(i) It was something which the Corinthians had *received*. No man ever invented the gospel for himself; in a sense no man ever discovers it for himself. It is something which he receives. Therein indeed is the very function of the Church. The Church is the repository and the transmitter of the good news. As one of the old fathers had it, "No man can have God for his Father, unless he has the Church for his mother." The good news is something that is received within a fellowship.

(ii) It was something in which the Corinthians *stood*. The very first function of the good news was to give a man stability. In a slippery world it kept him on his feet. In a tempting world it gave him resistance power. In a hurting world it enabled him to endure a broken heart or an agonized body and not to give in. Moffatt finely translates Job 4:4, "Your words have kept men on their feet." That is precisely what the gospel does.

(iii) It was something in which they were *being saved*. It is interesting to note that in the Greek this is a present tense, and not past. It would be strictly correct to translate it not, "in which you have been saved," but, "in which you are being saved." Salvation goes from glory to glory. It is not something which is ever completed in this world. There are many things in this life which we can exhaust, but the meaning of salvation is something which a man can never exhaust.

(iv) It was something to which a man had *to hold tenaciously*. Life makes many an attempt to take away our faith. Things happen to us and to others which baffle our understanding; life has

its problems to which there seems no solution and its questions to which there seems no answer; life has its dark places where there seems to be nothing to do but hold on. Faith is always a *victory*, the victory of the soul which tenaciously maintains its clutch on God.

(v) It was something which *must not be held haphazardly and at random*. The faith which collapses is the faith which has not thought things out and thought them through. For so many of us faith is a superficial thing. We tend to accept things because we are told them and to possess them merely at secondhand. If we undergo the agony of thought there may be much that we must discard, but what is left is really ours in such a way that nothing can ever take it from us.

In Paul's list of appearances of the Risen Lord two are specially interesting.

(i) There is the appearance to *Peter*. In the earliest account of the Resurrection story, the word of the messenger in the empty tomb is, "Go, tell his disciples *and Peter*." (Mark 16:7). In Luke 24:34 the disciples say, "The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to *Simon*." It is an amazing thing that one of the first appearances of the Risen Lord was to the disciple who had denied him. There is all the wonder of the love and grace of Jesus Christ here. Others might have hated Peter forever, but the one desire of Jesus was to set this erratic disciple of his upon his feet. Peter had wronged Jesus and then had wept his heart out; and the one desire of this amazing Jesus was to comfort him in the pain of his disloyalty. Love can go no further than to think more of the heartbreak of the man who wronged it than of the hurt that it itself has received.

(ii) There is the appearance to *James*. Without doubt this James is the brother of our Lord. It is quite clear from the gospel narrative that Jesus's own family did not understand him and were even actively hostile to him. Mark 3:21 tells us that they actually sought to restrain him because they believed him to be mad. John 7:5 tells us that his brothers did not believe in him. One of the earliest of those gospels which did not succeed in getting into the New Testament is the Gospel according to the Hebrews. Only fragments of it remain. One fragment, preserved by Jerome, reads, "Now the Lord, when he had given the linen cloth unto the servant of the priest, went unto James and appeared unto him (for James had sworn that he would not eat bread from that hour wherein he had drunk the Lord's cup until he should see him risen again from among them that sleep)." So, the story runs, "Jesus went to James and said, 'Bring ye a table and bread.' And he took bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it unto James the Just and said unto him, 'My brother, eat thy bread, for the Son of Man is risen from among them that sleep.'" We can only conjecture what lies behind this. It may well be that the last days turned James's contempt into wondering admiration so that when the end came, he was so torn with remorse for the way in which he had treated his brother that he swore that he would starve unless he came back to forgive him. Here once again we have the amazing grace and love of Christ. He came to bring peace to the troubled soul of the man who had called him mad and who had been his opponent.

It is one of the most heart-moving things in all the story of Jesus that two of his first appearances, after he rose from the tomb, were to men who had hurt him and were sorry for it. Jesus meets the penitent heart far more than halfway.

Finally, in this passage we have a vivid light thrown on the character of Paul himself. To him it was the most precious thing in the world that Jesus had appeared also to him. That was at one

and the same time the turning point and the dynamic moment of his life. But verses 9–11 tell us much about him.

(i) They tell us of his utter *humility*. He is the least of the apostles; he has been glorified with an office for which he is not worthy. Paul would never have claimed to be a selfmade man. It was by the grace of God that he was what he was. He is perhaps even accepting a taunt made against him. It would seem that he was a little and an unhandsome man (2 Corinthians 10:10). It may be that the Jewish Christians who wished to impose the law upon Christian converts and who hated his doctrine of free grace, declared that, so far from being born again, Paul was an abortion. He, for his part, was so conscious of his own unworthiness that he felt no one could say anything too bad about him. Charles Gore once said, “On a general review of life we can seldom feel that we are suffering unmerited wrong.” Paul felt like that. His was not the pride which resented the criticism and the taunts of men, but the humility which felt that it deserved them.

(ii) They tell us at the same time of *the consciousness of his own worth*. He was well aware that he had laboured beyond them all. His was not a false modesty. But even at that, he spoke always, not of what he had done, but of what God had enabled him to do.

(iii) They tell of *his sense of fellowship*. He did not regard himself as an isolated phenomenon with a message that was unique. He and the other apostles preached the same gospel. His was the greatness which bound him closer to the Christian fellowship; there is always something lacking in the greatness which divides a man from his fellows.

## IF CHRIST BE NOT RAISED

### 1 Corinthians 15:12–19

If it is continually proclaimed that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some among you say that the resurrection of the dead does not exist? If the resurrection from among the dead does not exist, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then the proclamation of the faith is emptied of its meaning, and your faith has been emptied of its meaning too. If that is so we are shown to have borne false witness about God, because we witnessed about God, that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise, if indeed the dead are not raised up. If the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised your faith is worthless, you are still in your sins; and, if that is so, those who died trusting in Christ have perished. If it is only in this life that we have hope in Christ, then we are more to be pitied than all men.

PAUL attacks the central position of his opponents at Corinth. They said flatly, “Dead men do not rise again.” Paul’s answer is, “If you take up that position it means that Jesus Christ has not risen again; and if that be so, the whole Christian faith is wrecked.”

Why did Paul regard a belief in the Resurrection of Jesus as so essential? What great values and great truths does it conserve? It proves four great facts, which can make all the difference to a man’s view of life here and hereafter.

(i) The Resurrection proves that *truth is stronger than falsehood*. According to the Fourth Gospel, Jesus said to his enemies, “Now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth.”

(John 8:40). Jesus came with the true idea of God and of goodness; his enemies procured his death because they did not want their own false view destroyed. If they had succeeded in finally obliterating him, falsehood would have been stronger than truth. On one occasion the Earl of Morton, regent of Scotland, sent for Andrew Melville, the great Reformation leader. "Ther will never be quyetnes in this countrey," said Morton, "till halff a dissonne of you be hangit or banished the countrey." "Tushe! sir," said Melville, "threaten your courtiers in that fashion. It is the same to me whether I rot in the air or in the ground. ... Yet God be glorified, it will nocht ly in your power to hang nor exyll his treuthe!" The Resurrection is the final guarantee of the indestructibility of the truth.

(ii) The Resurrection proves *that good is stronger than evil*. Again to quote the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is represented as saying to his enemies, "You are of your father, the devil." (John 8:44). The forces of evil crucified Jesus and if there had been no Resurrection these forces would have been triumphant. J. A. Froude, the great historian, wrote, "One lesson, and only one, history may be said to repeat with distinctness, that the world is built somehow on moral foundations, that in the long run it is well with the good, and in the long run it is ill with the wicked." But if the Resurrection had not taken place, that very principle would have been imperilled, and we could never again be certain that goodness is stronger than evil.

(iii) The Resurrection proves that *love is stronger than hatred*. Jesus was the love of God incarnate.

"Love came down at Christmas,

Love all lovely, Love Divine."

On the other hand, the attitude of those who procured his crucifixion was an almost virulent hatred, so bitter that in the end it was capable of ascribing the loveliness and graciousness of his life to the power of the devil. If there had been no Resurrection, it would have meant that the hatred of man in the end conquered the love of God. The Resurrection is the triumph of love over all that hatred could do. This very beautiful poem sums up the whole matter.

"I heard two soldiers talking

As they came down the hill,

The sombre hill of Calvary,

Bleak and black and still.

And one said, 'The night is late,

These thieves take long to die.'

And one said, 'I am sore afraid,

And yet I know not why.'

I heard two women weeping  
As down the hill they came,  
And one was like a broken rose,  
And one was like a flame.  
One said, 'Men shall rue  
This deed their hands have done.'  
And one said only through her tears,  
'My son! my son! my son!'  
I heard two angels singing  
Ere yet the dawn was bright,  
And they were clad in shining robes,  
Robes and crowns of light.  
And one sang, 'Death is vanquished,'  
And one in golden voice  
Sang, 'Love hath conquered, conquered all,  
O heaven and earth rejoice!'"

The Resurrection is the final proof that love is stronger than hate.

(iv) The Resurrection proves that *life is stronger than death*. If Jesus had died never to rise again, it would have proved that death could take the loveliest and best life that ever lived and finally break it. During the second world war a certain city church in London was all set out for harvest thanksgiving. In the centre of the gifts was a sheaf of corn. The service was never held, for, on the Saturday night, a savage air raid laid the church in ruins. The months passed and the spring came, and someone noticed that, on the bomb site where the church had stood, there were shoots of green. The summer came and the shoots flourished and in the autumn there was a flourishing patch of corn growing amidst the rubble. Not even the bombs and the destruction could kill the life of the corn and its seeds. The Resurrection is the final proof that life is stronger than death.

Paul insisted that if the Resurrection of Jesus was not a fact the whole Christian message was based on a lie, that many thousands had died trusting in a delusion, that without it the greatest

values in life have no guarantee. “Take away the Resurrection,” he said, “and you destroy both the foundation and the fabric of the Christian faith.”

## THE FIRST-FRUITS OF THOSE THAT SLEEP

1 Corinthians 15:20–28

Now then Christ has been raised from among the dead, the first-fruits of those who sleep. For, since it was through one man that death came, it was also through one man that the resurrection of the dead came. For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. Each comes in his own rank. Christ is the first-fruits, and then those who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes. After that comes the final end, when he will hand over the Kingdom to God, his father, when he has reduced to helplessness every other rule, and every other authority and power. For he must reign until he puts all his enemies under his feet. Death will be the last enemy to be reduced to helplessness. For God has subjected all things to him. (When we say that all things have been subjected to him, that of course does not include him who subjected them to him). But when all things have been subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subjected to him who subjected all things to him, so that God may be all in all.

THIS again is a very difficult passage because it deals with ideas which are strange to us.

It speaks of Christ as “the first-fruits of them that sleep.” Paul is thinking in terms of a picture which every Jew would recognize. The Feast of the Passover had more than one significance. It commemorated the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt. But it was also a great harvest festival. It fell just at the time when the barley harvest was due to be ingathered. The law laid it down, “You shall bring the sheaf of the first-fruits of your harvest to the priest; and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, that you may find acceptance; on the morrow after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.” (Leviticus 23:10, 11). Some sheaves of barley must be reaped from a common field. They must not be taken from a garden or an orchard or from specially prepared soil. They must come from a typical field. When the barley was cut, it was brought to the Temple. There it was threshed with soft canes. so as not to bruise it. It was then parched over the fire in a perforated pan so that every grain was touched by the fire. It was then exposed to the wind so that the chaff was blown away. It was then ground in a barley mill and its flour was offered to God. That was the first-fruits.

It is significant to note that not until after that was done could the new barley be bought and sold in the shops and bread be made from the new flour. The first-fruits were a sign of the harvest to come; and the Resurrection of Jesus was a sign of the resurrection of all believers which was to come. Just as the new barley could not be used until the first-fruits had been duly offered, so the new harvest of life could not come until Jesus had been raised from the dead.

Paul goes on to use another Jewish idea. According to the old story in Genesis 3:1–19 it was through Adam’s sin that death came into the world as its direct consequence and penalty. The Jews believed that all men literally sinned in Adam; we see that his sin might transmit to his descendants *the tendency* to sin. As Aeschylus said, “The impious deed leaves after it a larger progeny, all in the likeness of the parent stock.” As George Eliot wrote, “Our deeds are like

children that are born to us, they live and act apart from our will; nay, children may be strangled, but deeds never. They have an indestructible life both in and out of our consciousness.”

Nobody would be likely to deny that a child can inherit a tendency to sin and that the father’s sins are literally visited upon the children. No one would deny that a child can inherit the consequences of a father’s sin, for we know all too well how physical conditions which are the consequence of an immoral life can be transmitted to the child. But the Jew meant more than that. He had a tremendous sense of solidarity. He was sure that no man could ever do anything that could affect only himself. And he held that all men sinned in Adam. The whole world of men was, as it were, in him; and when he sinned all sinned.

That may seem a strange idea to us and unfair. But that was the Jewish belief. All had sinned in Adam, therefore all were under the penalty of death. With the coming of Christ that chain was broken. Christ was sinless and conquered death. Just as all men sinned in Adam, so all men escape from sin in Christ; and just as all men died in Adam, so all men conquered death in Christ. Our unity with Christ is just as real as our unity with Adam and this destroys the evil effect of the old.

So we get two contrasting sets of facts. First, there is Adam-sin-death. Second, there is Christ-goodness-life. And just as we were all involved in the sin of him who was first created, we are all involved in the victory of him who re-created mankind. However we may estimate that way of thinking today, it was convincing to those who heard it for the first time; and, whatever else is doubtful, it remains true that with Jesus Christ a new power came into the world to liberate men from sin and death.

Verses 24–28 read very strangely to us. We are used to thinking of the Father and the Son on terms of equality. But here Paul clearly and deliberately subordinates the Son to the Father. What he is thinking of is this. We can use only human terms and analogies. God gave to Jesus a task to do, to defeat sin and death and to liberate man. The day will come when that task will be fully and finally accomplished, and then, to put it in pictorial terms, the Son will return to the Father like a victor coming home and the triumph of God will be complete. It is not a case of the Son being subject to the Father as a slave or even a servant is to a master. It is a case of one who, having accomplished the work that was given him to do, returns with the glory of complete obedience as his crown. As God sent forth his Son to redeem the world, so in the end he will receive back a world redeemed; and then there will be nothing in heaven or in earth outside his love and power.

## IF THERE IS NO RESURRECTION

1 Corinthians 15:29–34

If there is no resurrection, what will those who are baptized for the dead do? If the dead are not raised at all, why do people get themselves baptized for them? Every day I take my life in my hands, I swear it by the pride which I have in you in Christ Jesus our Lord. What good is it to me—looking at it from the human point of view—if at Ephesus I had to fight with beasts in the arena? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die. Don’t deceive yourselves—evil friendships destroy good characters. Turn to sober living, as it is only right that you should, and don’t go on sinning.

Some of you boast about your knowledge, but you have not a vestige of knowledge about God. It is to shame you that I speak.

ONCE again this passage begins with a very difficult section. People have always been puzzled about what *being baptized for the dead* means, and even yet the problem is not definitely settled. The preposition *for* in the phrase for the dead is the Greek *huper*. In general this word can have two main meanings. When used of place, it can mean *above* or *over*. Far more commonly it is used of persons or things and means *instead of* or *on behalf of*. Remembering these two meanings, let us look at some of the ways this phrase has been understood.

(i) Beginning from the meaning of *over* or *above*, some scholars have suggested that it refers to those *who get themselves baptized over the graves of the martyrs*. The idea is that there would be something specially moving in being baptized on sacred ground with the thought of the unseen cloud of witnesses all around. It is an attractive and rather lovely idea, but at the time Paul was writing to the Corinthians persecution had not yet broken out in anything like a big way. Christians might suffer ostracism and social persecution, but the time of the martyrs had not yet come.

(ii) It is in any event much more natural to take *huper* in the sense of *instead of* or *on behalf of*. If we take it that way there are three possibilities. It is suggested that the phrase refers to those *who get themselves baptized in order to fill up the vacant places in the Church which the dead have left*. The idea is that the new believer, the young Christian, comes into the Church like a new recruit to take the place of the veterans who have served their campaign and earned their release. There is a great thought there. The Church ever needs its replacements and the new member is like the volunteer who fills up the depleted ranks.

(iii) It is suggested that the phrase means *those who get themselves baptized out of respect for and affection for the dead*. Again there is a precious truth here. Many of us came into the Church because we knew and remembered that some loved one had died praying and hoping for us. Many have in the end given their lives to Christ because of the unseen influence of one who has passed over to the other side.

(iv) All these are lovely thoughts, but in the end we think that this phrase can refer to only one custom, which has quite correctly passed out of Church practice altogether. In the early Church there was vicarious baptism. If a person died who had intended to become a member of the Church and was actually under instruction, sometimes someone else underwent baptism for him. The custom sprang from a superstitious view of baptism, that, without it, a person was necessarily excluded from the bliss of heaven. It was to safeguard against this exclusion that sometimes people volunteered to be baptized literally on behalf of those who had died. Here Paul neither approves nor disapproves that practice. He merely asks if there can be any point in it if there is no resurrection and the dead never rise again.

From that he passes on to one of the great motives of the Christian life. In effect he asks, "Why should a Christian accept the perils of the Christian life if it is all to go for nothing?" He quotes his own experience. Every day he is in jeopardy of his life. Something terrible of which the New Testament has no record happened to Paul at Ephesus. He refers to it again in 2

Corinthians 1:8–10: he says that in Asia, that is in Ephesus, he was in such dire peril that he despaired of life and had the sentence of death passed upon him. To this day in Ephesus there is a building known as Paul’s prison. Here he calls his peril *fighting with beasts*. The word he uses is that used of a gladiator in the arena. The later legends tell us that he actually did so fight and that he was wondrously preserved because the beasts would not attack him. But Paul was a Roman citizen and no Roman citizen could be compelled to fight in the arena. Much more likely he used the phrase as a vivid picture of being threatened by men who were as savage for his life as a wild beast might have been. In any event he demands, “To what end is all the peril and the suffering if there is no life beyond?”

The man who thinks that this life is all, and that there is nothing to follow it, may well say, “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.” The Bible itself quotes those who speak like that. “Come,” they say, “let us get wine, let us fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow will be like this day, great beyond measure.” (Isaiah 56:12). The preacher, who held that death was extinction, wrote, “There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and find enjoyment from his toil.” (Ecclesiastes 2:24, cp. 3:12; 5:18; 8:15; 9:7). Jesus himself told about the rich fool who forgot eternity and took as his motto, “Eat, drink and be merry.” (Luke 12:19).

Classical literature is full of this spirit. Herodotus, the Greek historian, tells of a custom of the Egyptians. “In social meetings among the rich, when the banquet is ended, a servant carries round to the several guests a coffin, in which there is a wooden image of a corpse, carved and painted to resemble nature as nearly as possible, about a cubit or two cubits in length. As he shows it to each guest in turn, the servant says, ‘Gaze here, and drink and be merry, for when you die, such will you be.’” Euripides writes in the *Alcestis* (781–789, A. S. Way’s translation):

“From all mankind the debt of death is due,  
For of all mortals is there one that knows  
If through the coming morrow he shall live?  
For trackless is the way of fortune’s feet,  
Not to be taught nor won by art of man.  
This hearing then, and learning it of me,  
Make merry, drink; the life from day to day  
Account thine own, all else in fortune’s power.”

Thucydides (2:53) tells how, when the mortal plague came to Athens, people committed every shameful crime and eagerly snatched at every lustful pleasure because they believed that life was short and they would never have to pay the penalty. Horace (Odes 2:13; 13) gives as his philosophy, “Tell them to bring wines and perfumes and the too-short-lived blossoms of the lovely rose while circumstances and age and the black threads of the three sisters (the Fates) still

allow us to do so.” In one of the most famous poems in the world the Latin poet Catullus wrote, “Let us live, my Lesbia, and let us love, and let us value the tales of austere old men at a single halfpenny. Suns can set and then return again, but for us, when once our brief light sets, there is but one perpetual night through which we must sleep.”

Take away the thought of a life to come and this life loses its values. Take away the idea that this life is a preparation for a greater life to follow and the bonds of honour and morality are loosened. It is useless to argue that this should not be so and that men should not be good and honourable simply for the sake of some reward. The fact remains that the man who believes that this is the only world tends to live as if the things of this world are all that matter.

So Paul insists that the Corinthians must not associate with those who say that there is no resurrection; for this would be to risk an infection which can pollute life. To say that there is no resurrection is not a sign of superior knowledge; it is a sign of utter ignorance of God. Paul is unleashing the lash that very shame may bring these wanderers back into the right way.

## THE PHYSICAL AND THE SPIRITUAL

### 1 Corinthians 15:35–49

But perhaps someone says, “I what form are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” That is a foolish question. When you sow a seed, it cannot be made alive, unless it first dies. It is not the body which is going to come into existence that is sown, but a seed which is not clothed in a body at all, it may be of corn, or of some other of the crops. But God gives it a body as he wills, and to each of the seeds he gives its own body. All flesh is not the same flesh. But there is one kind of flesh of men, and another of beasts, and another of birds, and another of fishes. There are heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies. The splendour of the heavenly bodies is one thing, and the splendour of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one splendour and the moon another splendour and the stars another splendour. I say stars, not star, for star differs from star in splendour. There is the same difference between this body and the body we shall have in the resurrection of the dead. Our body is like the seed. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a physical body; it is raised a spiritual body. For if a physical body exists, so does a spiritual one. For it stands written, “The first man, Adam, became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.” It is not the spiritual that comes first, but the physical, and after that the spiritual. The first man is of the earth and was made of earth; the second man is from heaven. Such as are made of earth are like earth; such as are heavenly, are like the heavenly one; and, as we have borne the image of that which is of earth, so we shall also bear the image of him who is of heaven.

BEFORE we begin to try to interpret this section we would do well to remember one thing—all through it Paul is talking about things that no one really knows anything about. He is talking not about verifiable matters of fact, but about matters of faith. Trying to express the inexpressible and to describe the indescribable, he is doing the best he can with the human ideas and human words that are all that he has to work with. If we remember that, it will save us from a crudely literalistic interpretation and make us fasten our thoughts on the underlying principles in Paul’s mind. In this section he is dealing with people who say, “Granted that there is a resurrection of the body, with what kind of body do people rise again?” His answer has three basic principles in it.

(i) He takes the analogy of a seed. The seed is put in the ground and dies, but in due time it rises again; and does so with a very different kind of body from that with which it was sown. Paul is showing that, at one and the same time, there can be dissolution, difference and yet continuity. The seed is dissolved; when it rises again, there is a vast difference in its body; and yet, in spite of the dissolution and the difference, it is the same seed. So our earthly bodies will dissolve; they will rise again in very different form; but it is the same person who rises. Dissolved by death, changed by resurrection, it is still we who exist.

(ii) In the world, even as we know it, there is not one kind of body; each separate part of creation has its own. God gives to each created thing a body suitable for its part in creation. If that be so, it is only reasonable to expect that he will give us a body fitted for the resurrection life.

(iii) In life there is a development. Adam, the first man, was made from the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7). But Jesus is far more than a man made from the dust of the earth. He is the incarnation of the very Spirit of God. Now, under the old way of life, we were one with Adam, sharing his sin, inheriting his death and having his body; but, under the new way of life, we are one with Christ and we shall therefore share his life and his being. It is true that we have a physical body to begin with, but it is also true that one day we shall have a spiritual body.

All through this section Paul has maintained a reverent and wise reticence as to what that body will be like; it will be spiritual, it will be such as God knows that we need and we will be like Christ. But in verses 42–44 he draws four contrasts which shed light on our future state.

(i) The present body is corruptible; the future body will be incorruptible. In this world everything is subject to change and decay. “Youth’s beauty fades, and manhood’s glory fades,” as Sophocles had it. But in the life to come there will be a permanence in which beauty will never lose its sheen.

(ii) The present body is in dishonour; the future body will be in glory. It may be that Paul means that in this life it is through our bodily feelings and passions that dishonour can so easily come; but in the life to come our bodies will no longer be the servants of passion and of impulse but the instruments of the pure service of God, than which there can be no greater honour.

(iii) The present body is in weakness; the future body will be in power. It is nowadays fashionable to talk of man’s power, but the really remarkable thing is his weakness. A draught of air or a drop of water can kill him. We are limited in this life so often simply because of the necessary limitations of the body. Time and time again our physical constitution says to our visions and our plans, “Thus far and no farther.” We are so often frustrated because we are what we are. But in the life to come the limitations will be gone. Here we are compassed about with weakness; there we will be clad with power.

“All we have hoped or willed or dreamed of good shall exist;

The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard.”

On earth we have the “broken arcs”; in the life to come “the perfect round.”

(iv) The present body is a natural body; the future body will be a spiritual body. By that, it may be, Paul meant that here we are but imperfect vessels and imperfect instruments for the Spirit; but in the life to come we will be such that the Spirit can truly fill us, as can never happen here, and the Spirit can truly use us, as is never possible now. Then we will be able to render the perfect worship, the perfect service, the perfect love that now can only be a vision and a dream.

## THE CONQUEST OF DEATH

1 Corinthians 15:50–58

Brothers, I say this, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, nor can corruption inherit incorruption. Look now—I tell you something which only the initiated can understand. We shall not all die, but we shall all be changed, in a moment of time, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised up incorruptible and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality, then the word which stands written will happen, “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, beloved brothers, show yourselves steady, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your toil does not go for nothing.

ONCE again we must remember that Paul is dealing with things which defy language and baffle expression. We must read this as we would read great poetry, rather than as we would dissect a scientific treatise. The argument follows a series of steps until it reaches its climax.

(i) Paul insists that, as we are, we are not fit to inherit the Kingdom of God. We may be well enough equipped to get on with the life of this world, but for the life of the world to come we will not do. A man may be able to run enough to catch his morning train and yet need to be very different to be able to run enough for the Olympic games. A man may write well enough to amuse his friends and yet need to be very different to write something which men will not willingly let die. A man may talk well enough in the circle of his club and yet need to be very different to hold his own in a circle of real experts. A man always needs to be changed to enter into a higher grade of life; and Paul insists that before we can enter the Kingdom of God we must be changed.

(ii) Further he insists that this shattering change is going to come in his own lifetime. In this he was in error; but he looked to that change coming when Jesus Christ came again.

(iii) Then Paul goes on triumphantly to declare that no man need fear that change. The fear of death has always haunted men. It haunted Dr. Johnson, one of the greatest and best men who ever lived. Once Boswell said to him that there had been times when he had not feared death. Johnson answered that “he never had a moment in which death was not terrible to him.” Once Mrs. Knowles told him that he should not have a horror for that which is the gate of life. Johnson answered, “No rational man can die without uneasy apprehension.” He declared that the fear of death was so natural to man that all life was one long effort not to think about it.

Wherein lies the fear of death? Partly it comes from fear of the unknown. But still more it comes from the sense of sin. If a man felt that he could meet God easily then to die would be only, as Peter Pan said, a great adventure. But where does that sense of sin come from? It comes from a sense of being under the law. So long as a man sees in God only the law of righteousness, he must ever be in the position of a criminal before the bar with no hope of acquittal. But this is precisely what Jesus came to abolish. He came to tell us that God is not law, but love, that the centre of God's being is not legalism but grace, that we go out, not to a judge, but to a Father who awaits his children coming home. Because of that Jesus gave us the victory over death, its fear banished in the wonder of God's love.

(iv) Finally, at the end of the chapter, Paul does what he always does. Suddenly the theology becomes a challenge; suddenly the speculations become intensely practical; suddenly the sweep of the mind becomes the demand for action. he ends by saying, "If you have all that glory to look forward to, then keep yourself steadfast in God's faith and service, for if you do, all your effort will not be in vain." The Christian life may be difficult, but the goal is infinitely worth the struggle.

"A hope so great and so divine,

May trials well endure;

And purge the soul from sense and sin,

As Christ himself is pure."

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<sup>2</sup>*The letters to the Corinthians*. 2000, c1975 (W. Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, Ed.). The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. The Westminster Press: Philadelphia