

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.



# THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

*AN EXPOSITION OF 1 CORINTHIANS XV.*

BY THE LATE

WILLIAM MILLIGAN, D.D.

PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY AND BIBLICAL CRITICISM IN THE  
UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SECOND EDITION

WIPF & STOCK • Eugene, Oregon

Wipf and Stock Publishers  
199 W 8th Ave, Suite 3  
Eugene, OR 97401

The Resurrection of the Dead  
An Exposition of 1 Corinthians XV  
By Milligan, William  
ISBN 13: 978-1-60608-438-0  
Publication date 01/09/2009  
Previously published by T & T Clark, 1895

### Prefatory Note.

The following chapters appeared originally in  
*The Monthly Interpreter* and *The Expositor*.  
They are now republished in accordance  
with what is known to have been the  
writer's intention.

G. M.

*March* 1894.

# CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. 1 CoR. xv. 1-11 . . . . .	3
II. 1 CoR. xv. 12-19 . . . . .	21
III. 1 CoR. xv. 20-22 . . . . .	41
IV. 1 CoR. xv. 23-28 . . . . .	61
V. 1 CoR. xv. 29-32A . . . . .	79
VI. 1 CoR. xv. 32B-34 . . . . .	97
VII. 1 CoR. xv. 35-41 . . . . .	117
VIII. 1 CoR. xv. 42-44 . . . . .	139
IX. 1 CoR. xv. 45, 46 . . . . .	161
X. 1 CoR. xv. 47-49 . . . . .	181
XI. 1 CoR. xv. 50-52 . . . . .	199
XII. 1 CoR. xv. 53-58 . . . . .	225

*“ Now I make known unto you, brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, wherein also ye stand, by which also ye are saved ; I make known, I say, in what words I preached it unto you, if ye hold it fast, except ye believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures ; and that he was buried ; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures ; and that he appeared to Cephas ; then to the twelve ; then he appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some are fallen asleep ; then he appeared to James ; then to all the apostles ; and last of all, as unto one born out of due time, he appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet 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 which was bestowed upon me was not found vain ; but I laboured more abundantly than they all : yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Whether then it be I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.”—1 COR. xv. 1-11. [R. V.]*

## THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.

---

### Chapter i.

IN entering upon the effort to explain and illustrate the course of St. Paul's argument in the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, it may be well, in the meantime, to postpone any inquiry into the peculiar views of those with whom the Apostle has to contend. We shall be able to form more correct ideas upon this point either in the course of our exposition of the chapter, or when we have brought it to a close. It is enough to observe now, that the whole character of the Apostle's reasoning shows how deeply moved he himself was by the thought of the momentous subject with which he is to deal. His very first word—"I make known" is one of power—*Antea fuerat doctrina*, says Bengel, *nunc fit elenchus*. It is the word which he had used in chap. xii. 3, when the awful thought of calling Jesus *Anathema* was present to his mind. More than that, it is the word used by our Lord Himself when, in the last sentence of His high-priestly prayer, He thought of the Divine authority with which, as the revelation of the Father, He had

impressed the knowledge of the Father upon the hearts of the disciples, so that in them the end of His coming had been answered, "that the love wherewith Thou lovest Me may be in them, and I in them" (John xvii. 26). "I make known" is more than I announce, or declare, or preach, or call to mind. It carries with it the whole weight of St. Paul's apostolical authority, as well as the remembrance of that submission which the Corinthian Christians had formerly yielded to his words. As, too, with the first word of the chapter, so also with the tone of the chapter throughout. There is an animation, a fervour, a swing in it almost unexampled even in the writings of one whose letters were "weighty and strong." Seldom does even he rise to such impassioned thought, such ardent feeling, or such lofty eloquence. He is evidently contending for what he knows to be one of the most central truths of that Gospel which he had received by direct communication from heaven. With it were connected all perseverance and enthusiasm in the work of the Lord (ver. 58). Without it the whole substance of his message disappeared (ver. 14), and its fruits perished (ver. 17).

The subject of the chapter is the Resurrection of the Dead. In the days when that great truth was first proclaimed, men questioned and denied it as they questioned and denied hardly any other doctrine which Jesus or His Apostles preached. No belief of the early Church roused to such an extent the indignation of the Sadducees, the most powerful party



in Jerusalem at the time (Acts iv. 2). It was received with mockery at Athens and throughout the Gentile world (Acts xvii. 32). One of the earliest heresies that sprang up in the bosom of the Christian Church itself, was that of Hymenæus and Philetus, who maintained that the resurrection was past already, and overthrew the faith of some (2 Tim. ii. 18). At Corinth, as we learn from this chapter, there were those in the midst of the Christian community who denied the doctrine, and asked either in perplexity or scorn, "How are the dead raised, and with what manner of body do they come?" (ver. 35).

But if there was difficulty in believing in the resurrection of the dead then, the difficulty is one which has only increased with time. The lapse of centuries has placed many another doctrine of our faith in a clearer and brighter light, and has made it easier of acceptance than it was at the beginning. It is not so here. As ever enlarging multitudes return to the dust, and the particles of their bodies enter in other forms into the frames of generations that follow them, the mind becomes bewildered in its effort to imagine what the resurrection of the dead can mean. How often do we torture ourselves with the thought of it! How often would we fain pause and dismiss the whole subject as one of those impenetrable mysteries which it is useless at present to endeavour to comprehend! But there is no pausing on the part of the Apostle in the chapter before us. On the contrary, the whole tenor of the chapter shows that he is animated in a higher

than ordinary degree by the confidence, the assurance, the joy, of faith. He feels that he is entering into the very heart of the Christian system. He seems almost to experience a sensation of relief as he turns from many of the points with which, in the earlier part of his Epistle, he had been engaged. The factions, the lawsuits, the disputes about meats, articles of dress, and gifts had wearied him. Now he is in his element, and he rushes like a war-horse to the battle.

In the first paragraph of the chapter, extending from ver. 1 to ver. 11, the foundation of the Apostle's argument is laid, and it may be summed up in the single sentence, "The Christ who died is risen." The Corinthian Christians indeed did not doubt that fact. Even those among them who hesitated to admit that there was any prospect of a resurrection for themselves, did not deny that, on the third morning after His crucifixion, their Lord had come forth in triumph from the grave. The proclamation of that great truth had, most of all, made them Christians. It had confirmed in the most wonderful and striking way the highest claims put forth by One who to the outward eye had no form, nor comeliness, and no beauty that men should desire Him. It had authenticated in a manner which no human reasoning could overthrow, His assertion that He was the Son of God, and the Sent of God to be the Saviour of the world. It had illustrated the nature of that imperishable life which He Himself possessed, and which He communicated to all who identified themselves with Him. It had shown

with what approbation and honour the Almighty regarded One who had been persecuted to a shameful death. It had surrounded the very cross of Calvary with glory. The early Christians in general, and no doubt the Corinthian Christians along with them, knew well that the Church of Christ had not been founded only upon a Saviour who died, but upon One who, though crucified in weakness, had been raised by the power of God ; and the life which they lived was life in a risen Lord. Therefore it is that, whatever the doubts they might entertain with regard to their own resurrection, the chapter before us affords not the slightest intimation that they entertained any with regard to the Resurrection of Jesus.

Yet, although this was the case, St. Paul feels that it was of the utmost importance to restate the truths already in their minds, and to impress these truths upon them with renewed power. The difference is vast between acknowledging that a thing is true, and seeing that truth stand out before our eyes in the clearness of deep and deliberate conviction. In the former case the truth may have no possession of us. It may be in our minds like seed laid up in a store-house, retaining indeed the principle of life, and ready for use at some future day, but as yet without vigour or result. In the latter case it is like seed cast into a soil which contains all the appropriate conditions for its growth, and to which it is no sooner committed than it begins to sprout, and to send up first the blade, and then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear. Would we

know the power of any truth that we have believed, we need to be constantly returning to it, constantly renewing our acquaintance with it, constantly satisfying ourselves, amidst all the fresh experiences that we make, of its reality and value.

Hence it is that, before entering upon the special argument of this chapter, St. Paul states again the substance of his Gospel, and that in such a way as ought to have awakened the most tender and powerful impressions in connection with it.

1. *First*, he reminds the Corinthian Christians of the contents of that Gospel which he had preached at Corinth. These contents are contained in the verses extending from ver. 3 to ver. 8, and the double introduction of the words "according to the Scriptures" gives the key to the arrangement of the particulars mentioned. In the first place, these are four in number, divided into two groups, the first group embracing the facts that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins and was buried; the second, that He rose from the grave on the third day and that He appeared after His Resurrection to the persons named. In the second place, the words "according to the Scriptures" show us, from the manner in which they are introduced, not only that we are dealing with two groups of facts, but that the chief stress of the statement is laid upon the first of the two particulars mentioned in each group,—“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and,” etc.; “He hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and,”

etc. In other words, the Gospel preached by St. Paul consisted mainly of the two great truths that Christ died for our sins and that He rose again. The other two are subordinate and subsidiary. That Christ was "buried" is no doubt even in itself full of consolation to the Christian mind, not simply because, as commentators so often think, it attests His death or prepares the way for His Resurrection, but because it illustrates His complete identification of Himself with all the different stages of our human history. Not only did He pass through life and death before us, He passed also through that grave in which we must one day be laid in a solitude upon which no friend of earth can break. That after His Resurrection Christ appeared to Cephas and the others who are here mentioned, is likewise of the utmost importance; for it assures us that, in accepting the crowning doctrine of our faith, we are following no cunningly-devised fable or fond delusion, but are dealing with a fact established by most abundant and varied evidence. Yet, important as these two points may be, they are not themselves the substance of the Gospel. That substance is to be found in the two immediately preceding them—Christ died for our sins, and rose again on the third day.

Even this, however, is not all. The words "rose again" of the Authorized Version do not bring out the meaning of the original. We ought to read, with the Revised Version, "hath been raised;" and the difference between the two renderings, though the latter

may be unmarked, or, when it is marked, may be blamed by many, is one of those differences that carry with them a whole world of theology. The reading "rose again" tells us only that on the third morning Jesus burst the bonds of death, and came forth victorious from the grave, a conqueror over it in His own Divine and triumphant might. The reading "hath been raised" tells us that He not only rose, but that in the state in which He rose He continued when the Apostle wrote, and by parity of reasoning continues still. It conveys to us the assurance that He did not die again, but that having died once He dieth no more: death hath no more dominion over Him. He lives, unchangeably the same, for ever.

And now we see what the two leading points of St. Paul's Gospel were. In conformity with the whole teaching of Scripture, they were these,—first, Christ died for our sins; secondly, He hath been raised and He lives for ever. These truths may not be separated from each other. God hath joined them together: no man may put them asunder. They include the whole history of Christ from His Incarnation onward; and because they include His history, they include also that of His people. Without the first the second would bring little comfort to us in our sinfulness. Even supposing for a moment (what, however, the Apostle afterwards declares to be impossible) that Christ had passed through the grave to a glorious Resurrection without our being concerned in His work, it is conceivable that we might have no part with Him

in that Resurrection. Looked at in itself, it might convey to us no earnest or foretaste of our own. Because He rose who was the Only-begotten of the Father, who did always and perfectly the Father's will, and in whom the Father was always well pleased, it would not follow that we who had violated the Divine commandments, and in whose case death was not a mere transition stage to life, should also rise. It is Christ's dying for our sins as our Representative, which gives us hope that, partakers of His death, we shall also be partakers of His Resurrection. Without the second truth, again, the first would be of as little avail. "If Christ hath not been raised," says St. Paul in the seventeenth verse of the chapter, "your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins,"—words which do not mean simply that our sins are not forgiven us, but that we must still be living in sin as the element of our whole moral being. It is in Christ the risen Saviour that we are introduced into that new and higher and heavenly life in which we are to walk; and except when brought into that life, the life which can alone satisfy the desires and complete the glory of our nature, we cannot be at peace. Thus the death and Resurrection of Christ must always go together as two sides of one compound truth. The separation too often made between them in theology is not found in the writings of St. Paul.

Upon the details of the manifestations of Himself by the Risen Lord, contained in the verses extending from ver. 5 to ver. 8, it does not seem necessary to

dwell. One or two points, however, may be briefly noticed. (1) The word "appeared" must denote actual and bodily appearances of the Risen Saviour, and not visions of the mental eye. We know from the Gospels that it was thus that Christ appeared in several of the instances here recorded, and the sense of the word applicable to some must be applied to all. The use of the word too in 1 Tim. iii. 16, "appeared to angels" (not "seen of angels," as in the Authorized and Revised Versions), is conclusive upon the point. Angels surely do not see visions. (2) All the appearances recorded belong to a date anterior to the conversion of the Apostle. No hesitation can be felt upon this point except in the case of that mentioned in ver. 8, the appearance to St. Paul himself. Yet the words in which the Apostle designates himself as the τὸ ἔκτρωμα ("the one born out of due time") of the apostolic band, hardly admit of any other interpretation. St. Paul felt, as he tells us in the next following verse, connected with that preceding by the word "for," that he was the least of the Apostles, and that he was not meet to be called an Apostle, *because he persecuted the Church of God*. Therefore it was that he deserves to be called the ἔκτρωμα "the abortion," among the rest, and the time which suggested such a humiliating name was that when he was yet a persecutor. (3) The words "last of all" in ver. 8, when viewed in their relation to the several times repeated ἔπειτα ("then") of the previous verses, seem distinctly to imply that the manifestation spoken of was not only the last of the



particular series to which allusion had been made, and which might therefore have been afterwards renewed, but that it was the final appearance of the Risen Lord in the form and way then in question. (4) There is difficulty in determining the principle upon which the different appearances of the Risen Christ, here gathered together by St. Paul, are grouped. The mention of "the twelve" in ver. 5, compared with that of "all the Apostles" in ver. 7, is sufficient to show that the arrangement is not chronological. It would seem rather that the whole number is divided into two groups, each consisting of three members. The first group will then have special relation to Christ's disciples in their home life, and that in three rising gradations—Peter, the twelve, the five hundred, all of these being viewed in their personal relation to Jesus; the second to the disciples looked at in their action on the world, again in three rising gradations—James the head of the Church at Jerusalem, all the Apostles (sent out upon their mission), the Apostle of the Gentiles.

Once more, before passing from that aspect of the two great truths of these verses, Christ's death and His endless life after death, which we are now considering, it may be well to notice that these truths embody not facts alone, but facts accomplished through the eternal purpose of God. Such is the meaning of the words "according to the Scriptures" associated with each. For, when he thus speaks, it is no mere fulfilment of prophecy that is in the Apostle's mind.

He does not wish merely to tell us that, hundreds of years before the events took place, the death and Resurrection of Jesus had been foretold by prophets, and that in the fulfilment of their predictions, in the correspondence of event with prophecy, we have an assurance that we are dealing not with mistaken traditions but with actual fact. He refers to the Scriptures, and the mention made in them of these things, for a different purpose. These Scriptures were the expression of the Divine will. They were the record of the Divine doings. They were the revelation of the Divine purposes. What they contained was either a statement or an illustration of the unchangeable principles of the Divine economy.

When, accordingly, we find the death and the life after death of the coming Redeemer spoken of in the Scriptures with gradually increasing clearness as the time for their accomplishment drew nigh, we are invited to think of them as far more than a simple fulfilment of prophecy. They are a part of the execution of God's great plan. They have their place in the Divine administration of the universe. They are not a scheme devised by man, or angel, or even by the Son Himself, to procure redemption for us. In them God accomplishes His own ends. He sent the Son. He so "loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

2. *Secondly*, the object of the Apostle in these introductory verses of the chapter is not merely to tell

the Corinthian Christians the contents of that Gospel which he preached, as he had often told it them before. His aim is so to tell it that they shall be reminded of its power, and be thus the better prepared for the important consequences to be connected with it in the subsequent portion of the chapter. Hence, accordingly, he reminds them—

(1) That it was this Gospel which had first awakened them to spiritual life. "Now I make known unto you," he says in verse 1, not only "the Gospel which I preached unto you," but "which also ye received." He takes them back to the moment when he had first come among them as the Apostle of a Risen Lord, and when by the tidings which he preached they had been first led to faith. What a moment never to be forgotten had that been! In their fair and beautiful city they had been cultivating their philosophy, and it had failed to satisfy either the questionings of the intellect or the longings of the heart. The wisest teachers of the day had been at their command, but they "through wisdom knew not God" (chap. i. 21). Idolatry in its most debasing forms, heathenism with its most impure and degrading rites, prevailed on every side. Then the Apostle came. He had been persecuted in Thessalonica. He had been driven from Beroea. He had been compelled to leave Athens, and it was with the marks of suffering upon him that he had arrived at Corinth. But the opposition that he had met with had only roused his spirit. The Lord had appeared

to him in the night by a vision, and had said, "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city" (Acts xviii. 9, 10); he had obeyed the vision, and had continued there a year and six months teaching the word of God among them, with what success they could themselves best testify.

These were affecting memories,—affecting to St. Paul, not less affecting to the Corinthian Christians; and they were all brought up by the words "which also ye received." Well, then, is the Apostle's argument, ye remember that spring-time of your spiritual life, and that the truth which then produced the change was that regarding a Redeemer who had passed through death to everlasting and glorious life, and whom I could then proclaim to you as the Risen and Living Lord. Surely you will think of that truth now as one to be held fast in faith. Not only so—

(2) The Apostle reminds them that this was the truth which from that moment until now had maintained their spiritual life in vigour. "Wherein also," he says, ver. 2, "ye stand." He had not only the past to appeal to, but the present, the multiplied evidences of Divine grace that could be seen, the manifold fruits of the Christian life that were exhibited, among them. In no early Christian church were these results so conspicuous as in Corinth. Nowhere did they find so rich a soil from which to spring. The life of the

Corinthian Christians was fuller and more striking than in any other city of the time.

Again, therefore, the appeal is to the same purpose as before. I do not send you, says the Apostle, only to the past. I bid you look at what you have continued to be down to this very hour. Notwithstanding all your shortcomings and sins, you know that you have a Divine life among you, a life that connects you with God and a higher world than the present. By what is it maintained? Is it not by that very Gospel which I preached at first, that we have a Lord who has passed through death to His exaltation at the right hand of God? He it is who supplies from His own living presence what keeps you alive. Because He is with you always, you are what you are. Surely you will think of that truth now as one to be held fast in faith. Once more—

(3) St. Paul connects this faith with the attainment of a full salvation. "By which also," he says in ver. 2, "ye are saved," or rather, however unpleasant the English may be, "ye are being saved:" that is, by which also ye are receiving larger measures of salvation, and shall at last obtain the full salvation for which ye wait and long. The salvation spoken of is not to be understood in the sense of mere deliverance from the penalty of sin, in the theological sense of justification. We shall fail to comprehend the root of the Apostle's reasoning if we identify these two, as if the man who is justified were also saved, or the man who

is saved were no more than justified. Salvation is a far wider word than justification. It includes not pardon only but spiritual life, deliverance of the soul from the power not less than the punishment of sin, restoration to the Divine image, conformity of character to the inheritance of the saints in light. And whence is the hope of this salvation obtained? Not simply from the death of Christ. There we may obtain pardon for past offences. There we may feel that our sins are covered in the blood of Him who, as our Representative, took upon Him death for us. But there we have not, nor in the nature of the case can we have, life. Life flows from life. It may spring up in the midst of death, but not from death. It is a Living Lord who quickens us to be partakers of His own life. Christian hope is more than the hope of deliverance from sorrow or crying or pain. It is first and most of all the hope of deliverance from sin, to be no more tempted to evil either from within or from without, to be like the Lord when we see Him as He is. Surely we ought to think of this truth also as one to be held fast in faith.

Such is the statement with which the Apostle opens the argument of this chapter. It is a statement of fact and an appeal to experience. There is undoubtedly proof presented of the fact that Christ rose from the grave. But there could be no proof by witnesses who could be seen and questioned, that Christ was living still at the right hand of the Father an endless life of glory. For that the Corinthian

---

Christians must depend upon positive assertion confirmed by undeniable experience of the result. Even the witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ are cited less as witnesses to prove a point, than as witnesses who tell an old story over again in order to revivify the convictions of their hearers. St. Paul is not dealing with sceptics as to the Resurrection of the Lord to whom it is necessary to present a proof, but with persons whose eyes were only becoming dim to it, and their hearts insensible to its influence. All, both Apostle and converts, are agreed upon one point, and have one point to start from. The Christ who had died and risen again, who had passed through death to life, was the substance of their common faith. Whether it was St. Paul himself or his fellow-Apostles, so they preached, and so the Corinthians believed. Let the latter think over it again; and, as they were even now persuaded of the truth itself, let them be prepared to follow it out, as they would follow out all truth, to the consequences which were legitimately involved in it.

*“Now if Christ is preached that he hath been raised from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither hath Christ been raised: and if Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we witnessed of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, neither hath Christ been raised: and if Christ hath not been raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable.”—1 COR. xv. 12-19. [R.V.]*



## Chapter ii.

IN the first eleven verses of the chapter the Apostle had laid the foundation of his argument, and he is now ready to proceed to the argument itself. He is to conduct it by an appeal to what the Corinthian Christians knew and acknowledged with regard to the Resurrection and the Resurrection-life of Christ. Neither of these great facts is he again to establish. Even the witnesses, cited in the long list contained in vers. 5-8 of the chapter, had been cited by him not so much to prove what hardly stood in need of proof, as to illustrate and enforce the fact on which his mind was fixed, and to bring it home to his readers with fresh liveliness and power. To this last result all that he had said had tended; and now the result is gained. The Risen and glorified Redeemer is before both himself and the Corinthian Church as One who, after having died for their sins, has been raised from the grave, and has ascended to His Father and their Father, to His God and their God. Having gained this point St. Paul is ready to proceed with his argument for the resurrection of the dead. It is drawn from the absurd and incredible con-