BUILT DIFFERENT

LESSON SEVENTEEN

COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY NOTES

1 CORINTHIANS 15:12–19

Thomas Schreiner, in the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, comments on the implications of what is true if resurrection isn't true:

12. The word *preached* (*keryssetai*) is picked up from verse 11; thus Paul carries the readers back to verses 1–11. The church and the apostles universally preach that Christ is risen *from the dead*, that is, the resurrection is not merely the revivification of someone's spirit. The person who was previously in the tomb, Jesus of Nazareth, was no longer there. Since the physical resurrection of Christ is a fundamental element of the gospel, Paul is astonished that there are some among the Corinthians who claim *there is no resurrection of the dead*. Such a claim flies in the face of the gospel universally proclaimed and the evidence of the eyewitnesses. Nor can someone concede that Christ is risen but deny the resurrection of believers. The resurrection of Jesus is inseparable from the resurrection of his people, for believers are united to Christ; thus his destiny is also theirs.

13. Pagans in the Graeco-Roman world typically rejected a physical resurrection, and the Corinthian sceptics betrayed their pagan background in their dismissal of the physical resurrection. Paul sharpens the point from verse 12 so that they cannot wriggle out of the implications of what they are teaching. If they deny the physical resurrection of believers, it follows that they are rejecting the truth that Christ is risen. Given what Paul has written in verses 1–11, it is clear that such a denial constitutes a radical rejection of the gospel proclaimed and received by all.

14. The implications if Christ has not been raised are massive, and Paul wants the Corinthians to see clearly how radically and completely the gospel is undercut by such a claim. Here he focuses on his *preaching* and their *faith*. The word *preaching* (*kerygma*) refers here not to the *act* of preaching but to the content of the preaching. Paul has already explained in verses 1–11 the gospel that is the common confession of the church, which includes the resurrection of Christ as a fundamental element. Thus, if Christ is not risen, what Paul preaches is *useless*, and the faith of the Corinthians is *useless* as well.

15. If the resurrection did not take place, Paul's message is not merely useless; the problem goes beyond this, for Paul would actually be preaching something which is false and claiming that he is representing God's message to his contemporaries (cf. Job 13:7). Paul proclaims that God raised Christ from the dead, but in fact the claim is not true if the believing dead are not raised. We see again the inextricable link between the destiny of believers and the resurrection of Christ. If believers will not be raised in the future, Paul asserts most emphatically, Christ is not raised. The two are bound together. So, if the Corinthian pagans are right, Paul is a false witness on God's behalf and fundamentally misrepresents the truth.

16–17. Paul returns to the axiom of his argument, a truth he declares four times in these verses: the resurrection of the believing dead and the resurrection of Jesus Christ cannot be segregated from one another. What is true of one is true of the other. The Corinthians who deny the physical resurrection of believers cannot say that they are talking only about the resurrection of believers and not about the resurrection of Christ. The implications of denying the resurrection of believers are again considered. Verse 14 said that one's faith would be 'useless', and here we have a similar idea: one's faith would be *futile*. What this means is explained in more detail: if Christ is not risen, the gospel (see 15:1–4!) that promises forgiveness of sins through Christ's death and resurrection is false; and if the gospel is false, believers *are still in [their] sins*. They are not forgiven before God but condemned, since Christ's death on their behalf obviously was not effective if he is still in the grave.

18. Nor are the consequences restricted to the living; there are also implications for the believing dead, *those also who have fallen asleep in Christ*. The expression fallen asleep, as was argued in 11:30, describes the death of Christians, and the text specifies those who have fallen asleep as those in Christ. Paul does not envision a world where God does not exist and there is no truth. He is not an atheist or a postmodernist. Instead, he considers the state of those who have died as believers

if Christ is not raised, and he argues that they will perish since God is just and their sins have not been forgiven. He gives no comfort for believers left behind if those who have died are not raised (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13–18), for the believing dead 'have perished'. The NIV's rendering *lost* for the verb is not quite as clear. The verb (*apollymi*) is used by Paul to denote final judgment and eschatological destruction (see Rom. 2:12; 14:15; 1 Cor. 1:18–19; 8:11; 2 Cor. 2:15; 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:10).

19. The final consequence of denying the resurrection is presented. If there is no resurrection of the dead, the advantages of hoping in Christ are restricted to this life. If there is no future hope, believers are *most to be pitied*. They have put their faith and hope in what is a lie, and Paul considers that to be pitiable. Paul does not salute the nobility and sacrifice of Christians even if their faith is not true. Instead, if Christ was not crucified and has not risen for their sins, believers have wasted their lives in believing fables.[1]

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20–28

William Baker, In the *Cornerstone New Testament Commentary*, shows how Paul fleshes out the implications of the resurrection being true:

Having reasoned that a premise of no resurrection leads to dishonoring the apostles and making the lives of believers pitiable (15:12–19), Paul offers the counter premise for analysis beginning in 15:20–29. What if Christ did rise from the dead? What value would there be in that?

Paul begins immediately in 15:20 to state the most important result of Christ's resurrection: the hope it offers those who have died. Those believers who have died, mentioned in 15:18 as abandoned without Christ's resurrection, now have the hope of being raised as well. The event of Christ's resurrection is not confined to an isolated historical moment. It is the harbinger of a mass, collective resurrection of all believers who have died. He was first, but he will be followed by many. Paul draws on the customary Jewish practice pertaining to firstfruits, which is the giving of the first ripened sheaf of grain to God as an offering. Giving him the first and the best foreshadowed a bountiful harvest; so also with the resurrection of Christ and those who will follow him.

In 15:21–22, Paul explains how Christ's resurrection can have this implication. Not unlike his more elaborate argumentation in Romans 5:12–21, Paul pictures the first created man, Adam, and Christ to be the head of two races of people. Thus, each person generated from them is, in a fashion, within their gene pool from the beginning and inherits their key traits (Bruce 1971:146; Thiselton 2000:1225). Thus, for Paul, when Adam sinned, all the human race sinned within him and inherited the death penalty for sin that he received. However, when Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, all of the Christian race was raised with him to begin a new life. They were also given an inheritance of eternal life, which includes a ticket for resurrection after death. Being in Christ does not remove them from being in Adam and inheriting his death penalty for sin. It does, however, reverse the consequences of being in him because in Christ they are guaranteed nullification of death's permanence through resurrection.

In 15:23, Paul first thinks of ordered military ranks to explain how resurrection works. There are two waves, first the captain leading the charge, followed by his troops. The captain, in this case Jesus Christ, has already charged, and the rest are just behind him, heading in the same direction toward the enemy in full confidence that they will be victorious because just ahead they have seen him break through the enemy line. This enemy will be identified in 15:26 as death, and his enemy troops in 15:24 as "every ruler and authority and power."

Paul also repeats the image of firstfruits from 15:20. Christ is the first harvested offering to God, guaranteeing the rest to come. At this point Paul identifies when the rest will come, when the troops will break the enemy line. He says this will happen at Christ's coming, meaning his return from heaven

[1] Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 308–310.

after his resurrection, having conquered death. He also stresses that the second wave of resurrection will occur only to those who are under his ownership. They must belong to him in order for him to take them back with him. Those outside of Christ, who do not believe in him, are not contemplated at all here (Barrett 1968:355; Garland 2003:709; Hays 1997:264). Presumably, they have no promise of resurrection, no promise of life beyond death, and thus no hope in this life, either. Elsewhere, Paul speaks of the resurrection of believers in two waves: those who have already died and those who are alive at Christ's coming (1 Thess 4:16–17).

In 15:24, Paul announces that after this mass resurrection of believers, the end of all things as we know them will come. God will have completed his massive plan to save fallen humanity, a plan conceived before the beginning and unfolding through Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, the apostles, and the church. In a ceremony of Christ's willing service to the Father in coming to earth as a man and completing his mission through the cross, this resurrected, victorious king will present his realm to God himself (Lambrecht 1982:511), like a conquering hero presenting his prize to his Lord. This king will have conquered all other kings, all other rivals to power that have emerged throughout the course of human history, including the imperial power of mighty Rome (Horsley 1998:205; Witherington 1995:305).

As elsewhere in Paul's writings (Rom 8:38; Eph 1:21; 3:10; Col 1:16), these powers include not only those human in this earthly part of his realm but those spiritual, supernatural, and demonic forces who have opposed God's gracious plan (Conzelmann 1975:272; Forbes 2001:68–69; Garland 2003:708; Hays 1997:265). These authorities were the true power behind all tyrants and rulers who erected military and social structures to oppress the helpless (Thiselton 2000:1232). All of these in heaven and on earth are pictured as being pinned facedown to the ground by Christ's boot heel. Having mocked God in their blasphemous lust for power and their self-aggrandizement, they will be humiliated before God by Christ. As Proverbs 3:34 says, "The Lord mocks the mockers but is gracious to the humble."

Some contend that 15:24–25 implies a period in which Christ reigns over a temporary messianic kingdom on earth, a period between the general resurrection of believers and the humiliation of every rival power under his rule (Kreitzer 1987:142–145). However, this importation of a particular theological interpretation from Revelation 20:4–6 is unwarranted and unsustained by Paul's language (Barrett 1968:357; Collins 1999:552; Garland 2003:710). His reign currently is from heaven. His destruction of all opposition proceeds from there (Lewis 1998:55) until the resurrection of believers. Then he will crush all rivals finally and completely before presenting his kingdom to God.

Paul's touchstone verse to warrant his belief in Christ's victorious assault on all God's enemies is Psalm 110:1, to which he connects when he says, "He humbles all his enemies beneath his feet" (15:25). Although the verse originally was voiced as God speaking to David in the second-person singular ("your feet"), Christ dramatically applied this verse to himself as God's rightful Son (as seen in the Gospels: Matt 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42–43). It fortified Peter's Pentecost sermon, as conveyed in Acts 2:34–35, and also anchors Hebrews 1:13. Paul's dependence on it here stands in solid company in considering this passage the bedrock for developing an authoritative understanding of Christ's work in relationship to the Father.

In 15:26, Paul highlights death as the final foe to be vanquished by Christ. Though personified here, this foe is not like the other foes who bring death by their wars and oppression. This is the penultimate evil result of all sin. This enemy is within the human encampment, brought in by the treachery of Adam when he sinned against God. This is a foe no human might nor human goodness can eradicate. Christ weakened the power of sin over believers when he was raised. He provided hope for the release of death's grip over humanity. But in his final, mighty act, he will eliminate death. He can do this because he already defeated death in the personal battle that resulted in his resurrection. Now, he will administer the crushing, fatal blow. Death itself will be dead.

Paul justifies this understanding of Christ striking down death as his destined resurrection act by citing Psalm 8:6. Originally a psalm addressed to God to celebrate the awesome responsibility he gave his human creation over the other aspects of his creation, it employs the term "son of man" to

refer to humanity (Ps 8:4, NLT mg). The author of Hebrews (Heb 2:6–8) also picks up this designation as a messianic reference to Christ, no doubt because Christ favors the term Son of Man as his own self-reference as seen in the Gospels (Mark 10:33). Thus, God's subjection of all things to Christ is established in Psalm 8:6 when it says God has put "all things under their [lit., his] authority," even though "their" originally referred to humanity. Since both Psalm 8:6 (in literal translation) and Psalm 110:1 share the phrase "under his/your feet," Paul believed they can be interpreted in tandem. Thus, the "all things" from Psalm 8:6 appears in Paul's rendering of Psalm 110:1 in 15:25 as "all" enemies, though "all" does not literally appear in 110:1.

In the latter part of 15:27 Paul himself clarifies that "all things" does not include God and that the authority Christ has over all things comes from God himself. By implication, though, this means that because of his resurrection, Christ has authority over everything in the universe, except God. This, then, includes all other authorities like human rulers or demonic influences, and of course, the all-mystical superpower of death. But it also means he has authority over all life on this planet, all laws that govern this planet, the sun, the moon, the stars, and beyond. From this perspective, it is not at all difficult to picture Christ as the primary operative, even now, of all the forces that sustain life—as we know it and even beyond what we know (Eph 1:19–23; Col 1:15–20).

The last stage of this cosmic supremacy of Christ Paul announces in 15:28. Having subjected everything to himself, Christ in turn presents himself—and all things—to God. He has been working for God all along. In the divine plan, the grace is God's; the mission, the enacting of God's grace, the means of salvation, the humbling of all authorities, and the banishment of death come from Christ. Yet, in kind with his humility to enter into the human race to complete all this (as Paul articulates in Phil 2:6–11), Christ's final act is done with utter humility. All, including himself, is given over to God. The ultimate honor for victory in this cosmic drama belongs to God alone. Closure comes when God reigns gloriously over all. This picture of submission is with respect to Christ completing his messianic mission but does not pertain to his eternal relationship to God the Father, which is equal and complete (A. F. Johnson 2004:294–295).[2]

1 CORINTHIANS 15:29–34

Gordon Fee, in the NICNT, shows how Paul ties together a few seemingly unrelated thoughts to show the importance of the resurrection:

29 This rhetoric follows naturally, although not necessarily logically, from the preceding argument in which Paul pressed for the necessity of the resurrection, given the fact of Christ's resurrection and its having set in motion the final defeat of death. "Otherwise," he now urges, implying that if what has been argued is not true, then (lit.) "what will they do, those who are being baptized (or are having themselves baptized) for215 the dead?" In typical fashion, and to make certain that his point is clear, he repeats the question, once again using the language of their assertion: "If the dead are not actually217 raised, why at all are they being baptized for them?"

The normal reading of what Paul wrote is that some Corinthians were being baptized, apparently vicariously, in behalf of some people who have already died. It would be fair to add that this reading is such a plain understanding of the Greek text that no one would ever have imagined the various alternatives were it not for the difficulties involved, both historical and theological. The problem is twofold: (1) There is no historical or biblical precedent for such baptism. The NT is otherwise completely silent about it; there is no known practice in any of the other churches nor in any orthodox Christian community in the centuries that immediately follow;221 nor are there parallels or precedents in pagan religion. This is a genuinely idiosyncratic historical phenomenon. For that reason, if in fact some were actually practicing such a baptism, we are left quite in the dark on all the essential questions: (a) *Who* was being baptized? (b) *For whom?* (c) *Why* were they doing it? and (d) *What effects* did they think it had for those for whom it was being done? It is quite impossible to give

[2] William Baker, "1 Corinthians," in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians*, vol. 15 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009), 221–224.

a definitive answer to any of these.

(2) The second problem is theological and has to do with how Paul can appeal, without apparent disapproval, to a practice that stands in such contradiction to his own understanding both of justification by grace *through faith*, which always implies response on the part of the believer, and of baptism as personal response to grace received. This smacks of a "magical" view of sacramentalism of the worst kind, where a religious rite, performed for someone else, can have saving efficacy. That lies quite outside the entire NT view of things.

This combination of difficulties has led to a variety of alternative solutions, which at best are difficult to categorize, but which for the most part have in common the attempt to find an alternative meaning to the plain sense of one or more of the words (either "baptized," "for," or "the dead").

(1) One option is to understand "baptize" metaphorically in light of a Jesus *logion* preserved in two gospels (Mark 10:38; Luke 12:50). Either (a) some were "being baptized into the ranks of the dead" by martyrdom, or (b) the apostles "were being destroyed by their labors on behalf of the dead (i.e., those who are lost)."225

(2) Others take "baptized" as referring to Christian baptism but give the preposition "for" different shades of meaning; sometimes these views suggest special meanings for "the dead" as well. These run the gamut: (a) that they are being baptized "over" the graves of the dead; (b) that they are being baptized "with death before their eyes" as it were; (c) that it means "with a view toward," suggesting that the departed are Christians and those being baptized are new converts who are being baptized with a view toward their being reunited with their departed loved ones;228 (d) that it means "concerning," or "with reference to," having to do with the symbolic meaning of baptism, that it is in reference to death, burial, and resurrection; (e) that the prepositional phrase goes with the verb "do," not "baptized," and should read, "What will the baptized do in behalf of the dead (in the future, given that they do not believe in resurrection)?"230

(3) Another set of solutions attempts to find a meaning for "the dead" that will be more compatible with Pauline theology. These include: (a) that "the dead" refers to the "(soon to be) dead bodies" of the Christians themselves, and that they were being baptized for the sake of that part of them that was dying and about to become a corpse; and (b) that "the dead" refers to those among whom Christ was named, hence "What shall they do who have sworn allegiance to one who on their showing must be numbered among the dead?"232

(4) Finally, some have offered alternative punctuation: either (a) "In that case, what are the baptized to do? (It is) for the dead (= merely in death), if there is no resurrection of the dead at all. Why then are they baptized for them (= and whatever is the use of that?)"; or (b) "Otherwise what shall they do who are baptized for the dead? (i.e., are they baptized to belong to, to be numbered among the dead, who are never to rise again)? Indeed, if the dead do not rise again, why are people baptized? For them? that is, are they baptized to be numbered among the dead who are never to rise again?"

Partly because of this very plethora of options, none of which is compelling as a natural reading of the text, the majority of scholars think that Paul is referring to some form of vicarious baptism. But again, there is no unanimity as to what "form" this may have taken. Some things, however, seem to be necessary prerequisites. First, as already noted (pp. 845–46 n. 219), this unusual use of the third person plural, when elsewhere Paul always turns such references into a word to the community as a whole (e.g., vv. 12–13, 35–36), suggests that it is not the action of the whole community. On the other hand, there is no reason to deny that it was happening with the full knowledge of the community and probably with their approval. Second, Paul's apparently noncommittal attitude toward it, while not implying approval, would seem to suggest that he did not consider it to be as serious a fault as most interpreters do. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine any circumstances under which Paul would think it permissible for living Christians to be baptized for the sake of unbelievers in general. Such a view, adopted in part by the Mormons, lies totally outside the NT understanding both of

salvation and of baptism. Therefore, the most likely options are (a) that it reflects some believers' being baptized for others who either were or were on their way to becoming believers when they died (e.g., as in 11:30), but had never been baptized; or (b) that it reflects the concern of members of households for some of their own number who had died before becoming believers.

What they may have expected to gain from it is not quite clear, but one may guess that at least they believed baptism to be necessary for entering the final eschatological kingdom. In any case, and everything must be understood as tentative, this probably reflects the Corinthian attitude toward baptism in general, since earlier passages (1:13–17; 10:1–22) imply a rather strongly sacramental stance toward baptism on their part, with some apparently magical implications. Perhaps they believed that along with the gift of the Spirit baptism was their "magical" point of entrance into the new pneumatism that seems to have characterized them at every turn. If so, then perhaps some of them were being baptized for others because they saw it as a way of offering similar spirituality to the departed. But finally we must admit that we simply do not know.

In any case, whatever they were doing and for whatever reason, Paul saw it as a clear contradiction to the present stance of the community at large that "there is no resurrection of the dead." If so, Paul argues, then this other action by some of their number is the highest expression of absurdity. From his point of view, Christ's resurrection makes any other form of spiritual existence beyond the grave a non sequitur.

30 While on this kind of tack, Paul reverts to another question that lies behind so much of this letter—their view of his apostleship vis-à-vis his own—which he will now defend in a most circuitous way. As noted throughout, the Corinthians oppose Paul's *point of view* in so many things because they stand in opposition to him. Their opposition is based in part on conflicting views of what it means to be *pneumatikos*, which had inherent in it their taking a less than enthusiastic view of his weaknesses and sufferings as an apostle. What Paul seems to do in this concluding set of sentences is to capitalize on his weaknesses once more (cf. 2:1–5; 4:10–13; 15:9–10), this final time, however, agreeing that if they are right on the one count (there is no resurrection), then they are surely also right on the other (his apostleship is of no profit whatsoever). But of course they are not right on the former (vv. 20–28), and his apostleship has to do with their being his "boast" in Christ Jesus.

The new train of thought thus proceeds in the style of the final sentence in the preceding verse: "Why indeed do we ourselves face mortal danger every hour?"240 This question serves as a significant comment on Paul's view of his own life. As he will detail on more than one occasion, his apostolic ministry was a constant round of hardship and danger of all kinds. The emphasis here is on its continual (= "every hour") dangers (cf. 2 Cor. 11:26), for which the next two verses serve as commentary. His point, of course, is that he is indeed crazy to put his life in constant jeopardy for the sake of others, if neither he nor they have hope in the resurrection. But even more, he now also indicates the absolutely central and crucial place that Christ's resurrection played in his life. One must remember throughout that to deny the resurrection of the dead meant to deny the resurrection of Christ (vv. 12–19), which meant for Paul the denial of Christian life altogether. Thus everything Christians do as Christians—and especially the labors of an apostle—are an absurdity if there is no resurrection.

31 Paul's concern could have been established by his simply adding his final sentence (v. 32b) at this point. Instead, for their sake he elaborates on the continual dangers mentioned in the opening sentence: "Daily244 I die." Taken as an elaboration of the preceding question (v. 30), this means some-thing like "On a daily basis I face the reality of death." Although one cannot be sure as to what this refers specifically, there are several hints in this letter and in his next preserved letter to this church that his stay in Ephesus was anything but an Aegean holiday. In the next sentence he refers to "fighting wild beasts in Ephesus"; toward the end (16:9) he notes that even though a great door was open for ministry, many stood in opposition to him. Then, sometime later when writing his next (preserved) letter to them (our 2 Corinthians) shortly after leaving Ephesus, he thanks God for having been delivered from a deadly peril in which he had actually despaired of his life (2 Cor. 1:8–11), while the rest of the letter is a litany of hardships and sufferings that seem too fresh in mind to be simply

general catalogues. One wonders at moments like these what a different picture of both the apostle and the early church we might have received if Paul had kept a journal of his stay in Ephesus!

What follows comes as something of a surprise. It is a kind of oath, the first word serving as the affirming particle (= "I swear by"), and the next words serving as that by which one swears. Literally it reads "I swear by your boasting," which he quickly qualifies as "(boasting) which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord." The NIV's "I glory over you" translates the possessive adjective "your" plus the noun for the act of "boasting."249 Although grammatically this could refer to their boasting in him, that fits neither the immediate context (esp. the following qualifying phrase) nor the context of the letter as a whole. Rather, the possessive is here objective and refers to Paul's "boast" in the Corinthians as believers,250 a "boast" that probably does not so much refer to his telling others about the Corinthians as to their very existence as the result of his apostolic labors (cf. 9:2, 15–16).

What a telling oath this is. To make sure that they understand the truth of his constant facing of death, he swears by that which is dearest to him, their own existence in Christ, which also came about by labors that had exposed him to such dangers. That seems also to be the point of the qualifying addition, "which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord." The boast is his, but it is not self-serving nor self-exalting. It rests completely on what Christ had done among them through his labors (cf. vv. 9–10). Thus they are his boast; but for Paul that ultimately means boasting in Christ.

32 Paul's opening sentence further elaborates the preceding rhetoric (vv. 30–31) by way of a specific instance; the second sentence ties it all back into the argument with the same form of conditional clause with which the present paragraphs began (v. 29). The fighting "with wild beasts in Ephesus" must be understood metaphorically, not only because Paul otherwise lived to tell about it,255 but because (a) such a metaphor was a common phenomenon in the moralistic literature of Hellenism, and (b) his Roman citizenship should have excluded him257 from what would have meant certain death if it were a literal fight in the arena. But the metaphor is not a word about his struggle with opponents in general; rather, he specifies that it was with "wild beasts" in *Ephesus*. Since he is in Ephesus at the time of writing, and since a few paragraphs later (16:9) he refers to many who oppose him there, this is probably a reference to that struggle. The language of the preceding sentence (v. 31) would suggest that it was not simply an ideological struggle but, as often in his life, one that had exposed him to severe physical dangers as well. Beyond that, one would only be speculating.

With this understanding of the metaphor, the much-debated prepositional phrase "according to man" is also easily decided. Its meaning is not "for merely human reasons" (original NIV), but exactly as early on (3:3), where Paul, in contrast to their boasting of being truly "in Spirit," accuses the Corinthians of acting "according to man," that is, as "mere human beings" who do not have the Spirit of God. Here he means that if there is no hope in the resurrection, then his life-or-death struggle against the opponents of his gospel is carried on at the merely human level—he is nothing more than a "mere man" among other "mere humans,"261 with nothing better than merely "human hopes." His point of course is: What sense does it make to live like *this* if we live only at the merely human level as others who have no hope for the future?

The concluding apodosis, "what have I gained?" is often seen as Paul's reflecting on his own personal life. While there is a degree of truth to that, more likely he is once again putting his ministry, and in that sense his personal life, into perspective. No resurrection means he has played the fool with his life; all of his labor has been in vain after all. This comes very close to the point made twice earlier (vv. 9–10 and 14–15), that their existence as believers is predicated on his ministry, which had the resurrection of Christ as its heart and soul. Thus, without the resurrection his earthly struggle is without meaning; he has gained nothing, not only now but in the life to come, and not only for himself but for all those who have come to Christ as a result of that struggle.

To cap the argument Paul once more repeats the protasis against which this entire argument struggles, namely the Corinthian position, literally "if the dead are not raised," meaning as the NIV has it, "if there is no resurrection," i.e., "of believers." The apodosis in this case offers the logical

conclusion as to the direction in which one's life ought to go, in contrast to the daily struggles, even to the point of facing death, that characterize his own life. If there is no resurrection, then instead of "fighting wild beasts in Ephesus," one may as well go the route of despair—and dissolution—and "eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." This word is one of those happy ambivalences in Paul that point simultaneously in two directions. On the one hand, this is a verbatim citation of a passage in Isaiah (22:13) and is surely intended as the logical alternative to his own kind of "daily dying." If there is no resurrection, he has argued, such a "death-facing" life is without gain. One may as well go the way of despair and eat and drink, for "tomorrow" we die anyway. To be without hope in the resurrection makes life in the present a constant round of nothing.

On the other hand, this citation from Isaiah (22:13) also reflects contemporary anti-Epicurean sentiments, which (not altogether fairly) believed the Epicureans taught this very philosophy. In Plutarch's anti-Epicurean writings, for example, the language of "eating and drinking" was a formula for the dissolute life.264 Since Paul immediately follows this quotation with a series of imperatives that call the Corinthians from the errors of their ways to a "sober" life in Christ in which they "stop sinning," these words of despair also serve as transition to what follows. The Corinthians, aware of his own apostolic struggles on the one hand, and their own less-than-disciplined lifestyle on the other, would have to be in a true stupor (cf. v. 34) not to catch his point and see the application.

33 In typical diatribe style, the *argumentum ad absurdum* turns truly *ad hominem*, and becomes a word of exhortation for the Corinthians to mend their ways. When one considers that the point of the whole argument is to get them to change their views as to the resurrection of the dead, it is difficult not to see in these words a direct connection between much of the behavior being corrected by this letter and this denial of theirs. Paul's concern is a simple one: They are to adopt the kind of behavior that should be expected of those for whom the future is both "already" and "not yet," who have been "washed from their sins" through Christ Jesus (cf. 6:11; 15:3) and who yet await the final destruction of death (vv. 24–28). They are to live as people who not only have a past in Christ, but a future as well.

This opening exhortation, therefore, repeats the imperative used much earlier (6:9; cf. 3:18): "Stop deceiving yourselves" (or "allowing yourselves to be misled"). Their present path is one of delusion, both in terms of their theology and its consequent behavior. In this case the delusion is spelled out in the language of an epigram from Menander's Thais, "Bad company corrupts good character," which comes into the argument as something of a jolt. On the one hand, as countless generations in every culture and clime have experienced, this epigram is independently true and carries much the same effect as the more Jewish proverb Paul cited earlier (5:6). Keeping company with evil companions can have a corrosive influence on one's own attitudes and behavior. But why that word here, in the middle of an argument against their denial of the resurrection of the dead?

It may be that this is simply a matter of style, that in keeping with the diatribe Paul is merely generalizing about their own behavioral patterns. But more likely this is a very direct word to their present situation. Since the word translated "company" can mean either "companionship" or "conversation," one wonders whether the emphasis here is more on the "company" of "evil conversation" that denies the resurrection, than on simply associating with people who so deny.267 In that case, it would mean here something like, "Evil conversations such as those that deny the resurrection of the dead can only have a corrupting effect on your good character." Otherwise, he would seem to be pointing to the "some" who are denying the resurrection (v. 12). By implication, they should thus dissociate from them.

34 The concluding two imperatives suggest that the "evil company" is in fact their denial of the resurrection, which undoubtedly had a role in the corrosion of their Christian behavior. Thus he exhorts them to "Sober up as you ought269 and stop sinning." The verb "sober up" may be a metaphor either for to awake from sleep or to be aroused from a drunken stupor.271 One cannot be sure which Paul has in mind here, although both the context ("let us eat and drink") and the compounded form of the verb suggest that it is the latter. In any case, it is a telling metaphor, which the NIV's contemporary English idiom "come back to your senses" nicely captures regarding their present state of delusion, in which they both deny the resurrection of believers and thus behave

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as if there were no future to the kingdom of God. Therefore, coming to their senses means they must "stop sinning." This prohibition expressed in the Greek present tense implies the cessation of action already going on; and apparently it is not the action of one or a few. The letter is replete with examples of sinning to which this could refer.

What is less clear is the final reason of this double-sided exhortation, "for (lit.) ignorance of God some have." It is possible that this is a word that points outward, to those outside their community who do not know God and, given the present theological delusion and behavioral aberrations of this Christian community, are not likely to.273 Nonetheless, in the present context this is almost certainly a word of irony, the ultimate "put-down" of those responsible for taking this church down its present disastrous course. Those who are leading others into a new understanding of *pneuma*, *sophia*, and *gnOsis* (Spirit, wisdom, and knowledge) are here said to be as the pagan world that surrounds them, people who are altogether "ignorant of God." Most likely this is to be understood in light of the preceding paragraph (vv. 20–28), that those who deny the resurrection ultimately live in ignorance of the one and only God, who through Christ's resurrection has set in motion that chain of events which leads to his finally being all in all. It is also possible, however, since the clause functions as the explanation of "stop sinning," that Paul intends a much broader perspective (e.g., as in 8:2–3, where their lack of love also exhibits failure to know God). In any case, he now says this "to their shame," probably in much the same way as in the first occurrence of this clause in the letter (6:5), where his argument itself is an attempt to "shame" them into a change of thinking and behavior.

Thus the present long argument that began way back (v. 12) comes to a conclusion on this very strong hortatory word. The inevitable conclusion of the Corinthians' position means both the end of their existence as believers (vv. 14, 17) and hopelessness for the dead (v. 18); it also means that the activities of some of them and especially of his own apostolic labors are living contradictions. Thus they need to come to their senses, as he will urge again at the conclusion of the letter (16:13). But before that conclusion he must bring the present matter to its full conclusion, by addressing the issue of what the resurrection means in relationship to our present bodily existence.

Probably because most people have had such a difficult time knowing what to do with the question with which this paragraph began (v. 29), there has been a strange silence in the church with regard to this paragraph. Yet it stands as one of the more significant texts pointing to a genuine relationship between what one believes about the future and how one behaves in the present (cf. 2 Pet. 2–3). This is not to say that the future is the only motivation for correct behavior, but it is to plead that it is a proper one because it ultimately has to do with the nature and character of God. Those who have put their trust in Christ should be living in this world as people whose confidence in the final vindication of Christ through our own resurrection determines the present. On this matter see also on an earlier passage (7:29–31). It is a matter of sober historical record that slippage at this key point of Christian theology is very often accompanied by a relaxed attitude toward the Christian ethic. It is no wonder that the world fails so often to "hear" our gospel, which must look at times like anything but the good news it really is—that Christ delivers people from the bondage of sin and guarantees their future with him in a life where neither sin nor death will have a foothold.[3]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Mark A. Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, New American Commentary
Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (NICNT)
Anthony Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC)
Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary
Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians*, IVP New Testament Commentary
David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, The Bible Speaks Today
William Baker, *1 Corinthians*, Cornerstone Bible Commentary
Paul Ellingwroth and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on 1 Corinthians*, UBSH

[3]Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Revised Edition, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 845–858.