

THE RESURRECTION (15:1–58)

Paul comes to the last great subject of his letter. Some of the Corinthians had denied that the dead will rise (v. 12). He sets out to show that such a denial cannot be countenanced for a moment, for the resurrection of the believer is integral to the faith. Unless Christians are to rise in due course they are pathetic; ‘to be pitied more than all men’ (v. 19). Paul starts from first principles. He shows that Christ’s resurrection is fundamental to the gospel, then that the resurrection of Christ implies that of Christians. He goes on to deal with objections that were, or might be, raised, and shows how baseless they are. This is the classic Christian discussion of the subject.

A. The resurrection of Christ (15:1–11)

1. Despite most recent translations, Paul does not speak of reminding his friends of *the gospel* he had preached, for his verb (*gnōrizō*) means ‘make known’ (cf. Moffatt, ‘I would have you know’). The word is itself a gentle rebuke; some Corinthians were evidently far from appreciating what the gospel meant. Yet they had *received* it (the aorist points to a decisive act), and they took their *stand* on it (cf. 2 Cor. 1:24). Clearly they recognized that it is fundamental, even if they did not understand it fully.

2. *By this gospel* is rather ‘through which’ (*dia*), the preposition drawing attention to the gospel as the means Christ uses to bring about salvation. *You are saved* is present continuous, ‘you are being saved’. There is a sense in which salvation is once for all (as in ‘received’, v. 1), and another sense in which it is progressive (cf. 1:18; 2 Cor. 2:15). We do not exhaust the meaning of salvation by our experience when we first believe. Salvation goes on from strength to strength and from glory to glory. The word order is unusual: ‘by what word I preached the gospel to you if you hold fast’, and this poses some problems. Two main solutions have been suggested, (a) The construction is conditional, with the ‘if’ clause coming late in order to give emphasis to what precedes. The meaning would then be: ‘if you hold fast with what terms I preached the gospel to you’. This is not a very natural Greek construction (though far from impossible); also against it is the fact that it makes Paul demand that they hold fast, not only to the gospel, but to the actual words in which he presented it (cf. Moffatt, ‘provided you adhere to my statement of it’). (b) We could connect ‘by what word I preached to you’ with ‘I make known’ (v. 1). This would give the sense, ‘I make known to you ... in what terms I preached ...’ The difficulty with this is the following ‘if you hold (it) fast’, for Paul is not telling them something ‘if they hold it fast’. He is telling them whatever their attitude. Perhaps ‘if you hold fast’ is a kind of parenthesis, or it may attach to ‘you are being saved’ (as Goodspeed, RSV, etc.). Or the conditional may be seen as fulfilled, ‘if you hold fast (as you do)’. The construction is difficult, but the second solution is to be preferred. *Otherwise*, Paul goes on, *you have believed in vain*, where the last word, *eikē*, may be understood as ‘without due consideration, in a haphazard manner’ (BAGD). If people profess to believe the gospel, but have not given due consideration to what that implies and what it demands, they do not really trust Christ. Their belief is groundless and empty. They lack saving faith.

3. The derivative nature of the gospel is stressed. Paul did not originate the message he gave them. He simply *passed on* what he had *received* (for these verbs see notes on 11:23). This is the accepted language for the handing on of tradition. What follows is a very early summary of the church's traditional teaching. Paul is not giving us some views he has worked out for himself; he is passing on what had been told him. This is the *kērygma*, the proclamation, the gospel preached by the early church. Paul sees it as *of first importance*. Without this message we do not have the essential Christian position. The first point in it is that *Christ died for our sins*. That is to say, his death was an atoning death. The cross is at the heart of the gospel. *According to the Scriptures* shows that this was no afterthought. The saving death of Christ was foretold long before in sacred Scripture. It was not death as such, but Christ's death as a saving event that the Scripture foretold and the church proclaimed. Paul does not say what scriptural passages he has in mind, but they will be such as Isaiah 53.

4. In such a brief statement it is a little surprising to find this reference to Christ's burial (cf. the Apostles' Creed). The early church was in no doubt about the reality of the death of Jesus, and the fact of burial is evidence of this (it is mentioned in all four Gospels). While Paul does not explicitly mention the empty tomb, these words are the necessary prelude to it and seem to imply it. From the burial Paul moves to the resurrection on the third day and the burial has implications for this, too; 'if he was buried, the resurrection must have been the reanimation of a corpse' (Barrett). *He was raised (egēgertai)* is passive, which puts stress (as usually in the New Testament) on the activity of the Father in raising the Son (cf. v. 15). And it is perfect, which points to the permanent state; it 'sets forth with the utmost possible emphasis the abiding results of the event' (*Prolegomena*, p. 137). Christ continues in the character of the risen Lord. The perfect tense is used in this way six more times in this chapter (vv. 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 20), and once only in all the rest of the New Testament. It is likely that *according to the Scriptures* is to be taken with *was raised*, rather than with *on the third day* (so, for example, Metzger, *JTS*, n.s., viii, 1957, pp. 118–123). There is little Old Testament evidence for a rising on the third day (though some suggest Hos. 6:2, or Jonah 1:17), but Isaiah 53:10–12 may fairly be held to prophesy the resurrection (it speaks of activity after death; cf. the use of Ps. 16:10 in early preaching).

5–7. Paul gives a list of the resurrection appearances. It is not an exhaustive list, and we may speculate, for example, on the reason for the omission of all the appearances to the women. The apostle begins with an appearance to *Peter*. Actually he says 'Cephas', the Aramaic name, but *NIV* alters this to the Greek name (which Paul uses nowhere except in Gal. 2:7f.). This appearance is mentioned again only in Luke 24:34 (cf. Mark 16:7). We may conjecture that the Lord, in his mercy, was concerned to give assurance of forgiveness to that servant of his who had three times denied him. *The Twelve* (here only in Paul) is clearly a general term, for Judas was not there, and, if the reference is to the appearance on the evening of Easter Day (Luke 24:36ff.; John 20:19ff.), Thomas was absent also. The appearance to *more than five hundred of the brothers* is mentioned here only (unless, as is probable, it is that referred to in Matt. 28:16ff.). It is obviously important, for on no other occasion could such a large number of people testify to the fact of the resurrection. Paul's insistence that most of them were still alive shows the confidence with which he could appeal to their testimony. They could be interrogated and the facts elicited. Notice the beautiful way he refers to those who have died. Death, which is an antagonist no-one can withstand and which was viewed with horror by most people in the ancient world, has become for the Christian nothing more than sleep (see further, *TNTC* on 1 Thess. 4:13f.).

The second name given in this list is *James* (linked with Cephas again in Gal. 1:18f.). It is not certain which James is meant, but most agree that it is James the Lord's brother. It is not unlikely that it was this appearance that led to his conversion and through him to that of the other brothers. They did not believe in Jesus during his ministry (John 7:5), but as early as Acts 1:14 we find them among the believers. What else accounts for the sudden change? *All the apostles* puts emphasis on *all* (BDF 275 (5)); not one was missing. This may refer to an appearance like that in John 20:26ff., but more probably points to the appearance at the time of the ascension (Acts 1:1ff.). This muster of witnesses indicates the importance Paul attached to the resurrection of Jesus. He is about to show its consequences for Christian faith, and he lays the foundation by showing how well based is belief in it. He does not give a complete list of witnesses, but he gives enough to show that the fact is extremely well attested. So reliable is the evidence that it must be accepted, and Paul can go on from there.

8. The apostle puts his vision on the road to Damascus on the same level as the other resurrection appearances. He sees himself as the last in the line of those who have seen the Lord. He calls himself *one abnormally born* (to *ektrōmati*, 'the abortion', 'the miscarriage'). This strong and unexpected term has been interpreted in more ways than one. Some point to the fact that the Twelve had been with Jesus for years, whereas Paul was born into the apostolic band suddenly, without the period of gestation that might have been expected. The emphasis then would be on the abnormality of the process. Others point out that the word is 'an offensive word' (Héring), and see it as a term of abuse (cf. BAGD). Paul was not a handsome man (2 Cor. 10:10), and critics may have combined an insult to his personal appearance with a criticism of his doctrine of free grace, by saying that, 'so far from being born again, Paul was an abortion' (Barclay). This is supported by the fact that Paul goes on to refer to his unworthiness. *To me also* comes last in the Greek with a certain emphasis. Even to Paul, the abortion, Christ appeared.

9. The emphatic personal pronoun *I* again draws attention to the greatness and the condescension of Christ. The risen Lord appeared even to Paul, *the least of the apostles*. This is not a reference to gradation within the apostolate, for elsewhere he can say, 'I do not think I am in the least inferior to those "super-apostles"' (2 Cor. 11:5). In this spirit he could resist even Peter (Gal. 2:11). What Paul means is that his character as a persecutor had made him the least of them all; indeed, he was not worthy to be an apostle at all. Paul holds firmly to two things. The one is the high dignity attaching to his position as an apostle, as we see from several passages in his writings (cf. ch. 9). The apostolate is the highest office in the church, and Paul is an apostle in the fullest sense, because Christ called him to it. The other is his profound sense of personal unworthiness. He is the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). He is not worthy to be an apostle, for he has persecuted that church that is the church of God.

10. Paul freely ascribes all that he has done in Christian work to *the grace of God*. It was *grace* alone that transformed him from a persecutor into a zealous preacher. He would not appear before the Corinthians as an apostle were it not for that *grace*, and what it had done in him. Far from being *without effect* (*kenē*, 'empty', 'without content'), it had caused him to work *harder than all of them*. His word for *worked* (*kopiaō*) means 'labour to the point of weariness'. Deissmann holds that the expression 'came originally from the joyful pride of the skilled craftsman' (LAE, p. 313). Paul stresses that he had toiled hard in the discharge of his apostolate. He does not say that he has accomplished more, but that he has worked harder than others. *Than all of them* could mean 'more than all of them put together', or 'more than any one of them'. As

he is magnifying the grace of God it is perhaps more likely that the former is his meaning, and as far as our information goes this was indeed the case. Though his beginnings had been so unpromising, yet *the grace of God* had enabled him to accomplish a prodigious volume of work. This might be interpreted as reflecting credit on Paul, so he immediately adds, *yet not I*. It was not the man, but *the grace of God* that was effective. He speaks of this grace as *with* him, rather than 'in' him or the like. This way of putting it almost makes *grace* a fellow-labourer, working alongside him, and thus emphasizes that the credit does not belong to Paul.

11. The upshot of all this is that there is but one gospel, whoever might preach it. Paul has stressed that he received the gospel, he did not originate it (v. 3). He has listed some of the more important points in the apostolic message, in particular the strong evidence for the resurrection. Now he is able to say that this is the common message of the preachers (cf. Knox, 'That is our preaching, mine or theirs as you will'). *We preach* is the present continuous tense; this is the way both Paul and the other apostles habitually preach. This is the authentic gospel, that which all the apostles make it their habit to proclaim. *This is what you believed* reminds the Corinthians that this was the basis of their faith. It was this message and not another that they had believed when they became Christians. Anything else is an innovation.

B. The denial of the resurrection (15:12–19)

The exact views of those who said 'there is no resurrection of the dead' (v. 12) are not clear. They may have held the typical Greek view of the immortality of the soul and rejected any idea that the body would rise. Death for such meant the liberation of the soul from its prison in the body, for the body (*sōma*), they held, was a tomb (*sēma*). They may have thought of the state of the departed as the life of the 'shades' in Hades. They may have rejected the thought of bodily resurrection as a reaction to some Jewish views that the body will be raised exactly as it was when it died. Or, starting from the fact that the Christian has risen with Christ (Rom. 6:5–8; Col. 3:1–4, etc.), they may have held that the resurrection life believers live now is all the resurrection there is. But Paul insists that the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead is of central importance. He shows the theological consequences of the position of the Corinthians. If dead men don't rise, then Christ did not rise. If Christ did not rise, the Christian faith is empty. The objectors are striking at the heart of the faith.

12. In the summary of Christian tradition in the foregoing verses it is the resurrection that is stressed: the resurrection of Christ is central to the gospel. Paul says, 'if Christ is preached, that he rose ...' (not *if it is preached that Christ ...*); to preach Christ is to preach the resurrection. He goes on to inquire how, in the light of that, it is possible to deny the resurrection. There is no article with *dead*, which makes it perfectly general, 'resurrection of dead men'. It is the concept of resurrection, rather than 'the collective dead', that is being discussed (BDF 254[2]; in this chapter the article is used with *nekros* only in vv. 29, 35, 42, 52).

13. Paul proceeds to show the consequences of holding that 'dead men don't rise'. If dead men in general are not raised, *then not even Christ has been raised*. *Oude* (translated *then not even*) here means 'neither' (BAGD). Paul is reasoning that, since Christ was genuinely human and died a human death, if men are not raised 'neither has Christ been raised'.

14. The logic is carried on remorselessly. If Christ was not raised, *our preaching is useless*. The inferential particle *ara* (which NIV omits; RSV, 'then') indicates that what follows is the necessary

logical consequence of the preceding. *Useless* (*kenon*) comes first with emphasis. The word means 'empty'. If there is no resurrection of Christ, the preaching, which Paul has shown is not peculiar to himself but common to all the apostles (v. 11), has nothing in it, no substance. It is the resurrection that shows that God is active in Christ, and if the resurrection did not take place the gospel is a sham. *Preaching* (*kērygma*; see note on 1:21) means, not the act of preaching, but the content, the thing preached, the message. The word order in the latter part of the verse is 'empty also your faith', which again puts the stress on 'empty'. The faith of the Corinthians depended on the gospel that had elicited it. If the gospel was a sham, then so was the faith it produced.

15. There is a further consequence. If there is no resurrection, all the apostles are shown to be liars. *We are found* means 'we are caught out' (Moffatt, 'we are detected'). It cannot be said that they are honest men, who in sincerity have given advice they thought to be good, though it is now shown to be not as good as they had imagined. Christianity is not a system of good advice, and the preachers had not simply told people of a good way to live. They had said that something happened; God raised up Christ. Christianity is basically a gospel, the good news of what God has done. The function of preachers is to bear witness to God's saving acts. The apostles had done just that. They had testified that God raised Christ. But if 'dead men don't rise', then dead Jesus did not rise and it is a lie to say that God raised him. Paul is saying in effect, 'Christ rose or we all lied'. *Testified about God* is more literally 'testified against God'. They said he did something (almost they accused him of something) that he did not do. *If in fact* (*eiper ara*) is an unusual combination. There is an emphatic 'if' coupled with the implication that what follows is another's opinion: 'if, as they say' (BDF 454(2)).

16. Paul repeats his statement of v. 13, with the change from 'no resurrection' to *are not raised* (i.e. 'by God'). The repetition drives the point home. The Corinthians must be made to see the logical consequences of the position they have taken up.

17. As he had repeated the sense of v. 13, so Paul now repeats that of v. 14. Instead of 'useless' he has *futile* (*mataios*) and (as with 'useless') puts it in the emphatic position. Faith in Christ is a fruitless exercise if the result is *you are still in your sins*. To 'be in one's sins' is not a common expression, though Jesus spoke of dying in sin (John 8:21, 24) and Paul of being 'dead in sins' (Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13). If people are still in their sins, what does 'Christ died for our sins' (v. 3) mean? In that case, Jesus' death has accomplished nothing. 'Christ dead without resurrection would be a condemned, not a justified, Christ. How could He justify others?' (Godet). Faith would then be futile. The words can be given a second meaning. If Christ was not raised, believers would still be living in their sins like any pagan. But they have a new power over sin, stemming from faith in the living Christ. Therefore Christ must have been raised.

18. A further consequence concerns the fate of the departed. Few things are more characteristic of early Christianity than the changed view of death it gave people. For pagans death was the end of everything. It was an adversary that would in the end defeat everybody. But for Christians it was no more than sleep (see further, *TNTC* on 1 Thess. 4:13f.). Christ had drawn the sting from it (v. 55). Death is now 'gain' (Phil. 1:21), so that Paul can 'desire to depart and be with Christ' (Phil. 1:23). Thus when believers died they were not mourned as people irretrievably lost. They were with Christ. But only, Paul insists, if there is a resurrection. If Christ did not rise, then neither will they. In that event, they *are lost*, they 'have perished' (RSV). Edwards

brings out the force of the aorist: ‘“perished” in the act of falling asleep, as they thought, in Christ’.

19. The perfect *ēlpikotes* carries the idea ‘we have set our hope and continue to hope’. *Only* comes at the end of the clause and is best understood as applying to the whole: ‘if in this life we have set our hope on Christ, and that is all’ (though some take it to mean ‘if in this life we have no more than hope’, ‘we are only hopers’). In that case *we are to be pitied more than all men*. If there is no resurrection Christians are pitifully deluded people. They have set their hopes on a Lord who they think will bring them a richer, fuller life, and all that distinguishes them from others is a special form of hardship (cf. 2 Cor. 6:4ff.; 11:23ff.). While Paul never minimizes the compensations the believer has in this life in the way of peace within and the like, yet it is only common sense that, if this world is all there is, the believer is ‘a martyr to an illusion’ (Héring). Anybody is better off than he.

C. The consequences of Christ’s resurrection (15:20–28)

From the hypothetical statements of the previous paragraph (with its seven *ifs*) Paul turns to certainties: the certainty of Christ’s resurrection and of its consequences. He shows that Christ’s resurrection implies that of believers, and goes on to enumerate the due order of events at the last time. All things will be subdued to Christ; even death will be destroyed. With a few bold strokes he paints an unforgettable picture of God’s final, complete supremacy. In the end, that is what matters.

20. ‘But it is not so! Christ did rise from the dead’ (Moffatt). *But* is adversative; far from Christians being the most to be pitied among men, the fact of the resurrection alters the whole situation. Paul states this fact with simplicity and assurance. Clearly he has no doubts at all. He uses the perfect tense *has been raised* (see on v. 4) with full meaning. Not only did Christ rise on a certain day in history, but he continues permanently in his character as the risen Lord. *The firstfruits* point us to the first sheaf of the harvest, which was brought to the temple and offered to God (Lev. 23:10f.); it consecrated the whole harvest. Moreover, *firstfruits* imply later fruits. Both thoughts are to the point here. Christ was not the first to rise from the dead. Indeed, he had himself raised some. But they would die in due course. His resurrection was to a life that knows no death, and in that sense he was the first and the forerunner of all those who were to be in him; ‘the resurrection of Christ is a pledge and proof of the resurrection of his people’ (Hodge). *Those who have fallen asleep* is a perfect participle denoting the continuing state of the faithful departed (for death as sleep see note on v. 18).

21. The thought that Christ is the second Adam, which underlies this paragraph, is more fully developed in Romans 5. *Death came through a man* refers to the penalty pronounced on the first sin (Gen. 2:17). This meant more than physical death, but it included it. ‘When man sinned he passed into a new state, one dominated by, and at the same time symbolized by death. It is likely that spiritual death and physical death are not being thought of as separate, so that the one involves the other’ (Leon Morris, *The Wages of Sin* [Tyndale Press, 1955], p. 12). Adam’s sin brought disaster not only on himself, but also on all his posterity. But if Adam’s sin had far-reaching consequences, so had Christ’s resurrection. It concerned not himself only, but those also who should believe in him. Just as death came into the world through Adam, so life came into the world through Christ. Paul’s repeated *through a man* points to the reality of the

incarnation. Christ was as truly a man as was Adam. It was fitting that, as it was *through a man* that the corruption entered the race, so it should be *through a man* that it was overcome.

22. The thought is further developed. *In Adam all die* points us to the mortality of the race because of our kinship with our first parents. But it points beyond that to the spiritual evil of which physical death is at once the symbol and the penalty. We are involved with Adam in a solidarity of guilt. There is a sense in which the race is one. But just as Adam's sin brought untold consequences of evil, so Christ's work brought untold consequences of good. But the *all* who are in Adam are not identical with the *all* who are in Christ. 'Each of the two Adams acts as the head of a humanity—the old and the new' (Héring), and not all people, of course, belong to the new. This verse gives no countenance to universalism. Paul is saying that in Adam all that are to die, die, while in Christ all who are to live, live. *Be made alive* refers to more than resurrection as such. It includes the thought of the abundant life that Christ brings to all who are 'in' him.

23. This giving of life does not take place all at once. *Tagma*, which NIV translates as *turn*, was originally a military term, referring to a detachment of soldiers, though it came to be used more generally. In the first *tagma* there is only *Christ, the firstfruits* (it is unusual to have only one in a *tagma* and Barrett suggests the meaning 'rank'). In the second are *those who belong to him*, or more exactly 'those who are Christ's'. *When he comes* ('at his coming') makes it plain that Paul is referring to the second advent. He uses the word *parousia*, which basically means 'coming' or 'presence' (as in 16:17), and which came to be used among Christians as the technical term for the Lord's return. The examples cited by Deissmann (*LAE*, pp. 368–373) make it clear that the word was in common use for a royal visit. Christians used it for the coming of the supremely royal One.

24. *Then (eita)* does not necessarily mean 'immediately after'. It indicates that what follows takes place at some unspecified time after the preceding. There are some (e.g. Deluz) who hold that *the end* points to a third *tagma* or 'order'. The first was Christ, the second ('at his coming') the redeemed, and now we have a third, the unbelievers. This is an unlikely meaning. The word for *end* is *telos*, which never means a group of people (as a third *tagma* would require). Héring is 'unable to find a single text, sacred or secular, in which *telos* has this sense'. It means the end or aim, and there is a sense of purpose about it. It points to the consummation of all things, the climax to which everything is destined to lead up. In any case, throughout this whole chapter the discussion is concerned with believers and Paul does not deal at all with the fate of the wicked. He speaks of two 'orders' only, Christ and believers; then he moves on to the final phase, and says nothing about the lot of unbelievers. *When* is the indefinite *hotan*; the time is not known. There is a dynamic meaning to the Greek *basileia* (*kingdom*); it is 'rule' rather than 'realm'. Paul's thought is that Christ will at the last exercise full and complete authority over all things and all people; he will reign in majesty (cf. 2 Thess. 1:7ff.). Then he will 'deliver up' this authority, this rule, to his Father. All that opposes God will be subdued. So Paul speaks of Christ as destroying *all dominion, authority and power*. These three words are probably not meant to define with precision different kinds of authority. Rather they together emphasize that in that day there will be no governing power of any kind that will not be completely subservient to Christ. *Destroyed* (*katargeō*; see note on 1:28) basically means 'render null and void', 'make inoperative', and this is much in point here. Paul does not speak of battles, or of rulers being dethroned. But he does speak of all rule, other than that of Christ, as being rendered completely inoperative. Although

this is mentioned after the delivering up of the kingdom it takes place before it (as the change of tense in the Greek shows).

25. There is a compelling divine necessity about Paul's *must*. He is speaking about what God has determined and therefore there is no shadow of doubt about it. No matter how strong the powers of earth and hell may seem, no matter how much the Christian may fear that the wicked will triumph, at the climax of history it is Christ and none other who reigns and *must* reign. This reign is a career of conquest, as *all* the enemies are put *under his feet* (cf. Ps. 110:1). These *enemies* are not named, with the exception of 'death' in v. 26. But this exception perhaps indicates that the *enemies* Paul has in mind are evil forces rather than evil people.

26. Strictly it is *death* (which has the definite article) that is the subject and *last enemy* (which lacks it) the predicate: 'Death will be destroyed as last enemy.' There is some emphasis on death as our *enemy*, and *last enemy* at that. *Destroyed* is *katargeō* again, as in v. 24 (where see note). The tense is present, and the use of this tense for future action strikes a note of vividness and certainty. Death will be robbed of all its power. Lenski sees death as dependent on Satan, sin, etc.; when then all of these have been dealt with, death as the last enemy will also disappear. In v. 12 'some' said, 'There is no resurrection', but Paul replies, 'There will be no death' (cf. Findlay).

27. Some think that *he* means Christ, but there seems rather to be a clear reference to the Father (cf. RSV). The opening words are very similar to those of Psalm 8:6. There they refer to the dominion God has given to mankind, the summit of creation. Here they apply to Christ only, and they are more far-reaching, for, as the context shows, they include everything except the Father himself; 'all things' is emphatic. There is an interesting change of tense. He *has put* is aorist, pointing us to the single, once-for-all act of subjection. But *has been put under him* is perfect; it includes the thought of the permanent state of subjection. *Who put* is aorist again, pointing to the same action as that of the first verb. Paul's point, then, is that God the Father has given to the Son unlimited sovereignty over all creation. This, of course, does not involve any infringement on the Father's own sovereignty. For Paul this *is clear* (*dēlon*).

28. The connection of thought with the previous verse is somewhat obscured in NIV, for *When he has done this* and *will be made subject* both render the verb that was three times translated 'put under' in v. 27 (and is translated the same way later in this verse). Paul hammers home his point by using the same verb six times in two verses. The climax of this process of 'putting under' comes when *the Son* (the one occurrence of this designation of Jesus in Paul) is 'put under' the Father. This presents a difficulty, for it appears to some that one member of the Trinity is seen as inferior to another. But we must bear in mind that Paul is not speaking of the essential nature of either the Son or the Father. He is speaking of the work that Christ has accomplished and will accomplish. He has died for us and has risen. He will return and will subdue all the enemies of God. The climax of this whole work will come when he renders up the kingdom to him who is the source of all. In that he became man for the accomplishment of that work, he took upon him a certain subjection that is necessarily impressed on that work right up to and including its consummation. The purpose of this (*hina*) is that *God may be all in all* (he says 'God', not 'the Father'; it is all that 'God' means). This is a strong expression for the complete supremacy that will then so obviously be his. Calvin says, 'all things will be brought back to God, as their alone beginning and end, that they may be closely bound to him.'

D. Arguments from Christian experience (15:29–34)

Now comes an abrupt change. Paul turns from Christ to the Christian and shows that certain practices, both among the Corinthians and in himself, logically imply the resurrection. Unless there is to be a resurrection in due course, the procedures of the Corinthians with regard to baptism and of Paul in his evangelism are inexplicable.

29. 'For otherwise, what will they do ...?' is an unexpected opening, with its future tense and the verb *do*. Perhaps it means, 'What is the value ...?' This problem, however, pales into insignificance alongside that of the meaning we are to assign to being *baptised for the dead*. The most natural way to understand the words is to see a reference to vicarious baptism. Some of the Corinthian believers may have been baptized on behalf of friends who had died before baptism (we can scarcely believe that they would have done this for people who had not come to believe, or that Paul would have mentioned the practice so calmly if that were the case). Parry says: 'The plain and necessary sense of the words implies the existence of a practice of vicarious baptism at Corinth, presumably on behalf of believers who died before they were baptised.' He regards all other interpretations as 'evasions ... wholly due to the unwillingness to admit such a practice, and still more to a reference to it by S. Paul without condemnation'. That Paul is quite capable of reasoning from a practice of which he disapproves is shown by the way he refers to sitting at a meal in an idol's temple without saying anything about this being wrong (8:10), though in a later passage he connects idol feasts with demons (10:21ff.). It is perhaps significant that, while Paul does not stop to condemn the practice of which he speaks here, he dissociates himself from it ('what will *those* do ...?'; contrast 'why do we endanger ourselves ...?', v. 30). He simply mentions the practice as taking place, and asks what meaning it can possibly have if the dead do not rise. Vicarious baptism is attested in the second century among heretics (Chrysostom says the Marcionites practised it). If something like this was known at Corinth it would strongly support Paul's argument for the resurrection. But the practice is not known from the first century, nor from the orthodox. Strange things happened at Corinth, but perhaps this is too strange even for Corinth. So the suggestion has been put forward that some believers had died, and certain of the living, as yet not church members, were themselves baptized in order to be united to the deceased in due course. Others think of the symbolism of baptism (Rom. 6:1ff.), though it is not easy to see the relevance of this to the resurrection of the body. Others again see a reference to the martyrs ('baptism in blood'), or to a practice 'with a view to (the resurrection of) the dead'. Many other suggestions have been made. As Conzelmann says, 'the ingenuity of the exegetes has run riot.' There is little point in canvassing even the more plausible suggestions. The language points to vicarious baptism. If we reject this we are left to conjecture.

30. Paul turns from the practice of the Corinthians to the experience of Christians generally and of apostles in particular. They were in constant danger, even in the absence of official persecution. Why should people run the risks attendant on joining themselves to such a religion if death is the end of everything?

31. 'Daily I die' comes first in the Greek for emphasis. Paul's danger was very real and very constant; he was never out of peril. He uses the strong affirmative *nē* (often used in oaths; only here in the New Testament), and follows it with 'your boasting which I have'. This is not an easy expression. It may mean Paul's boasting about the Corinthians: 'the glory (or boasting) I have because of you', taking 'your' as objective (as in Rom. 11:31). Or it may mean the Corinthians'

boasting about Paul: 'the glory (or renown) which I have among you because you are the fruit of my ministry', NIV is probably right in choosing the former. Moffatt brings this out with 'Not a day but I am at death's door! I swear it by my pride in you, brothers.' It is interesting to see this expression of Paul's basic satisfaction with his Corinthian converts, despite the many things for which he had to rebuke them.

32. Some hold that this verse is to be taken literally, and think that Paul had actually been put into the arena with wild animals, possibly at the time when he was in great danger in the province of Asia (2 Cor. 1:8ff.; Ephesus was in this province). It is objected that, since Paul was a Roman citizen, he could not be compelled to fight wild beasts. This, however, cannot be pressed, for even Roman aristocrats occasionally appeared in the arena. Acilius Glabrio, for example, an eminent Roman, was compelled by Domitian to fight wild beasts. However, if that had happened to Paul he would have lost his citizenship, and Acts is evidence that he still had it at a later time than this. Moreover he would surely not have omitted such a happening from his list of troubles (2 Cor. 11:23ff.). Further, had he been thrown to the wild beasts he is unlikely to have survived. But 'fighting with wild beasts' is often used metaphorically, as when Ignatius writes to the Romans, 'From Syria even unto Rome I fight with wild beasts, by land and sea, by night and by day', and proceeds to explain this as 'being bound amidst ten leopards, even a company of soldiers' (5:1; Lightfoot's translation). A. J. Malherbe has shown that language of this sort is freely used when sages describe the opposition they encounter (*JBL*, lxxxvii, 1968, pp. 71–80). Again, R. E. Osborne, arguing similarly for the metaphorical use, is able to cite a Qumran parallel (*JBL*, lxxxv, 1966, pp. 225–230). Paul is surely employing this metaphorical use. The aorist points to a specific occasion, but we have no way of knowing what it was. The Corinthians knew and could appreciate the reference. If there is no resurrection, Paul's whole life in general, and his conduct in the Ephesian incident in particular, are inexplicable. If there is no resurrection the logical course would be to follow the easy-going proverb Paul quotes (Isa. 22:13; cf. Eccl. 9:7–10). Deissmann cites 'the exhortation to drink in anticipation of approaching death' as 'one of the well-known formulae of ancient popular morals' (*LAE*, p. 295).

33. *Do not be misled* introduces a proverb found, for example, in Menander (*Thais*, 218; some think it is perhaps as early as Euripides). *Homiliai* is probably rightly translated *company* here, but the word is often used of the communications people make with each other, especially speeches (we get our word 'homily' from it). *Character* renders *ēthē*; the word is plural and would be better translated 'habits' (BAGD). Paul is saying that keeping the wrong kind of company (that of people who deny the resurrection) may well corrupt good Christian habits, and turn people away from the truth.

34. *Come back to your senses* is a free translation of *eknēpsate*. The verb originally meant 'become sober after drunkenness' (cf. Weymouth, 'Wake from this drunken fit'). It is very appropriate to an appeal to 'come to your senses'. Robertson and Plummer suggest that perhaps 'these sceptics claimed to be sober thinkers, and condemned the belief in a resurrection as a wild enthusiasm'. If so, Paul's verb is much to the point. *Stop sinning* reminds us that all of life is interwoven. On the face of it Paul is discussing a doctrinal question, not a moral issue; indeed, throughout his correspondence, the apostle insists on right doctrine. For doctrine leads to conduct, and unsound doctrine in the end must lead to sinful behaviour. *For* shows that Paul is linking failure to live rightly with failure to think rightly. *Who are ignorant* is 'have *agnōsian*' (i.e. 'hold on to ignorance'); the noun points not so much to intellectual ignorance as to ignorance in

religious things. It is used in the mystery religions of a 'lack of religious experience or *lack of spiritual discernment*' (BAGD). The error with which Paul is concerned arises basically (as do so many others) from a lack of real knowledge of God. The seriousness with which Paul regarded it is seen in his avowed intention of writing to shame his friends (contrast 4:14). 'I say to you, "For shame!"' (Orr and Walther).

E. The resurrection body (15:35–49)

Paul turns his attention to the nature of the resurrection body. Some had evidently ridiculed the idea of a resurrection by asking questions about the nature of the body with which people would rise. 'How can people possibly rise when their bodies have completely rotted away?' seems to have been the kind of objection raised, an objection not unfamiliar in modern times. Paul counters by pointing to the miracle of harvest. The seed is buried, but it is raised up with a new and more glorious body. From this he goes on to consider that there are different kinds of body, and different kinds of glory. This leads to the triumphant climax that, though our bodies are 'sown' in corruption and dishonour and weakness, they will be raised in incorruption and glory and power. As God has willed that we should have bodies fitted for our life on earth, so he has willed that we shall have bodies fitted for our heavenly existence. Paul's insistence on bodily life should not be overlooked. Those who held to the immortality of the soul, but denied the resurrection of the body, usually looked for nothing more than a shadowy, insipid existence in Hades. It is fundamental to Paul's thought that the after-life will be infinitely more glorious than this one. This necessitates a suitable 'body' with which the life is to be lived, for without a 'body' of some kind there seems no way of allowing for individuality and self-expression. But Paul does not view this 'body' crudely. He describes it with the adjective 'spiritual' (v. 44), and he expressly differentiates it from 'flesh and blood' (v. 50). His thought is in marked contrast to that of Judaism. There we find that the body to be raised will be identical with the body that died. The writer of the *Apocalypse of Baruch* asks whether there will be any change when men rise, and the answer is that 'the earth shall then assuredly restore the dead ... It shall make no change in their form, but as it has received, so shall it restore them' (50:2; the writer thinks that later on they will be 'glorified'). Paul will have nothing to do with this view (see vv. 42ff., 52, etc.). While there will be identity there will also be difference.

35. Some hold that in the lively style of the diatribe Paul has posed his own question, others that he is dealing with a question raised at Corinth. We have no way of knowing. *But* is the strong adversative *alla*. Far from conforming to the kind of conduct Paul has just outlined, someone (the word is indefinite) will offer an objection. Paul either quotes the person, or uses the words he would imagine an objector would use. *How are the dead raised?* queries the mechanics of the process. *With what kind of body will they come?* inquires as to the form they will have. It was clear to these Greek sceptics that a body quickly decomposes, and they thought to laugh the idea of resurrection out of court with their query about the body. What kind of body would arise from a heap of decomposed rubbish?

36. Paul deals sharply with such objections; he begins with 'Fool!'. Modern translations usually soften this, as RSV 'You foolish man!', while NIV makes it an impersonal exclamation, *How foolish!* and JB shifts the derogatory word from the questioner to the question: 'They are stupid questions.' But Paul is being blunt. He is making it clear that he finds such arguments worthless.

His *you* is strongly emphatic. He uses the personal pronoun, which is emphatic by itself, and he adopts the unusual course of putting it before the relative pronoun: 'Fool! You, what you sow ...' The effect is to make it clear that what Paul has been saying about the resurrection is not without its parallels in activities familiar to, and even engaged in by, the objectors. If they only thought about what they were doing, they had the answer to their objection in their own habitual practices. They sowed seed, which was destroyed, at least in the form in which it was sown. The act of sowing (a 'burial'!) was so similar to what follows death among mankind that Paul can speak of the grain as dying (cf. John 12:24). Carrying on this metaphor, the growth that follows is a giving of new life and that new life does not come unless the grain first 'dies'. The seed must be destroyed if the new life is to appear. Familiarity with the marvel of harvest has dulled our sense of wonder. But if we did not know, how would we ever guess that casting a seed into the ground and burying it is the way to produce a living plant? Why, in the light of this, should we regard as incredible the transformation of a dead body? AV correctly translates *zōopoieitai* as 'is quickened'; the verb is passive, not middle. The seed does not come to life of itself, but God gives it life. NIV's *does not come to life* misses this. Paul is preparing the way for his further statement of what God does in giving new life (v. 38).

37. It is important that what dies is nothing like what appears. A dead-looking, bare, dry seed is put into the ground, but what comes up is a green plant, vigorous and beautiful. It is not *the body that will be* that is sown. Paul will presently develop the thought that the body that is raised is incomparably more glorious than the body that is buried. Here he leaves it to be implied. Far from the decomposition of the body presenting an obstacle to the resurrection, it merely prepares us for the truth that the body that is raised is much more wonderful than the body that is buried. Plant life is always on hand to teach us. We sow nothing more than *just a seed*, whether it be *corn* or anything else; this is common to all seeds. At sowing there is no indication of the plant with its stem and leaves and flowers. But they come. There is a combination of identity and difference. The difference between seed and plant is obvious. But there is identity, too, for the seed produces that particular plant and no other.

38. Paul explicitly mentions the divine oversight of the whole process only here, but this must be held to be determinative of his thought throughout. Plants do not rise (and people do not rise) of their own volition. Nor do they do it by chance. They do it because that is the way God has determined it shall be. There is a change of tense here. God *gives* is present; it indicates the habitual practice. God is always giving seeds bodies in this way. *As he has determined* is the aorist, signifying a decisive action. Once and for all God planned what should be and all things continue to follow his plan (the present has continuous force). There is regularity as this plan unfolds, but no uniformity, for God gives *its own body* to every seed.

39. From grain and plants Paul turns to *flesh*. *All flesh* is not of the same kind. The flesh of *men, animals* (the word strictly means 'bought', and thus domestic animals, beasts of burden, cattle, but the point is not important), *birds* and *fish* are all different. Paul is preparing the way for the thought that there can be a difference between the kind of body we have before the resurrection and the kind we shall have after it.

40. Similarly there is a difference between *heavenly bodies* and *earthly bodies*. We use the term 'heavenly bodies' of the stars, and some see this as Paul's meaning, though usually with the rider that the stars were seen as living beings. But this is probably not Paul's thought. He comes to the stars in the next verse, and further, the counterpart of 'heavenly bodies' in that sense of

the term is 'the earth', not *earthly bodies*. It was an accepted idea that heavenly beings, or at least some of them, had bodies. Paul's point is that their bodies are bodies proper to heavenly beings, while those on earth have different bodies, bodies proper to earthly beings. Proper both may be, but they are not the same. The *splendour* of earthly beings is of a different order from that of heavenly beings. The beings are different and their *splendour* is different, too.

41. This leads to a consideration of the heavenly bodies in our sense of the term. The sun, the moon and the stars are all glorious, each in its own way, and each in a way differing from anything on earth. Even the stars differ *in splendour*; one is more glorious than another. Wherever he looks Paul sees evidence of this principle of differentiation. It is a marvellous universe, and in it God has set so many things, so many glorious things, which yet differ markedly from each other.

42. It is along this line of differing bodies and differing splendours that the resurrection is to be understood. There is a definite article with *the dead* (i.e. 'the collective dead'; see on v. 12). Paul does not insert a subject for the following verbs, but he is clearly referring to *the body* (which NIV inserts; it is not in the Greek). He has pointed to a wide variety of phenomena in his examples, with his different kinds of flesh, heavenly bodies, etc., but *is sown* shows that what is primarily in mind is the sowing of seed, with the resultant new and vigorous life (vv. 36f.). He points to a number of differences between the body now and the body raised, and begins with perishability. The words NIV translates by *perishable* and *imperishable* are more strictly 'corruption' and 'incorruption'. While 'corruption' refers primarily to the body's liability to decay, the analogy between physical and moral corruption may not be out of mind. 'Incorruption' was in common use to indicate the quality of life in the hereafter, and it is particularly telling at this point. The chief objection the typical Greek had to any doctrine of resurrection was that the body is essentially corruptible. By its very nature it is subject to decay. He looked for an existence when the soul would no longer be handicapped by this corruptible body, when the soul would exist 'in incorruption'. Paul associates this very state with the resurrection body. He agrees that liability to decay is a property of our earthly body, the body that is to be put into the grave. But he insists that the body that will be taken from the grave at the resurrection will be a transformed body (cf. Rom. 8:21). It will be 'raised in incorruption'. That very feature that the average Greek regarded as incompatible with the body, because he thought only of the present body of flesh and blood, Paul sees as characteristic of the resurrection body.

43. Paul continues to pick out those features of bodily life that seemed to the Greek to demonstrate the folly of the idea of the resurrection, and to show that they have no relevance to the resurrection body. *Dishonour* translates *atimia*, a word that applies in various ways. It is sometimes used of loss of the rights of citizenship; a corpse has no rights. Again, there are 'less honourable' parts of this body (12:23), and when dead the whole body lacks honour. Further, the Jews held that a dead body conveys uncleanness (Num. 19:11). Look at it how you will, there is nothing honourable about a decaying body as it is put into a grave. But that has no relevance to the way the body is when it is raised. The resurrection body is a glorious body, just as far surpassing the present body as the beautiful plant surpasses the seed from which it sprang. The Greek's doubts arising from the dishonourable nature of the body that now is are groundless. The body that is to be raised will be a body *in glory*.

Again, the present body is characterized by *weakness*. Cultivate it as he would (and the Greek did cultivate bodily prowess), it still remains a weak instrument, far outspanned by the mind that is in it. And when it dies (the primary reference is to the dead body), it is the very symbol of

powerlessness. But the resurrection body will not be limited as this body is. Just as surely as this body is characterized by weakness, so the body that is to be raised will be characterized by *power*.

44. *Natural* translates *psychikon*, ‘pertaining to the soul or life’ (*psychē*); Conzelmann has ‘psychical’, NEB ‘animal’; Thrall explains, ‘the human being considered as part of the natural world’. It has to do with the present life in all its aspects, especially as contrasted with the supernatural life (cf. its use in 2:14 of the merely ‘natural’ man). There is nothing necessarily sinful or blameworthy about it (unless someone deliberately chooses to live on a lower plane when he could live on a higher). Here it means that the body we now have is a body suited to the present life. It is adapted to the *psychē*, the rational principle of life. But such a body is ill-adapted to life in the world to come. For that a body is needed that is attuned to the spirit, in fact *a spiritual body*. This does not mean a body ‘composed of spirit’, but rather ‘which expresses spirit’, ‘which answers to the needs of spirit’. At the end of the verse the apostle argues that, just as there is a body related to the *psychē*, so there must also be a body related to the spirit. The *spiritual body* then is the organ that is intimately related to the spirit of man, just as the present body is intimately related to this earthly life.

45. Characteristically Paul appeals to Scripture to clinch his argument. This is not something he has thought up for himself. Yet we should notice that he does not employ his usual formula of quotation *kathōs gegraptai*, ‘as it is written’, but *houtōs kai gegraptai*, ‘in this manner also it is written’. This may indicate something other than exact quotation. Paul refers to Genesis 2:7 (inserting *first* before *man* and *Adam* after it). His point appears to be that the characteristic of man from the very beginning is *psychē*, ‘soul’ (NIV *living being*). That was true of Adam and it is true of all his descendants. The first Adam passed on his nature to those who came after. The Scripture passage cited does not include Paul’s second point. He may have intended to prove only the first one from Scripture, the second being his own addition. Or he may mean that Scripture as a whole witnesses to Christ as a *life-giving spirit*. Or he may mean that this is implicit in Scripture. That is to say, Adam was the progenitor of the race, and his characteristics are stamped on the race. In the same way, Christ is *the last Adam*, the progenitor of the race of spiritual people. In modern times we often read of ‘the second Adam’, but Paul never uses this term (though cf. ‘the second man’, v. 47). There is a finality about ‘the last Adam’: ‘There will be no other Head of the human race’ (Robertson and Plummer). By virtue of his office as *the last Adam* he stamps his characteristics on those who are his. The first Adam implies the last Adam, and the first Adam’s work implies the last Adam’s work. In this office Christ’s characteristic is that he is *a life-giving spirit*. Not only is he the pattern of those who are in him, but he is the source of that spiritual life that will result in the bodies of which Paul speaks. We should understand *became* with this expression. Paul sees Christ as having become a life-giving spirit in his work of saving sinners. Some narrow this down to the incarnation, or the resurrection (about which this chapter says so much), or the second advent. But Paul is not specific.

46. Paul insists on the right order of things. He begins with the strong adversative *alla*. This is puzzling, for what follows is not in strong contrast with the preceding (which may be why NIV omits it). Perhaps it contrasts the following ‘broad statement’ with the preceding details (Ellicott). Or Paul may mean that, though the ‘life-giving spirit’ is before all time and before all men, yet in the order of creation we now see not what is particularly related to him, *the spiritual*, but what has particular relevance to life in the here and now, *the natural*. We enter *natural* life first; it is only after that that we may enter into *the spiritual*. It is perhaps worth noticing that Philo held

that God created a 'heavenly man' after his own image (Gen. 1:27), and only later an 'earthly one' (Gen. 2:7; *De Opif. Mund.* 134; *Leg. Alleg.* i, 31f.). Paul may be contradicting Jewish teaching of this sort.

47. *The first man* is, of course, Adam. He is *ek gēs*, 'of the earth' (*ek* indicates origin), and he is *choikos*, 'made of dust' (Gen. 2:7). *The second man* is Christ, set over against Adam once more, this time not in terms of work accomplished or natural constitution, but of origin. Though he appeared on earth, and lived and died and rose again on earth, he is not to be thought of as originating from the earth, as did Adam. He is *from heaven*. Some see here a backward glance to the incarnation and some a forward look to the second advent. But Paul is surely not looking specifically at either. He is contrasting Christ's heavenly origin with Adam's earthly one.

48. *As was the earthly man* points us to Adam once more. He is the pattern for all his descendants. As is his nature, so is theirs; all mankind are, in this sense, 'earthly' (*choikos*). Over against this is set 'the heavenly' (which, in accordance with v. 47, means *the man from heaven*). The use of the adjective ('the heavenly') rather than 'from heaven' points to his nature as a heavenly being, rather than his origin. But the really important point is the conclusion, *so also are those who are of heaven* (Greek, 'the heavenly'). There is no question in the minds of either Paul or the Corinthians (or of the Greeks at large) that all people are 'earthly'. Our bodies are earthly bodies and they share in the corruption that is part and parcel of earthly things. But Christians are not only earthly; they are also 'heavenly' because of their relationship to Christ. This means that Christ's people will be like him (cf. 1 John 3:2). The resurrection body of Christ shows us something of what life will be like for believers in that new world that their resurrection will usher in. Then he will change their 'lowly bodies' so that they will be 'like his glorious body' (Phil. 3:21).

49. *We have borne* translates the verb *phoreō*, which is more intensive than the more usual *pherō*. Whereas the latter means simply 'to bear', the former conveys the idea of bearing continually or habitually (it is often used of wearing clothes; cf. v. 53). It is thus a natural word to use here, where Paul conveys the thought of our habitual state. The use of the aorist may, as Parry thinks, be inceptive, 'began to wear, put on'. Or, from the standpoint of the resurrection, it may look back on earthly life as a completed whole. The bearing in question is seen in the whole of life, not simply in some parts. The *likeness* (*eikōn*), better 'image', is used of man being 'the image of God' (11:7). It can denote simply representation (as in the *eikōn* of the Emperor on a coin), or it can denote something more exact. Here it will be the image that corresponds to and reproduces the original. The majority of the more ancient mss; read 'let us bear' instead of *we shall bear* in the second part of the verse. If this reading be accepted (as it is by Findlay, Williams and others), then Paul is exhorting the Corinthians to put on their heavenly state, progressively to make it their own ('let us also try to be like the man from heaven', Goodspeed). This sounds as though it were something people can do by their own efforts. But this is so far from Paul's usual approach that we are justified in regarding 'let us bear' as a primitive corruption of the text by scribes interested in ethical exhortation, and not quite certain what the apostle meant. The context seems to make it clear that *we shall bear* is the right reading, and this is supported by some good authorities for the text, including Codex Vaticanus. Paul is saying, then, that just as throughout this life we have habitually borne the form of Adam, so in the life to come we shall bear that of our Lord. Just as surely as we have done the one, so surely shall we do the other. This is not a matter for doubt. For Paul the considerations adduced are decisive.

F. Victory over death (15:50–58)

The chapter comes to a magnificent climax. Paul makes it clear that those who rise will not be creatures of flesh and blood. They will be ‘changed’, as will those who are alive when that day comes. They will no longer have bodies liable to death and decay. In a lyrical passage the apostle exults in the triumph Christ has won over death itself. This calls forth a thanksgiving to God, the source of victory, and an exhortation to steadfastness.

50. *I declare to you* heightens the significance of what follows, and emphasizes that it is important. *Flesh and blood* is not an uncommon way of referring to life here and now (e.g. Gal. 1:16; Heb. 2:14). It directs attention to two of the most important constituents of the physical body, and two which are peculiarly liable to decay. The expression is thus an apt reminder of our mortality and of the weakness of our mortal frame. It does not signify moral frailty, as *flesh* by itself often does (Chrysostom found here a reference to ‘evil deeds’). The combination *flesh and blood*, however, seems always in the New Testament to have a physical meaning. The blunt statement that flesh and blood *cannot* participate in the kingdom plainly excludes all crude ideas of resurrection. It is not this body that will enter the life of the world to come. J. Jeremias insists that the expression does not refer to the resurrection of the dead, but to those alive when Christ comes (*NTS*, 2, 1955–56, pp. 151–159). Incidentally, *cannot* is singular; *flesh and blood* are taken as a unity. *Inherit* must not be pressed. Strictly the word means ‘receive by inheritance’, but in the New Testament it includes secure possession, whether brought about by inheritance or in some other way. For *perishable* and *imperishable* see notes on v. 42. The combination of *flesh and blood* and *the perishable* means that neither the living nor the dead at the coming of Christ will go into the kingdom as they are. Both must be changed.

51. Paul continues in an emphatic style. *Listen* (actually, ‘Look’, *idou*) has the effect of focusing attention on what follows. for *mystery* see the note on 2:7. People could never have worked out for themselves what will happen at the second coming, but God has revealed it. For *sleep*, see on v. 18. Some think that Paul means that the second coming will take place in his own lifetime, but this is to press his words illegitimately. The same process applied to other passages (e.g. 6:14; 2 Cor. 4:14; 5:8; Phil. 3:11) would show that he would then be dead! But Paul often classes himself with those he is describing, without any implication that he is one of them (cf. 6:15; 10:22). The plain fact is that Paul did not know when these events would take place, and nowhere does he claim to know. When he says *we* he means ‘we believers’, ‘Christians alive at that day’. Some will not die, but whether we are among that number, or whether we die before that day, *we will all be changed*. This obviously means difference, but we should not miss the fact that it also means identity. This body will not be destroyed or abandoned; it will be *changed*. Notice that the difficulty is the opposite of that facing the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 4:13ff.). There Paul assured his readers that those who die before the parousia will be at no disadvantage. They will rise first. Here the problem is one for the living, for Paul has just said ‘flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God’. How then can the living enter the kingdom? The answer is, *we will all be changed*. Early scribes found great difficulty with the text of this verse and there are several variant readings. One is important, for it found its way into the Vulgate, and thus represents the way Roman Catholics have usually understood the words. In Knox’s rendering it runs, ‘we shall all rise again, but not all of us will undergo the change I speak of.’ The second clause has been understood to mean that the unsaved will be raised, but not undergo the change of which Paul

speaks. However, the text behind NIV is to be preferred, as Knox concedes in a footnote (so also, more recently, JB).

52. The change will not be a long-drawn-out affair. The resurrection of the dead might be likened to the slow growth of a seed, but the change in the living will take place with startling suddenness. *Flash* translates *atomos*, 'that which cannot be divided', i.e. the smallest possible (we get our word 'atom' from it). It signifies the shortest possible time. *Twinkling (rhipē)* is connected with the idea of throwing. *The twinkling of an eye* is the time it takes to cast a glance, or perhaps to flutter an eyelid. The *trumpet* is linked in the Old Testament, in the teaching of Jesus and in contemporary Judaism with the events in the end time (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16 and the note in *TNTC*). Trumpets were frequently used at times of festivity and triumph, ideas which are both in place here. The sounding of the trumpet seems to be the signal for the dead to rise. *Last* refers not to the last in a series of trumpet blasts (as in Rabbinic speculation), but last among events on earth. It marks the end of things as we know them. The dead will be raised *imperishable*, which prepares the way for Paul to repeat his statement that *we will be changed*. He makes it abundantly clear that he does not envisage a return to the sort of life we live now.

53. Paul brings out something of the nature of the change, singling out the cessation of 'corruption' (liability to bodily decay) and mortality. These things are totally incompatible with life in the hereafter. Paul stresses the continuity between our present and our future states with a fourfold use (in this verse and the next) of the word 'this': 'this' perishable, 'this' mortal (NIV omits all four). Paul is emphasizing that it is *this* perishable and *this* mortal that will be clothed with imperishability and immortality. *Clothe itself* is a metaphor pointing us to the truth that the body is not the real person; it is only its clothing. In the life to come the real person will put on another suit, so to speak. *Immortality (athanasia)* is found but rarely in the New Testament (only in v. 54; 1 Tim. 6:16).

54. It is characteristic of Paul to see in all this a fulfilment of Scripture (Isa. 25:8). What God has planned long since, and has revealed to his servant the prophet, he will certainly fulfil. *Swallowed up in victory* points to the complete defeat and destruction of death.

55. In language reminiscent of Scripture (Hos. 13:14), Paul sings of the triumph to come. He is not basing an argument on Scripture, but using scriptural language for his exultation over the total defeat of *death*. The word *kentron (sting)* may refer to a goad (as in Acts 26:14), but it is also used of the sting of bees, scorpions and the like (cf. Rev. 9:10). Death is a malignant adversary, torturing people. But Christ has drawn its sting, and it is harmless to those who are in him.

56. Moral issues are the serious ones. It is not *death* in itself that is harmful; it is that death that is 'the wages of sin' (Rom. 6:23) that matters. Death, considered simply as the passing out of this life into the immediate presence of the Lord, is a gain, not a loss (Phil. 1:21, 23). Where sin is pardoned, death has no sting. It is quite another matter where sin has not been dealt with. There death is a virulent antagonist. The *sting* is not in death; it is in *sin*. And sin has an unexpected ally and source of power, *the law*. *The law* is divine in origin, and Paul can speak of the commandment as 'holy, righteous and good' (Rom. 7:12). But it is quite unable to bring people to salvation (cf. Rom. 5:12ff.; 7:7ff.; 10:4). Indeed, by setting before us the standard we ought to reach and never do, it becomes sin's stronghold. It makes sinners of us all. It condemns us all.

57. *But*, says Paul (Barrett speaks of ‘this great *but*’), introducing as it does the very opposite; the victory that defeats death and sin and law. Christ is victorious over death (Rom. 6:9); indeed he has abolished it (2 Tim. 1:10). He has satisfied the law’s claims, for he ‘redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us’ (Gal. 3:13). He has replaced the ‘reign’ of sin with that of grace (Rom. 5:20f.); he has drawn its sting. So Paul can say, *thanks be to God!* (cf. Rom. 7:25). The use of the present participle (NIV *gives*) may convey the thought that it is God’s characteristic to give victory. There is also the implication that we participate in that victory now, and that we participate in it daily. Chrysostom asks, ‘For whence, after all this, is death to prevail?’ and answers, ‘Through the law? Nay, it is done away. Through sin? Nay, it is clean destroyed.’ The Christian life is characteristically a life of victory. The use of the full title *our Lord Jesus Christ* heightens the sense of the majesty of his Person. There is victory for the Christian, but it comes only through what Christ has done for him.

58. Arising out of all this comes an exhortation to Christian stability. *Hedraioi* (*firm*) was used in 7:37 of having ‘settled the matter’; there is the thought of stable purpose, something that will not easily be disturbed, for the person’s whole bent is behind it (cf. Col. 1:23). *Let nothing move you* underlines this thought. The Corinthians were prone to fickleness, shifting without reason from one position to another. Let them get a firm grip on the truth of the resurrection, on God’s final plan for all people and all things, and they will not be so readily shaken. The imperative *ginesthe*, ‘be’ (NIV *stand*), might be translated ‘become’. Paul sets before his readers a state from which they were as yet all too far, and urges them to continue in it. They should be ‘always abounding in the work of the Lord’ (AV, RSV). The Christian life is an abundant life. There is nothing cramped or narrow in the genuine Christian experience. Edwards speaks of faith in the resurrection as producing ‘a consciousness of boundless and endless power for work’, and adds, ‘In the case of a believer, youth’s large dreams never contract into commonplace achievement.’ *Because you know* is probably not the right way to translate the participle ‘knowing’; it introduces the accompaniment of the foregoing, not the reason for it (the reason is surely the resurrection truth that Paul has been expounding). Because of the resurrection with all that it means of God’s final triumph, and of the survival of the believer through death, Christian *labour* (*kopos*, labour to the point of weariness) is *not in vain* (*kenos*, ‘empty’; Moffatt, ‘never thrown away’). Deissmann sees in these words ‘a trembling echo of the discouragement resulting from a piece of work being rejected for alleged bad finish and therefore not paid for’ (*LAE*, p. 314). The Christian faces no such discouragement. His labour is *in the Lord*. And what is done in the Lord is never done *in vain*.¹

¹ Morris, L. (1985). [*1 Corinthians: an introduction and commentary*](#) (Vol. 7, pp. 196–225). InterVarsity Press.