

67 EXPOSITION: I CORINTHIANS 15

An Exposition of I Corinthians 15 by the REV. C.H. SPURGEON

⁴¹ Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

² By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

³ For I delivered unto you first of all that 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 of Cephas, then of the twelve:

⁶ After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

⁷ After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

⁸ And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet 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 which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

¹¹ Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.

¹² Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?

¹³ But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:

¹⁴ And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.

¹⁵ Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.

¹⁶ For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised:

¹⁷ And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.

¹⁸ Then they also which 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 is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

²¹ For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

²² For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

²³ But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

²⁴ Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.

²⁵ For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.

²⁶ The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

²⁷ For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him.

²⁸ And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

²⁹ Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?

³⁰ And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?

³¹ I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

³² If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die.

³³ Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.

³⁴ Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.

³⁵ But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?

³⁶ Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die:

³⁷ And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain:

³⁸ But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.

³⁹ All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds.

⁴⁰ There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.

⁴¹ There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory.

⁴² So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:

⁴³ It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:

⁴⁴ It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

⁴⁵ And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

⁴⁶ Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.

⁴⁷ The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven.

⁴⁸ As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.

⁴⁹ And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

⁵⁰ Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.

⁵¹ Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

⁵² In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

⁵⁴ So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

⁵⁵ O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should

There were people in the Apostles' days who had an idea that there was no resurrection. Paul endeavours to refute the idea, and teaches the Corinthians that there was a resurrection from the dead. From the 1st to the 11th verse he proves the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and upon that grounds the doctrine of the resurrection of the just.

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, and wherein ye stand:

“By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.” (vss. 1-2)

Now, we expect to hear a whole list of doctrines when the apostle says “I declare unto you the gospel;” but instead of that, he simply tells us of the resurrection of Jesus, for that is the very marrow of the gospel, the foundation of it—that Jesus Christ died and rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures.

“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.”

“And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” (vss. 3-4)

That is the whole of the gospel. He who perfectly understands that, understands the first principles; he has commenced aright. This is the starting point if we wish to learn the truth, “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

“And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve.

After that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

After that he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."

(vss. 5-8)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is one of the best attested facts on record. There were so many witnesses to behold it, that if we do in the least degree receive the credibility of men's testimonies, we cannot and we dare not doubt that Jesus rose from the dead. It is all very easy for infidels to say that these persons were deceived, but it is equally foolish, for these persons could not every one of them have been so positively deceived as to say that they had seen this man, whom they knew to have been dead, afterwards alive; they could not all, surely, have agreed together to help on this imposture: if they did, it is the most marvelous thing we have on record, that not one of them ever broke faith with the others, but that the whole mass of them remained firm. We believe it to be quite impossible that so many rogues should have agreed forever. They were men who had nothing to gain by it; they subjected themselves to persecution by affirming the very fact; they were ready to die for it, and did die for it. Five hundred or a thousand persons who had seen him at different times, declared that they did see him, and that he rose from the dead; the fact of his death having been attested beforehand. How, then, dare any man say that the Christian religion is not true, when we know for a certainty that Christ died and rose again from the dead? And knowing that, who shall deny the divinity of the Saviour? Who shall say that he is not mighty to save? Our faith hath a solid basis, for it hath all these witnesses on which to rest, and the more sure witness of the Holy Spirit witnessing in our hearts. "And last of all," says the apostle, "he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time: for I am the least of the apostles." We should not have thought Paul proud if he had said, "I am the greatest of the apostles," for he occupies the largest portion of the sacred Scriptures with his writings; and

he preached more abundantly than they all. There was not one who could exceed Paul, or even come near him in his arduous labours; yet he says,

“For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God.” (vs. 9)

When he looked upon the mercies that God gave to him he always recollected how little he deserved; and when he found himself preaching, oh! with what pathos did he preach to the ungodly, for he could always close up:—“But I obtained mercy, that in me first Christ might show forth all long-suffering as a pattern to them that believe.” Have I a persecutor here? Let him know that his sin is a most damnable sin that will sink him lower into hell than any other; but even for him there is mercy, and abundant pardon; for Paul says he obtained mercy even though he persecuted the church of God.

“But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

“Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.” (vss. 10-11)

“But by the grace of God I am what I am.” That is about as far as most of us can get; we shall never get any further. “By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all.” Then he stops himself: “Yet, not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” We should always take care that we do not take any of our good works to ourselves: they are the effects of grace within us. If we once get putting the crown on our own heads we shall soon have heavy heads for our trouble; but if we put them all on the head of Jesus, he will honour us if we honour him.

Having thus proved the resurrection of Christ, he goes on:

“Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?”

“But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen!”

“And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.

“Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.

“For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised:

“And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins:”
(*vss. 12-17*)

Perhaps it does not strike you at first sight that there is an indissoluble connection between the resurrection of Christ and that of all his people; perhaps you do not see the marrow of the argument. The apostle says, “If the dead do not rise, then Christ did not rise; and if Christ did rise, then all the dead will rise.” Do you see how it is? Why, because Christ and human nature are now so linked together that what Christ did, he did as the representative of all his people. When Adam sinned, the world sinned, and the world died. “As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.” Christ could not rise except as the representative of his people; and “if Christ rose,” says Paul, “then his people will rise; and if he did not rise then we shall not rise, because we are one with him; and if we do not rise Christ did not rise, because we are one with him.” See here a connection which cannot be broken,—that if Christ rose, then must the dead rise also. This brings another argument

“Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.” (*vs. 18*)

How do you like that thought?

“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” (vs. 19)

For they were then persecuted, cast to the wild beasts, shut up in prison; and if this life were all, what would be the value of the Christian religion? It would only make men miserable.

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.

“For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” (vss. 20-22)

It is no use for the Arminian to strain this, and say that it proves that everyone receives grace through Christ. It says no such thing; it simply says, “die” and “live.” Everybody shall live at the resurrection.

“But every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits: afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming.

“Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.

“For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.

“The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” (vss. 23-26)

Here the great proof flashes out—if death is to be destroyed, then there must be a resurrection, for death cannot be destroyed until the very bones of the saints are delivered from the strongholds of the enemy.

“For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, All things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him.

“And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.” (vss. 27-28)

We are not to suppose, when we read that Jesus Christ will deliver up his kingdom to God, even to his Father, that he will therefore cease to be God or cease to be a King. Understand this; God the Father gave to the Son a Mediatorial Kingdom as Man-God; but the Father was just as much God when he had given him that kingdom; it was his own special kingdom which he, as the Man-God Mediator was to take, and God the Father lost no glory by giving it to him. When Christ shall have worked out all his Mediatorial purposes, when he shall have finished the salvation of all his elect, he will lay the crown of his Mediatorial Kingdom at the feet of God, and, as the Man-Mediator, he too will be subject unto the great Jehovah, the Three-one; then there will be no Mediator any longer, since there will be no necessity for any mediation, but we shall all be gathered in one, even the things that are on earth and the things that are in heaven—one in Christ Jesus. Then Christ will have his kingdom as God, but as Mediator he will have no kingdom. It is a destruction of office, not of person, nor yet of honor; it is a laying aside of his official capacity, not in any degree a diminution of his glory and honor.

“Else what shall they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?” (vs. 29)

This text has had thirty or forty explanations. Doddridge and a great many more think it refers to the practice, when a martyr died, for another person to come forward and fill the offices which he held, and so to be “baptized for the dead;” but the meaning I like best is: What shall they do who are baptized with the certainty that they are not baptized to live a long while, but that immediately after baptism they will be dragged away to die—baptized in the very teeth of death? For as soon as any one was

baptised, the Romans would be looking after him, to drag him away to death. Thus, they were many of them baptised as if they were being washed for their burial, and dedicating themselves to the grave. They came forward and said, "O Lord, I give myself unto thy service—not to serve thee here below, for that the enemy will not let me do, but since I must die, I will be baptized and brave it all; I will be baptized even for death itself." Well, what shall these do who are baptized in the certain prospect of death if the dead rise not? "Why are they then baptized for the dead?"

"And why stand in jeopardy every hour?

"I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

"If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die." (vss. 30-32)

It does not say that Paul did fight with beasts at Ephesus; but a great many others did. It was a common practice to put Christians to the lions, giving them a short sword, and bidding them fight for their lives; and sometimes, strengthened by God, they fought manfully, and come off alive. But "if," says Paul, "I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not?" I might as well give up my religion; then I could lie down and be at peace. "Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die." Oh! wicked Paul! to quote from a heathen poet! How disgraceful. If I were to repeat a verse, and it looked as if Shakespeare or any profane author ever wrote such a thing, how criminal! say you. But I like good things wherever I find them. I have often quoted from the devil, and I dare say I shall often quote from his people. Paul quoted this from Meander, and another heathen poet, who wrote far worse things than have been written by modern poets, and if any of us who may have stored

our minds with the contents of books we wish we had never read, and if there be some choice gems in them which may be used for the service of God, by his help we will so use them.

“Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.

“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” (vss. 33, 52)

Christ is coming, and he will find some alive on the earth, and those who are alive will not die. Paul was so full of the Second Coming, that he says: “We shall not all sleep.” He did not know but what Christ might come while he was writing the letter. And we are so earnestly looking for Christ, that we too are constrained to say, “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

“The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

“But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (vss. 53-57)

What a shame it is, when we sometimes attend a funeral and hear that magnificent portion of Scripture read over by a chaplain without heart, or soul, or life—the quicker he can get through the service the better. Oh that such noble words should be so awfully spoiled by men who know nothing about them!

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”