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

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

He offers to pour into your enfeebled souls the power of a divine and endless life—of his own life. He not only promises that, if you turn from your wickedness, you shall live; He also offers to turn you from it, if only you seek or accept his aid." And with this double message, in our lips and in our hearts, the word of the Law and the word of the Gospel, we may surely meet all the facts of human life squarely, and minister to the deepest necessities of the human heart.

S. Cox.

NO-RESURRECTION IMPOSSIBLE.

1 Corinthians xv.

This Chapter commits the logical theologian to one or other of two conclusions:—either to the doctrine of a conditional immortality, or to the belief that, in a certain sense at least, Christ has purchased life for all men. The resurrection which St. Paul here describes is beyond all question viewed by him as identical with the doctrine commonly called the immortality of the soul; in other words, it is his conception of the future life of humanity. And yet it is quite clear that in his view no man attains to this life simply because he is a man, but only because his manhood is the member of a body whose head is the risen Christ. On the one hand, all that are to rise are here; on the other hand, unless Christ be in a sense the Saviour of the whole world, the all that are here form but an insignificant portion of the all of humanity. For our part we have no hesitation in accepting the qualifying clause as the true statement of St. Paul's conviction. We doubt not that he looked upon Christ as at least to some extent the Saviour of all men. To what extent we do not here inquire. For our present purpose it is sufficient to state

that, in the eye of St. Paul, the salvation of Christ was at all events universal to the extent of obtaining an universal immortality. In the doctrine of the Apostle, every man who rises from the dust of death rises only because there is pulsating through his veins the risen life of Him, who is the head of that new body which includes and environs him; whatever be his relation to *spiritual* blessedness, the life which he lives in the flesh is lived by the strength of the Son of Man.

So sure is the Apostle of this universal immortality that he professes, in the passage before us, to reduce the denial of it to an absurdity. His design has been greatly misunderstood. It is often assumed that he is simply describing the awfulness of a world in which there would be no hope of immortality. No doubt he was impressed with the horror of such a scene; he tells us that, if such a fate should befal humanity, he and his fellow-Christians would be of all men most miserable. Nevertheless, this is not the thought which at present dominates the Apostle's mind. He is not thinking here of the misery, but of the impossibility, of there being no resurrection. He says that if there were no resurrection of the dead, no immortality of the soul, there would follow *five* conclusions, every one of which can as a matter of fact be disproved. The impossibility of no resurrection is concluded from the impossibility of five consequences which would flow from the supposition. Each of these impossibilities is tabulated as a positive argument for the future life.

1. The first impossible consequence may be called the argument from Mind, and is thus expressed: "If there be no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not raised." What Paul really means to say is this: If there be no immortality of the soul, Christ is dead—the highest of minds has become extinct. It may seem as if this were a mode of reasoning which never would be used in modern times. A writer of

our day would certainly put it differently; he would say, Are all the aspirations of the human soul to count for nothing—all the yearnings after moral purity, all the search for truth, all the thirst for beauty? Yet we think it will be found that the difference between this argument and that of St. Paul is only one of form. St. Paul's argument is also an argument from the strength of human aspiration, only, instead of looking forward, he looks back. To him the aspirations of the human soul were all fulfilled already in the image of a perfect mind. Christ was to him the realization of all that man had ever dreamed concerning the dignity of the soul; He was the majesty of mind personified. The Apostle did not need to look forward to the possibilities of the human heart; in Christ he beheld its actuality, its perfect bloom. He could not even imagine a more complete unfolding of the flower. The life of the Son of Man was, for him, the synonym for all that humanity ever did, or even can do, in the path of greatness; it was aspiration crystallized into fact. Accordingly, when he says, if there be no immortality, Christ is dead, there is a deep significance in his words. It is quite equivalent to saying, what becomes of the dignity of man? The notion that Christ could be dead was to Paul a contradiction in terms. Sometimes a man gets his whole conviction of immortality from his inability to realize the death of a single soul. There are presences in this world so vivid and so strong that their removal by death dissipates the idea of death; they are our types of immortality. But what was Christ to Paul? To say He was a strong and vivid presence is to say nothing; He was a presence that literally filled all things. That such a being should cease to be was, for him, a contingency unthinkable, that God should suffer his Holy One to see corruption was a paradox unparalleled. Of all the impossible consequences of there being no resurrection, the most impossible, as it seemed to Paul, was this: "Christ

is not risen," for Christ was at once his proof and his exemplar of the majesty of mind.

2. The second of those impossible conclusions which St. Paul derives from the denial of immortality is expressed in the words: "Your faith is vain." Put into modern form, his meaning is this: "If Christ be not raised"—if the highest imaginable powers of the human mind have been extinguished in death, then we have an anomaly in the universe—a faculty without an object. We must remember that, in the view of Paul, faith is not a mere act of credulity; it is a faculty, a power of the soul. This is shewn by his tendency to oppose faith to sight, clearly implying that the former is an inner vision, as the latter is an outer vision. Faith with him, as with the writer to the Hebrews, is not an obscure and dubious conjecture, but an "evidence of things not seen;" it is a special organ which claims to have its special object. That object is a super-sensuous world—a world not so much future as timeless, independent of the mutations of the visible and the tangible. Is this object a delusion, or as St. Paul puts it, is faith vain? Paul says that such a conclusion is impossible. Why? It is so, because, in this case, he would be forced to acknowledge an anomaly in nature. Wheresoever he turns he can find no other trace of a faculty without an object. He sees that light has been made for the eye, music for the ear, work for the hand, beauty for the imagination. Every sense has its environment, every power its appropriate field of exercise. Is there to be one solitary exception to the rule? Is the sense of the supernatural to have no object? The sense of the supernatural is what Paul calls faith—that faculty which looks "to the things that are unseen." These unseen things are to him at once the symbols and the proofs of immortality; they are not "temporal" but "eternal." If the existence of these be a delusion, then we have an eye without light, an ear without music, a hand

without material to work upon, a sense of beauty without the symmetry to fill it; our faculty of faith is useless, objectless, vain.

From this point of view it becomes easy to understand St. Paul's collateral statement, that "our preaching is vain." For all preaching is addressed to man's sense of need—to the faculty crying for its object. The design of the pulpit is to speak to the wants of man, and to tell him that there is something waiting to supply them. If there is nothing waiting to supply them, our preaching is indeed vain, and worse than vain. It is cruel to stimulate a sense of want which no scene of existence can ever gratify; to awake a power into being which no sphere of life will ever require is a process of education which can only lead to pain. In this case it might, in a quite unique sense, be said, "Ignorance is bliss." The fact that no faculty can be vain is itself the proof that "Christ is risen."

3. This brings us to the third argument. It is different in its nature both from those that precede and from those that follow it. They are founded upon facts which appeal to the universal nature of man; this, in the first instance at least, rests on an historical experience of the Apostle's own life and on an emotion induced by it. He says, If there be no resurrection, and if therefore the highest specimen of the human mind be dead, then *I* am found a false witness for Christ, to whose rising I testify. The argument, as we have said, is, in the first instance, purely personal, and could have no weight over any doubt but the Apostle's own. He alone could be the judge of his own integrity. But if we look deeper, we shall see that even here there is involved a general argument, a principle of universal application. What Paul really means to say is: If there be no resurrection, I am myself an anomaly; "We are found false witnesses for God," *i.e.* for goodness—false witnesses for the eternity of truth, selfish witnesses for the

immortality of self-sacrifice. Such is the paradox or impossible consequence, which Paul here designs to convey. It is an anticipation of Paley's argument, but better put, and it is not difficult to see that Paul attaches to it a peculiar importance. When he has completed his train of reasoning and left all the other arguments behind, *this* seems still to leave its echo in his soul. He asks, in various forms, what possible motives he can have for cheating the world into virtue. "I protest," he says, "I die daily"—by my profession of faith in a risen Christ I make my earthly life a perpetual mortification. "If in this life only we Christians have hope in Christ, if our faith has none but an earthly motive, we are of all men most miserable." What was the human motive for which "I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus." Why stand we in jeopardy every hour if there be no resurrection? Would not the Epicurean counsel in that case be the more just and prudent one, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

One cannot but remark what a singular light St. Paul here unwittingly throws on his own character as a witness. He suggests even more than he means. He only wants to prove that he is not a false witness in relation to others; he powerfully impresses us with the additional conviction that he is not a false witness in relation to himself. For, as we follow him in the foregoing train of thought, we see that this man even in his Christianity is no fanatic. We see that in his highest flights of ecstasy he has never for a moment lost sight of the present world, and the possible advantage of being a votary of the present world. He has never closed his eyes to the fact that the sincere profession of Christianity carries with it a series of pains and privations in themselves not desirable. This is not the language of a fanatic, of a man so possessed with one idea that he is incapable of weighing evidence on the other side. It is the language of a sober controversialist, who is still weighing

and measuring the relative advantages and disadvantages of being a Christian, and who would certainly give preponderance to the latter if he had not had a personal experience of the immortality of sacrifice.

4. St. Paul states his fourth argument thus:—"If there be no resurrection, and if therefore Christ be not risen, ye are yet in your sins." It is an argument which is often misunderstood. The common notion that he is forecasting the misery of a world without an immortal hope has led many to give them this significance: If Christ be not risen, your sins are not atoned for; the satisfaction for human guilt has not been accepted by the Father. Now, apart from the consideration that to attribute such scholasticism to St. Paul commits the mind to a theological anachronism, there is an objection to this interpretation which is involved in its very statement. How can it be said that the misery of a world without a future lies in the fact that sin is unatoned for? It lies in the fact that there will no longer be any need of atonement, that a time is coming when sin will no longer be a horror to us, nor virtue any more a joy. If there be no resurrection, and if, as a result of that, Christ be not risen, then we are neither sinners nor saints; we are simply dead; we have neither part nor lot in moral distinctions any more.

But if we look at the passage in the light of our present exegesis, it will assume a totally different aspect; we shall see that Paul is speaking, not of a miserable consequence, but of an impossible consequence. What he means is really this: If there be no Christian immortality, there cannot be at this moment in the world a Christian life; ye are in this case yet in your sins: there is no power keeping you from evil. But your own experience tells you that this is not true; you are not in your sins. There is a life within you which is not part of your natural life, nor a product of that life—a spirit lusting against your flesh, a law of your mind

warring with the law of your members. What is it? Whence came it? How do you explain it? If there be nothing but earth and the conditions of earth, in what manner shall we account for a sentiment which transcends those conditions? If the normal bias of the human soul in the present world is toward self-interest, how can you explain the bias which impels you into deeds of self-sacrifice from day to day? If there be no resurrection, you ought to be yet in your sins; how comes it to pass that you are not in your sins?

This is clearly St. Paul's meaning. Will it be said that the mode of reasoning is behind our age? It is at all events not very far behind it. If in the previous argument St. Paul anticipated Paley, in this he has anticipated two greater men—Kant and Schleiermacher. To Kant the existence of a moral law within the soul was the very demonstration of a life transcending the present order of being. The fact that, at the very moment when a man has determined to disobey the law, there shall come to him a voice which says, Thou shalt not, is to the philosopher of Königsberg an irrefragable proof that the law is not given by man, an indisputable prophecy that man is already in communion with a life higher than his own. In terms still more directly Pauline speaks Schleiermacher. Instead of seeking the evidence of a risen Christ in the documents of antiquity, he seeks it in the Church of his own day; nay, in himself as a member of that Church. He asks what it is that has given rise to this stream of Christian feeling, which is ever widening into an ocean of universal love. He cannot find a source for that stream in the soil of the natural life; for it flows in a channel the reverse of what we call natural. He is forced, therefore, to seek it in a life beyond nature; and the only such life he can find is that said to have been lived by the Son of Man. Only in the continued existence of this supernatural Fountain can he

explain the continuous flow of that higher life of humanity which constitutes the being of the Church universal. One cannot but recall the similar reasoning of St. John: "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." The test of immortality is placed in a fact of present experience—in a life which is in us but not of us, a love which flows from the immortal Love. The evidence that Christ is risen is the consciousness that we are not in our sins.

5. We pass to St. Paul's final argument. He says: If there be no possible resurrection even of the highest life, if even Christ be not risen, then they that have fallen asleep are perished. He does not mean that they are suffering in *hell*—which in this case would be impossible—but simply that they have been annihilated, have ceased to be. This, then, is the argument from affection, since it is evident that here St. Paul directs his main appeal to the feelings of the heart. It would be unfair to say, however, that on this account it is less logical than his other arguments. The feelings of the heart are just as much facts of nature as the sensations of the body, and the intuitions of the intellect; and any scientific theory which ignores their place in nature should be the last to lay claim to the name of Positive. St. Paul, therefore, has a perfect right to appeal to the human heart, whose instincts would be violated by the denial of immortality. It is all very well, with Bruno Bauer, to sneer at what he calls the "pectoral theology;" but it is the latest word of modern science, that all knowledge is reached at first through the medium of outward or inward feeling. If feeling lies at the foundation of scientific knowledge, it surely claims some recognition in our efforts to solve the problems of the religious life.

Perhaps we shall best appreciate the force of the Apostle's reasoning if we take it in connection with his own illustration—the case of those who are "baptized for the dead."

The subject has always been considered one of special difficulty. Yet the mystery does not lie in the obscurity of the historical reference. There seems little doubt of the fact that, in the primitive Church, or in a section of that Church, there prevailed a practice of substitutionary baptism—baptism in the room of those who had died without receiving it. The difficulty is not historical; it is theological. We want to know how salvation could be given by proxy, and especially how such a man as St. Paul could lend himself to such a view. It is true he does not approve the practice, but neither does he disapprove; nay, he uses it as an illustration of something of which he does approve —the affection of the living for the dead.

The consideration of our own historical anachronisms will yield the best vindication of the Apostle's line of thought. We attribute to St. Paul a mediæval view of baptism; nay, for that matter, a mediæval view of salvation. What is the fact? Baptism in the primitive Church did not *confer* salvation; it presupposed it. It was not the election to a life of grace; it was the ordination to a priesthood or ministry of sacrifice. It assigned a man his work in the world. The man who was baptised for a dead friend devoted himself by a symbolic act to finish the work which should have been given *him* to do, to fill up that which was behind; it was a tribute of affection to the memory of the departed.

It is to this phase of mind so prevalent in the Church of Corinth that St. Paul addressed himself, in arguing with men who, in the same moment, denied the truth of a resurrection, and yet kept alive the memory and labours of the dead. He tells them that they are inconsistent. He asks them why they are so eager to perpetuate on earth an immortality which they deny to exist beyond the earth, why they are so solicitous to preserve the work when they are content to see the worker pass into oblivion. Yet the real

force of St. Paul's argument goes deeper than this. What he wants to shew the Corinthians is not so much their own inconsistency as the inconsistency which their view would attribute to God. It is here that the point of his argument really lies. To prove human inconsistency can prove nothing; it has always been in the nature of man to be inconsistent with himself. But to attribute inconsistency to God is at once to reveal an inherent weakness in our mode of reasoning, a fatal flaw in our logic. Such a flaw was evident in the reasoning of men who believed at once in the annihilation of the soul at death, and in the baptism for the dead. For, in the view of the early Church, baptism was not a human process; it was a direct act of God. It was the consecration of a human life to an earthly service: but it was a consecration not by the hands of men but by the breath of the Divine Spirit. And to St. Paul, from this point of view, the belief of the Corinthians was simply grotesque. He saw them attributing to God at one and the same moment the most heedless unconcern and the most eager solicitude for the future fate of men—an unconcern so complete as to allow the soul to perish, a solicitude so deep as to consecrate other souls for the mere purpose of carrying on, for the mere sake of perpetuating the work and memory of that which had been annihilated. To St. Paul it was a mere contradiction in terms. He might have believed in a God who had not promised man any life beyond the present; but he could not believe in a God who in one breath refused man time to finish his earthly task, and yet insisted that the task should somehow or somewhere be finished. He felt that those who accepted the practice of baptism for the dead had thereby rejected the doctrine, "they also which have fallen asleep are perished."

GEORGE MATHESON.