

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

sians ii. 18, represents the worship of angels as an aberration—probably of Essene origin—connected with the service of the cosmic elements; but even more strikingly by Colossians ii. 15, which philologically appears to admit no other sense than that God divested Himself of the angelic authorities and powers, and made an open display of triumph over them in Christ. These angelic powers which God strips off like a garment can be no other than the angels who in the Old Covenant came between God and his people, but in the new Dispensation are superseded when Christ bursts the fetters of their law, triumphs over their terrors, and ascends to the seat of mediatorial sovereignty in victorious exaltation over all creatures, even over the angels to whom for a little time He was made subject.

W. ROBERTSON SMITH.

---

### THE CORINTHIAN SADDUCEES.

#### I CORINTHIANS XV.

IN a former paper I have endeavoured to reproduce certain opinions put forward by some church members at Corinth, opinions which called from the great Apostle of the Gentiles his famous Chapter on the Resurrection. I shall now attempt to reproduce the arguments with which he meets these opinions. If I can shew that these arguments really overturn the opinions delineated in my earlier paper, I shall do something to support the general truthfulness of that delineation.

Before openly challenging the enemy, St. Paul marshals some of his forces in battle array. He appeals to the fact that his readers have already accepted his teaching, and that, unless their faith is useless, they are day by day receiving salvation through the word he preached to them. Among

the chief points of this teaching were the death and resurrection of Christ in accordance with the ancient Scriptures and with the testimony of many witnesses.

That, after the lapse of about twenty-five years, a majority of the five hundred brethren were still living, seems to imply that the risen Saviour deliberately chose young men to be witnesses of his resurrection, men who might live long to testify it to others: just so, the date of the death of the chief Apostles proves that they were called by Christ while yet young. That St. Paul knew that a majority of the five hundred brethren still survived, proves that those who had actually seen the risen Lord were marked men in the early Church.

Having thus surrounded himself with numerous and well known witnesses, St. Paul summons before him the men whose opinions he is going to refute. They declare, without any qualification, that *dead men do not rise* again. He reminds them, as something beyond question, that this involves a denial of the resurrection of Christ. And this would imply that the Gospel preached by himself is an *empty* word, destitute of reality and truth, and that his readers' *faith is empty* credulity. Nay, more: if this denial be true, St. Paul and his colleagues are *found* out, found to be *false-witnesses*, false-witnesses not against man but *against God*. They have been telling lies about Him, and misrepresenting his dealings with mankind. This follows inevitably, as St. Paul again tells us, from the assertion that dead men are not raised. The same assertion involves, moreover, other consequences still nearer to the Corinthian Christians. If St. Paul's Gospel is an empty falsehood, his readers' belief of it is also an empty credulity. And, if so, they must be still in the moral state in which the Gospel found them, *i.e.*, still living *in* their old *sins*. But that they are not now living in their former sins they know by happy experience. For they now conquer the sins which once

conquered them. But could this moral victory result from mere credulity? No; the moral effects produced in them by the Gospel, effects which the noblest element of their being proclaims to be divine, prove that the word they have believed is true, at least in its main outlines. At any rate it is inconceivable that a gross misrepresentation of God's action towards men could produce the good effects which they see and feel. This powerful and double *reductio ad absurdum* is the Apostle's first argument.

We have here an admirable model for all Christian apologists. St. Paul appeals to subjective spiritual effects produced by objective historical testimony. The subjective effects and the objective testimony are not two parallel arguments, but are integral and mutually necessary parts of one great argument. For the spiritual effects would prove nothing about the resurrection, had they not been wrought by the agency of men who proclaimed the resurrection. On the same lines *we* must argue. There is abundant proof that this Epistle is from the pen of St. Paul: and we are therefore sure that he taught that Christ rose from the dead. The effect of his preaching, and that of men who shared his belief, is before us in the world to-day. Our only alternative is to suppose either that Christ actually rose, or that mankind was rescued from the destruction to which, in St. Paul's day, society was evidently hastening, by men whose confidence rested on a gross delusion. This combined argument is the strongest that can be adduced in a general way for the historical claims of Christianity. To those who have ventured to believe the Gospel of Christ, this argument is wonderfully confirmed by the inward victory over former sins which the Gospel conveys. On this immovable ground the people of God may rest even in face of death. But if deliverance from sin and felt moral elevation be not obtained through the Gospel, I wonder not that the more general argument, though sufficient for our early confidence,

loses in many cases its force and leaves men in doubt of even the historical truth of Christianity.

Verse 18 contains another distinct argument, another *reductio ad absurdum*, in support of the main contention of this Chapter. It is directed against what both St. Paul and his opponents admitted to be a corollary of the denial of the resurrection, viz., denial of a life beyond death. The logical particle *ἀρα*<sup>1</sup> introduces a necessary inference from the assertion St. Paul combats; an inference so evidently untrue that it overturns the assertion which involves it. If there be no resurrection of dead men, and therefore no life beyond death, those who have gone down to the grave trusting in Christ, and belonging to Christ, have by their death lost all, and lost themselves. For, if the vulgar belief of Plato's day be correct, they have ceased to be, or have passed into a worthless shadow life. But this is inconceivable. So in all ages the death of the righteous has been a witness to a life beyond death. From their death-bed has shone forth the light of immortality.

The completeness of the argument of Verse 17, and the independent force of that of Verse 18, warn us not to take the latter as a mere completion of the former. There was surely no need to prove to Christians, unless their profession was false, that they were no longer in their sins. But no doubt the one argument suggested the other. If St. Paul's testimony be untrue, living believers of it are still in their former heathenism; and, if there be no life beyond death, departed believers are lost.

Verse 19 presents another independent argument, suggested by that of Verse 18. It also casts important light upon the opinions of the Corinthian deniers of the resurrection. The argument implies that these men had, or professed to have, *hope in Christ*, but a hope limited to the present life. In other words, their hope of eternal glory depended on

<sup>1</sup> See EXPOSITOR, *First Series*, vol. x. pp. 326.

their survival to the coming of Christ. They were *only* men who *in this life have hope in Christ*. If so, of all men they are most to be pitied. For they cherish hopes of eternal blessedness, but hopes which may at any moment be dashed to the ground by the hand of death. Especially to be pitied were men like the Apostle, whose life was one long deadly peril. But that his lot was not thus pitiable, St. Paul leaves his readers to infer. The deep admiration which his heroism evoked in their hearts, forbade the suggestion. Thus even the perils and uncertainties of the present life are to the Christian a testimony of a life to come.

Having adduced from the heart and experience of his readers proof of the truth of the Gospel proclaimed by himself and others, and having shewn the morally absurd consequences of denying a future life, St. Paul may now fairly indulge in an outburst of exultant assertion. But, as usual, his exultation is full of argument. That through one man we all go down into the grave, prepares us to believe that through another man we shall obtain life beyond the grave. That the resurrection of Christ is but the beginning of the resurrection of his people, is in harmony with St. Paul's constant teaching that they share all that He has and is. Indeed the resurrection of his people is involved in the complete victory over all enemies promised of old to the Messiah, and in the original destination of man to reign over all God's works. Not until our bodies are rescued from the iron grip of death can the Son present to the Father his finished work, viz., a once rebellious but now submissive world.

In both parts of Verse 22 the word *all* refers only to believers. For of them only does St. Paul think throughout this Chapter, and of them only are many of his assertions true. This limitation of view is very conspicuous in Verse 43. For none can say that the lost will rise *in glory and power*. And it is suggested at once by the words,

*they that are Christ's*, in Verse 23. In accord with this limited reference we find the indefinite πάντες, without the addition of ἄνθρωποι so conspicuous in Romans v. 12, 18, where the writer's mental horizon embraces the whole race, and where the saved are specially distinguished as *they who receive the free gift of righteousness*. If we took the word πάντες as denoting all mankind, we should have in the passage before us a plain declaration that all men will be saved, saved, we may almost say, at the general resurrection. For the word *life*, when spoken of the departed, denotes in the Bible always a state of happiness. But the reasons stated above forbid us to infer from Verse 22 anything about the ultimate state of those who die unforgiven.

Verse 29 may be rendered: "Else what will they do who are from time to time baptized on behalf of the dead ones? If, to speak generally, dead men are not raised, why are they even baptized on their behalf?" But the force of the argument contained in these questions, it is very difficult now to reproduce. For, not only is the argument directed against an error known to us only through St. Paul's refutation of it, but it also rests upon a custom unknown to us. All we can do is to try to find, or to suppose, a custom which might be described by the words *baptized on behalf of the dead ones*, and might be appealed to in proof of the resurrection of the dead or at least of life beyond death.

Of the remains of such a custom there are traces in the writings of the Fathers. Chrysostom tells us, in his homily on this passage, that the followers of the heretic Marcion, "When a catechumen dies among them, hide a living man under the bed of the dead one, and come to the dead man, and speak and inquire whether he wishes to receive baptism. Then, when he answers nothing, the hidden man says from beneath instead of him that he wishes to be baptized. And so they baptize him instead of the departed." Epiphanius, giving a traditional explanation of the verse

before us, says (*Heresies*, xxviii. 6) that the followers of Cerinthus "baptized others in the name of those who die without baptism, lest when they rose in the resurrection they should be punished for not having received baptism."

Now we can well conceive that this custom, which lingered only in small sects, was a perversion, both in practice and doctrine, of an innocent and appropriate custom existing at Corinth in St. Paul's day. We may suppose that, for those who died in faith but not yet baptized, others, baptized members or catechumens, underwent the rite, perhaps in some cases at the request of the dying man, as a testimony to the church and the world of the faith of the unbaptized departed; that thus they might have, though dead, a name and memorial place in the church. If baptism on a deathbed were not practised in the Apostle's days, (and we have no proof that it was,) this custom of vicarious baptism would easily arise, and would naturally fall into disuse when the practice of deathbed baptism became common. Such a custom might easily be described, without supposing any spiritual benefit to the dead man from the rite, by the words *baptized on behalf of the dead ones*. For the rite was performed to supply an omission on the part of the dead; and sometimes perhaps at his request. And it might easily degenerate into the foolish form described by Chrysostom and give rise to the false teaching mentioned by Epiphanius. But in itself it would be innocent and appropriate; and might be mentioned by the Apostle without disapproval. And it would be a strong testimony on the part of the dying man, and of those who took part in or approved of the rite, that there is a blessed life beyond death for those who die in Christ. For if, as some said, participation in the coming kingdom of Christ depends upon our surviving to his coming, the dead believer's faith has failed to save him. Surely no sacred rite would be performed for one who, by the loss of his bodily life, had lost his soul. If this custom was sanc-



tioned by the church at Corinth generally, St. Paul's argument was an appeal to the faith of the whole church as expressed in a common rite, against the teaching of a minority.

Similarly, Cicero appeals (*Tusculan Disputations*, i. 12) to funeral rites as proof of the general belief of mankind in a life beyond the grave.

The word *ἐπεὶ* introduces a *reductio ad absurdum*, as in Chapter v. 10 and Chapter vii. 14: and *ὑπέρ* is used nearly as in Philemon 13. St. Paul sees in thought men who are undergoing the rite, *who are being baptized on behalf of the dead*; and asks what they are going to do, what result they will attain. He gives force to his question by repeating it. The words, *If dead men are not raised*, state in full what is implied in the word *else*. The word *ἄλλως* indicates that the clause in which it occurs is meant to be a statement of a universal principle. St. Paul asks, What result will those gain who have themselves baptized for the dead, if there be no resurrection of the dead? No answer can be given. For, as both the Apostle and his readers assume,<sup>1</sup> if there be no resurrection of the dead, there is no life beyond death. Consequently, the dead are lost. And the faith of the departed believers has been in vain. But, if so, to commemorate their faith by undergoing baptism for them, is absurd. Thus the custom in question, which was probably sanctioned by the whole church, attests the faith of the church in the safety of their departed brethren, and in the resurrection of the dead.

It is worthy of notice that this *argumentum ad hominem* is not put forward until by more solid arguments St. Paul has proved his point. After these arguments, the personal argument now before us is exceedingly appropriate to bring home to his readers the contradiction between the teaching St. Paul combats and the acknowledged practice of the church.

<sup>1</sup> See page 39.

After appealing to a well known and generally approved custom at Corinth, St. Paul now appeals to the conduct of himself and his colleagues. He thus takes up and develops the argument of Verse 19. If there be no future life, his own action is foolish in the last degree. For, if eternal glory depends on a continuance of the present bodily life, to expose that life to great peril, as he did every day, was infinite folly. But that the Apostle's heroism was not folly, he leaves his readers to judge. For this he can trust to the respect which he knows he has won in their hearts.

The *wild beasts* were probably bloodthirsty and violent men. For, if St. Paul had been cast into the arena to fight with actual wild beasts, his deliverance must have been little less than miraculous; and so terrible an event could not have been omitted from the catalogue of 2 Corinthians xi. 23 ff. We therefore infer, as would his readers unless they knew to the contrary, that this word, *ἐθηριομάχισα*, is a forcible description of encounters with deadly enemies during the Apostle's long sojourn at Ephesus. It is a terrible picture of the perils which culminated in the uproar of Acts xix. 23 and caused the terror which still breathes in 2 Corinthians i. 9. With these passages the passage before us is an important coincidence. St. Paul was surrounded at Ephesus by men thirsting for his blood, men against whose fury he was as powerless as the men thrown to lions in the amphitheatre.

As illustrations of this use of the word we may compare the same word in the same sense in Titus i. 12, and 2 Timothy iv. 17. So Ignatius,<sup>1</sup> after speaking of being literally thrown to wild beasts, says, "From Syria all the way to Rome I am fighting with wild beasts, being bound to ten leopards, *i.e.*, a band of soldiers." Also,<sup>2</sup> "Guard against the wild beasts in human form."

In contrast to his own conduct, which is reckless folly if

<sup>1</sup> *Epistle to the Romans*, ch. v.

<sup>2</sup> *Epistle to the Smyrnans*, ch. iv.

there be no future life, St. Paul now depicts conduct which would be wise if the teaching of his opponents were correct. And, to make his readers feel the gross impropriety of this conduct, he puts it in the form of advice. "If there be no life beyond death it would be right for me to advise you to enjoy the present; for the present would be all you have to enjoy." Many of the readers would recognize in the words *Let us eat . . . we die* an exact quotation of Isaiah xxii. 13, a description of conduct at Jerusalem which the Prophet condemns. And to this condemnation by a Hebrew prophet St. Paul adds a warning from a heathen poet. He thus shews that this moral, or immoral, outflow of the teaching he combats is condemned not only by the voice of God speaking in the Jewish Scriptures, but by the common sentiment of men speaking in a Greek poet.

Nothing more is needed but sharp words of direct warning. And the earnestness of the warning suggests that it was needed, that the denial of the resurrection was already producing at Corinth immoral results. There were evidently some men there whose presence was a shame to the church. That St. Paul speaks, not to these men, but about them to the church, suggests that their case was almost hopeless. His words to the church have a parallel in Chapter v. 2.

St. Paul's disproof of the bold denial of the Corinthian Sadducees is now complete. This denial implies that the Gospel preached by himself and his colleagues is a lie against God, and that the Corinthian Christians are still living in sin; that their dead brethren have by their death lost all, and that consequently Christians, and especially those exposed to constant peril, are of all men most to be pitied. This denial is contradicted by a custom sanctioned in the church, and by the whole course of the Apostle's own life. And it tends towards conduct reprobated both by Jewish prophets and by Gentile poets. To tolerate the men who propound it is a disgrace to the church.

Having thus disproved the denial of the resurrection, St. Paul traces it to one of its sources, viz., a misconception of, or inability to understand, the process of the resurrection. Some men took for granted that, if the dead rise, their resurrection bodies must be similar to those now living on earth. And, because they could not conceive this, they denied the resurrection altogether. St. Paul reminds them that the infinite variety of Nature around us proclaims the folly of those who suppose that resurrection bodies must needs be the same as those laid in the grave; and that, in addition to this infinite variety on earth, we have shining above us in heaven a multitude of beautiful objects altogether unlike all the varieties of things on earth. Moreover, development is the order of God. Even Adam in his early purity had not such a body as God designed to be his eternal dwelling-place. This will be ours through our relation not to the first, but to the second, Adam. So absolute is the contrast between the earthly and the heavenly that even those who survive the coming of Christ will need to be changed. Not until mortality has been laid aside will the final victory be gained.

This whole argument rebukes the teaching, common in all ages and places, that our resurrection bodies will consist of the same material particles as do those we now wear; and it thus removes a serious objection to the resurrection based on this supposition. Yet our future bodies will bear some definite, though now inconceivable, relation to those we have now. For, in a manner analogous to the grain of wheat and the rising blade, *each* will receive *his own body*.

We also learn that Adam, as he sprang from the Creator's hands, although unstained by sin, was not perfect, even as touching his body. For him, as for us, maturity of manhood is the prize of battle and victory.

JOSEPH AGAR BEET.