

CORINTHIANS - The MORE EXCELLENT WAY

STUDY 18

Essentials & Enemies

... we preach Christ crucified ... For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

I COR. 1:23, 3:11

Study 18a: NO OTHER FOUNDATION (15:1-11)

15:1-2 The SAVING gospel was already known by the Corinthians. What are the implications for future 'gospels' [hint: from which Bible books do many other 'gospels' derive their peculiar doctrines?]

[vv 1-58] From ecclesiastical, moral, and liturgical questions, the apostle passes to one of a dogmatic nature. He has reserved it for the last, no doubt, because of its importance. Doctrine is the vital element in the existence of the Church. The Church itself is in a manner only doctrine assimilated. Any grave corruption in teaching immediately vitiates the body of Christ. The apostle opened his letter by laying down as the foundation of his work, Christ crucified; he concludes it by presenting as the crown of his work, Christ risen. In these two facts, applied to the conscience and appropriated by faith, there is concentrated indeed the whole of the Christian salvation. [Godet 749]

The things of 'first importance' in other 'gospels'

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES – Christ returned (invisibly) in 1874 (now 1914); thus you must accept the FDS, the only 'organization' who understands these 'deeper things'
MORMONS – Christ appeared a second time, in New York state, but only to Joseph Smith

ADVENTISTS – Christ's investigative judgment began in 1844; thus you must accept the authority of Ellen G. White, who is the prophet appointed to reveal these things

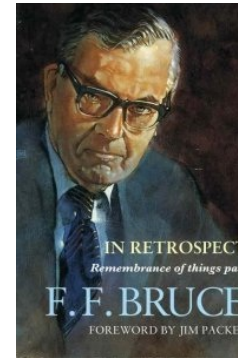
CHURCH OF CHRIST – Christ's true church (us) is the only one which has a valid baptism

NEW AGE – Christ is a spirit (thus not truly 'raised', nor returning bodily), a great Master, but not the unique Son of God

Lest we the church feel superior let us not forget some of OUR 'first things': Christ only speaks authoritatively through a man in Rome; Christ only speaks through the King James Version (or, for that matter, through an inerrant Bible); and, where 2 or 3 are gathered together speaking in tongues, there He is

[vv 1-58] Paul starts from first principles. He shows that Christ's resurrection is fundamental to the gospel, then that the resurrection of Christ implies the resurrection of the Christian. Next he goes on to deal with objections that were, or might be, raised, and shows how baseless they are. This is the classical Christian discussion of the subject. [Morris 203]

15:3,4 What are the things 'of first importance'? (NIV; 'as a first essential' [Barclay]; 'first of all' [Bruce's Expanded Paraphrase]; 'the points which I put in the first rank' [Godet]; 'Among first things ... not to time, but to importance' [A.T. Robertson]; 'in the foremost place ... foremost in importance, not in time' [Robertson/Plummer])



[v 3] The things of **first importance** are four in number: (a) **Christ died**, (b) **he was buried**, (c) **he was raised**, (d) **he appeared** in resurrection to many. Whatever differences there might be in primitive Christian faith and preaching, there was evidently unanimity on these fundamental data ... **Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures** to the event itself three points of interpretation are added: (a) the person who **died** was the **Christ**; (b) he **died** for his people's **sins**; (c) his death took place **in accordance with the Old Testament scriptures**. For a pagan (like Tacitus) to say **Christ died** would involve no expression of opinion about the person in question; for one of Paul's Jewish upbringing to say so involved the acknowledgement that the person in question was the Messiah of Israel. That he **died for our sins** (cf. 2 C. 5:21; Rom. 3:24-26; 4:25; Gal. 1:4) probably implies

that Jesus was further identified with the suffering Servant of Isa. 53:12 who 'bore the sin of many'; this would account also for the phrase **in accordance with the scriptures**. The identification of Jesus with the Servant of the Lord is made repeatedly in the earlier speeches of Acts (cf. Ac. 3:13ff.; 8:32ff.), although they do not explicitly emphasize the Servant's bearing of sin. [Bruce 138]

[v 4] *According to the scriptures* indicates that the gospel was no afterthought. The saving death of Christ was something foretold long before in sacred Scripture. Paul does not mention specific passages, but Is. liii will be particularly in mind. [Morris 205]

What is the importance of 'he was buried'?

[v 4] ... this is not said to be 'in accordance with the scriptures', but if it is implied that it is, then Isa. 53:9a comes to mind. Separate mention is made of his burial because (a) burial emphasizes the finality of death (cf. Ac. 2:29 concerning David: 'he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day'); (b) burial in the present instance emphasizes the reality of the resurrection which followed, as a divine act which reversed the act of men (cf. Ac. 13:29f.). The clause bespeaks belief in the empty tomb. [Bruce 139]

15:5-8 What is the SECOND foundation stone of church doctrine?

[v8] ... the Divine testimony of the Scriptures is designedly placed before all the apostolic testimonies which are about to follow. The Scriptures had said the event would happen; the witnesses declare it has happened. [Godet 759]

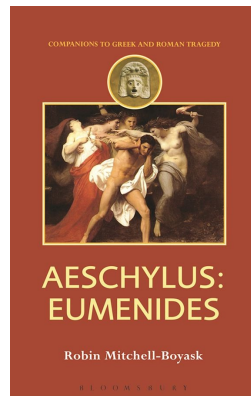
15:9-11 Although Paul does not OFFICIALLY list his conversion among the 'first things', of what does he consider it the supreme example? (1 Tim.1:1,2,10-17; 2 Tim.1:1,2,8-11; Acts 20:24; 2 Cor.12:9)

Study 18b: BODILY RESURRECTION ESSENTIAL (15:12-34)

15:12-19 How SERIOUS is denial of the bodily resurrection? (vv.2,3)

[vv 12-19] They probably held the Greek idea of the immortality of the soul, but found it hard to think of the body as rising again ... The objectors are striking at the heart of the faith. [Morris 209]

[v 12] Conceivably they thought that the respectable Greek belief in the immortality of the soul (see on 1:12) was perfectly adequate, and that the idea of the resurrection of the body was an embarrassing Jewish handicap to the progress of the gospel in the Gentile world: it stood to reason that (in the words which Aeschylus puts into the mouth of Apollo) 'when the earth has drunk up a man's blood, once he is dead, there is no resurrection' (*Eumenides* 647f.) Some kind of assumption into glory at death or at the parousia might be envisaged, but certainly not the reanimation of corpses. Perhaps they maintained a more sophisticated view, like Hymenaeus and Philetus at a later date, who held 'that the resurrection is past already' (2 Tim. 2:17): since Paul himself taught that believers in Christ had been raised from death with him, why should they think of any further resurrection? [Bruce 144]



15:20-22 NOTE: A man died, a man is raised – typifying all men

15:23-28 Identify the source of misunderstanding for cultists here

[vv 24-26] The **enemies** are hostile principalities and powers, all the forces that endeavour to oppose and hinder the fulfilment of God's saving purpose in the world. The resurrection harvest marks the destruction of death, **the last enemy**, and not the least formidable of the principalities and powers (cf. Heb. 2:14f.; Rev. 20:14a). [Bruce 147]

15:29-34 What other false teaching has already rooted in Corinth? (Note the irony: 2 teachings of the 'enemies' of the gospel - and today's 2 biggest cults - are both found in this chapter)

[v 32] ... the quotation is taken *verbatim* from Isa. 22:13, but the thought is that of Ec. 2:24a where, in the absence of any hope of life beyond the grave, the Preacher affirms that 'there is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and find enjoyment in his toil' (cf. Ec. 9:7-10). [Bruce 150]

[v33] *Me planasthe, be not deceived*, has about it the idea not so much of deception as of error (*planao* in the passive = 'to go astray', 'to wander'; cf. Our term 'planet', for the wandering stars) ...The point of Paul's citation is that keeping

the wrong kind of company (i.e. that of men who deny the resurrection) may well corrupt good Christian habits, and turn men away from the true position. [Morris 221]

The 'vain gospel' & 'false witness' of 'bad company'

[vv 1-58] All the religious and moral deviations which we have hitherto observed at Corinth proceeded from the Greek character; it is probable that it was so also in this case. From the Greek point of view, especially since the time of Plato, it was customary to regard matter, ... as the source of evil, physical and moral, and consequently the body as the principle of sin in human nature. [Godet 751]

[v 14] *Vain (kenon)* comes first with emphasis. The word means 'empty'. If there is no resurrection of Christ behind it, the preaching, which he has shown to be not peculiar to himself, but common to all the apostles (verse 11), has no content, no substance. It is the resurrection which shows that God is in it, and if the resurrection did not take place then the whole thing is a sham. *Preaching* is *kerugma* ... It denotes not the act of preaching, but the content of preaching, the thing preached, the message. The word-order in the latter part of the verse is 'vain also your faith', which again puts the stress on *vain*. The faith of the Corinthians depended on the gospel which had elicited it. If that gospel was a sham, then so was the faith it produced ... [v 17] Paul elsewhere speaks of being 'dead in sins' (Eph. ii. 1,5; Col. ii. 13), and we are reminded of our Lord's words about dying in sins (Jn. viii. 21,24). Paul has already pointed out that 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures' (verse 3). But if men are still in their sins this death has availed nothing. [Morris 210-211]

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