

RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD AS A FRACTIONAL ELEMENT IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT. The major tragedy that humanity has to face is death. It is the enemy that every human being must face in at least two situations. On the one hand, death is the one that kidnaps loved ones in the family, causing the pain of separation. On the other hand, every human being must face his own death. Although this enemy often brings sorrow and despair into human life, it is the Christian faith that offers hope even in the face of death. This reason led me to address the theme of the resurrection of the dead in this paper. This theme is also presented by the apostle Paul, as an answer to one of the problems of the church in Corinth. In this paper we will present the role and place of the resurrection of the dead in 1 Corinthians, and then we will present the apostle's reasoned response to those who challenged the resurrection of the dead, and in the final part we will present the apostle Paul's perspective on how the dead will rise.

KEY WORDS: resurrection of the dead, 1 Corinthians 15, fractional element, unity, nature of resurrected body, true teaching

Introduction. Place and Role of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians

The apostle Paul addresses the Christian community in Corinth, a community that faces a strong fractional spirit. This fractional spirit was fuelled by several sources, or problems that the apostle Paul addresses in the epistle in order to diminish and even eliminate that influence. First Corinthians is to be understood as an oral discourse addressed by the apostle to this community. Because the epistle takes the form of an oral discourse, it must have a rhetorical structure specific to the time (see Appendix 1).

The rhetorical category in which the epistle falls is the deliberative one. This rhetoric has the main purpose of causing the audience to change their actions and behaviour in the future. Margaret Mitchell proposes a rhetorical division of 1 Corinthians (Mitchell and Betz 1996: 1143-1147, see also Appendix 2), which shows that the main problem in Corinth is the lack of unity. Verse 10 of chapter 1 represents the central element of the epistle, and in this verse, it is highlighted that there are divergences between the Corinthians, and the exhortation of the apostle Paul is one of unity. In the *probatio*

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section, or the argumentation of this idea, the apostle presents four sets of arguments showing the lack of unity. Chapter 15 of First Corinthians, the chapter on the resurrection of the dead, is a whole section (the fourth) which presents the fact that the fraternal spirit in the church is maintained by the doctrinal issues between the Corinthians, this being caused by the misunderstanding of teaching about the resurrection of the dead.

Therefore, the issue of the resurrection of the dead is presented in 1 Corinthians as an element that produces divergence. This idea is supported by verse 12 of chapter 15, where the apostle Paul makes it clear that in Corinth "... some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead." It is clearly understood that, in the church of Corinth, some Christians denied the resurrection of the dead, and through this the fractional spirit manifested itself by dividing opinions in the church. It is possible that this situation was reached in the Corinthian church, following the influences of Greek philosophy which did not conceive the resurrection of the human body, but considered the body to be the prison of the soul, and the sooner the soul was released, the better. This philosophical view led to the situation in which the apostle Paul was found when in the Areopagus of Athens he was ridiculed when addressing the issue of the resurrection of the dead (Acts 17:32, see Keener 1993: 487).

The Apostle Paul's Response to the Denial of the Resurrection of the Dead *Fixing the Common Base – The Resurrection of Christ*

The apostle begins to address this issue by re-establishing the foundation of the gospel, that is, the resurrection of Christ. To discuss the issue of the resurrection of the dead, Paul presents one of the elements that all Christian communities agreed on, namely, that Christ rose from the dead. It is considered that verses 3-5, in which the death, the resurrection and the appearance of the Lord are presented, constitute the basis of an early Christian creed (Fee 1988: 718). This creed presents the proof that Christ did indeed die on the cross of Golgotha, this proof is given by the burial of Jesus after His crucifixion. Just as burial is evidence of Jesus' death, the presence of eyewitnesses is clear evidence that Jesus rose from the dead. It is argued that the resurrection of Christ was not a "spiritual" but a bodily, physical one. Christ could be seen after the resurrection and the apostles together with Cephas are eyewitnesses to this fact (Fee 1988: 725).

Verses 6-7 are the historical argument in favour of the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ, in these verses it is argued that Christ was seen by over five hundred brothers at once. Thus, Christ did not appear somewhere hidden, secretly, so that one could claim that his appearance was only a personal illusion, but the appearance of the risen Christ took place in front of many eyewitnesses, so that no one could deny this resurrection. Verses 8-11 show

the personal experience of the apostle Paul with the risen Christ. To describe this process, Paul presents himself as “an abomination”, a term that has the meaning of an abortion or an unnatural birth of a child. By this designation Paul referred to the fact that he did not become an apostle naturally being an eyewitness like the other apostles but his belief is the result of the sudden intervention of Christ in his life (Fitzmyer 2008: 551). The experience of the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus is not a vision, but a physical appearance, or real revelation of the risen Christ. The apostle further presents that his apostolate is the result of God’s grace and initiative. And when Paul refers to God’s grace, he refers to the grace he experienced in the moment when Jesus revealed himself to him, when he was still a persecutor. The fact that in this situation he sets an example, as he will do later in his argument, is an element that belongs to a deliberative rhetoric (Mitchell 1993: 287).

This section, concluded in verse 11, reaffirms the teaching accepted by all Christian communities. Christ rose from the dead in a physical, bodily way and this fact cannot be denied because there were eyewitnesses. The physical resurrection of Christ is a problematic of great importance due to the fact that the whole gospel and Christianity itself is based on what is considered to be the return to life of Christ, who has been declared dead. The resurrection of Christ shows that beyond suffering and death, beyond all that terrifying things that the human being can go through, there is hope. If sin brought death as its main result, preceded by pain and suffering, we notice that the resurrection of Christ brought hope instead, hope that goes beyond the grave. Moreover, the resurrection of Christ also brought the power to live today according to God’s will. The resurrection of Christ was not a spiritual one, as the teaching of Gnosticism sustained, but His resurrection was a physical one, and the apostle Paul put forward arguments to prove this fact. The implications of Christ’s physical resurrection are major, and the apostle Paul will present them in his argument, but we must say that the very importance of these implications has meant that since the morning of the resurrection, this resurrection has been challenged. Matthew, the evangelist states that the Jewish political and religious authorities bribed the Roman guards guarding the tomb of Jesus, to claim that the resurrection of Jesus was not a physical one, but the absence of the body of Jesus was justified by the fact that the disciples stole the body of Jesus. This lie and the rejection of the reality of the resurrection of Jesus has continued to occur over the time, in various forms, especially because the physical resurrection as we have seen is of a major importance for Christianity.

Implications of the Hypothesis that the Dead do not Rise

In the section between verses 12-19, the apostle Paul presents the logical implications of the Corinthian hypothesis that the dead do not rise. First of all, the apostle Paul states that if the dead are not going to rise, neither is the

resurrection of Christ true. Challenging the resurrection of the dead means challenging the resurrection of Jesus, this means that all Christianity is nothing but a great deception. Because the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ proves that His sacrifice was accepted by the Father and that man can be justified before God by faith, the sacrifice of Christ is the essence of Christianity. If Christ's sacrifice is removed from Christianity, there is nothing left. And by denying the resurrection of the dead, the validity of the sacrifice of Christ is also denied. Hence other implications come to light, implications that become dramatic for the life of the believer. The apostle presents the fact that without this central element, the resurrection of Christ, the whole missionary activity, characterized by effort and sacrifice is of no value (Collins 1999: 542).

From Joseph Fitzmyer's perspective, the adjective *kenos* (emptied) is used in v. 10, where Paul stated that the divine grace was not "without effect" in his life. Now he applies the same idea not only to the apostolic preaching of the risen Christ, but also to the response of the Christian faith to this preaching (Fitzmyer 2008: 563). The Corinthians' faith is also worthless, because the proof that Christ's sacrifice was accepted thus making man's redemption possible is the resurrection of Christ, but without this resurrection the logical conclusion is that redemption is not possible either. Thus, the Corinthians are still under the punishment of their sins without being able to be saved from this state. Paul's argument is that when the future in which the resurrection takes place is denied, so is the past in which forgiveness through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus took place. On the other hand, the denial of the resurrection means the denial of the whole future reality (Fee 1988: 743). Gordon Fee states that "those who reject the actuality of Christ's resurrection will face the consequences of such rejection, being false witnesses against God himself" (Fee 1988: 743). In fact, another implication of the denial of Christ's resurrection is related to those who died with hope in the resurrection. If Christ has not risen, it means that there is no future for the dead, as they are hopeless.

We note, therefore, that in this section, the apostle shows not only the implications of the hypothetical case in which Christ did not rise, but also presents the practical implications for those who manifested this fractional spirit in the Corinthian church. We understand that those who denied the resurrection of the dead were part of the local church in Corinth, and when they denied the resurrection of the dead, there was division among the faithful. Giving way to these people's argument, Paul shows that in fact they are not even part of the church of Christ because the church is made up of all the believers who were forgiven through faith in the sacrifice of Christ. And if Christ has not risen, there can be no talk of salvation, so the existence of the Church in the version they sustained cannot be justified. So we notice that

the fractional spirit not only has an immediate effect by creating division, but we can see that the implications are much deeper, to the point that the identity of the Church is called into question.

The Significance of Christ's Resurrection

In verses 20-28, the apostle Paul presents the theological argument in favour of the resurrection of the dead. From the beginning of this section, Christ is presented as victorious over death and He is the lever or guarantor, the first fruit of the resurrection. The fact that Christ rose from the dead guarantees that those who are "in Christ" will also be resurrected. The resurrection of Christ is the defeat of death, the final form of a man's existence is not death but the form taken after the resurrection (Perkins 2012: 177). So, because Christ is the first fruit of the resurrection, the resurrection of the dead is inevitable.

It is no coincidence that the apostle Paul uses the metaphor of the first fruit. This metaphor is often used in the context of the Old Testament (Exodus 23:16, 19; Leviticus 23: 10-14; Numbers 18:8-13; Deuteronomy 18:4, 26:2, 10; 2 Chronicles 31:5; Nehemiah 10: 37) and the significance of this first fruit was regarding the recognition of divine sovereignty. It was recognized in the first fruit that God would bless the whole harvest, and the whole harvest would be of equal value to the first fruit. At the same time, the first fruit showed the quality but also the quantity of the entire harvest, which will be a blessed one. Gordon Fee points out that just as the first fruit represented the beginning of the harvest, the last stage of the agricultural cycle, for the apostle the resurrection of the dead will happen at the end of history with an eschatological perspective. Therefore, observing the analogy between the agricultural first fruit and Christ as the first fruit of the resurrection of the dead, we will state the following: just as in the case of the agricultural process, God is the one who supervises the process of plant growth and harvest, in the case of Christ and the resurrection is accomplished by God himself as well. On the other hand, the fact that the first fruit guarantees the quality of the whole harvest, in the case of the resurrection from the dead, it shows that the resurrection of the human body will be of the same nature as the resurrection of Christ. Just as Christ was raised from the dead, so will all believers be raised from the dead. And finally, as we have shown, the agricultural first fruit marks the beginning of the last stage of the agricultural process and the resurrection of Christ marks the beginning of the "last days" which makes the resurrection of the dead an eschatological event. By the analogy between the agricultural first fruit and Christ, the first fruit of the sleeping is shown, as Gordon Fee argues, that the resurrection from the dead is inevitable, this event being guaranteed by God himself.

The apostle's theological argument is based on the contrast between Adam and Christ. If through Adam sin entered the world, through the sacrifice of Christ forgiveness and deliverance are brought. Through the cross, Christ came out victorious over all things, including death, this guarantees that all people will be resurrected. "Paul's view is that death is inevitable because we share humanity and the sinful nature of man, Adam. But believers are equally involved in the resurrection of the dead through the second Man, Christ, who through His resurrection reversed the process begun by Adam" (Perkins 2012: 751). In fact, the apostle Paul analyzes this typological relationship between Adam and Christ in the epistle to the Romans, chapter 5 as well. In this presentation made by the apostle Paul we can see that Adam and Christ have a typological relationship in the sense that Adam represents the ancient creation lost in sin, and Christ represents the new creation reconciled with God through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. Warren Wiersbe makes a comparison in his study and shows that the typological relationship is observed in the origin of the agents of the typological relationship, in their status, in their action, in the effect of their action and in the eternal effect of their action (Wiersbe: 383).

As for the origin, the typological relationship shows that Adam was created from the dust, while Christ came from heaven. The status of the agents that form this typological relationship shows that Adam is considered to be the King of the old creation (due to the fact that he received the mandate to rule the garden of Eden), and Christ is the King and Priest of the new creation. The typological relationship also analyzes the actions carried out by the protagonists of this relationship. Adam acted by surrendering and falling into temptation, showing disobedience to God while Christ was victorious in temptation, and showed obedience even to the ultimate sacrifice by accepting the cross. As for the immediate effect of actions, Adam brought death into the world by his action, but on the other hand, by His action, Christ brought righteousness, salvation, and life. The effects of the actions of the protagonists of the analysed typological relationship are not only immediate but long-term effects can also be observed. As for Adam, more than the immediate death, because of his action, in the long run sin reigns in the world, and following the action of Christ, Grace reigns and believers reign in life with their Lord. Observing this typological relationship, we notice that from all the analyzed points of view, Christ is superior to Adam. If death is the effect of Adam's action, so much more the effect of Christ's action will be fully manifested, and this manifestation means life, and full life includes the resurrection of the dead. In this way the typological relationship between Adam and Christ functions as a strong theological argument for the apostle, which helps him sustain the truth of the bodily resurrection of the dead.

Continuing the same theological argument, Paul argues that Christ must exercise his rule beginning with the resurrection until the fulfilment of Psalm 110:1, and death is presented as the last enemy to be defeated. It is claimed that the work of the Messiah will be complete when the redemption is complete, that is, when the resurrection of the dead will take place (see Fitzmyer 2008: 573). Verse 27 presents God as the One who realizes the resurrection of the dead, and Christ's subordination to the Father is functional, not ontological. The fact that at the end of the theological argument it is stated that "God be all in all" refers to the redemption of all creation which is realized on the basis of the merits of Christ (Collins 1999: 554). The theme of the redemption of all creation is also addressed in Romans chapter 8:19-22.

Practical Arguments for the Resurrection of the Dead

Beginning with verses 29 to 34, Paul presents practical arguments that sustain the faith in the resurrection of the dead. One of these arguments, presented in verse 29, draws attention to the practice of the "baptism for the dead". At a first glance we can understand this baptism as a substitute baptism for those who have died unreconciled with Christ. But this practice has no biblical or historical precedent, and on the other hand contradicts the general teaching of the New Testament regarding salvation. It is impossible for someone to be baptized for someone else, whether dead or alive, because baptism only has value for the person for whom it was performed. New Testament teaching contradicts such a practice because it is argued that man's salvation is given by a personal faith in the sacrifice of Christ. This teaching of the New Testament is a complex one, covering the whole soteriological branch of theology, but in this article we have made tangential reference to the doctrine of justification by faith.

There are, however, some possible interpretations for the practice of baptism for the dead referred to by the apostle Paul, as a practical argument for the resurrection of the dead. One of these interpretations is that people decided to become Christians and be baptized motivated by the martyrdom of Christians. Another interpretation draws attention to the idea that people were baptized being aware of the danger of death due to the fact that they become Christians. And the third interpretation is that people were aware of the shortness of life and the imminence of death when they were baptized (Fee 1988: 766). We cannot say clearly which of the interpretations is correct, but the purpose of the apostle Paul was not to explain this practice, but to make the Corinthians aware that their practice (regardless of its significance) has no value if the dead do not rise.

Another practical argument put forward by the apostle Paul refers to his missionary activity. Because of his devotion to the cause of the gospel, Paul is constantly on the brink of death. And if there is no resurrection of the dead,

what is the point of Paul putting his life in danger? In verse 32, Paul expresses his struggle with the “beasts of Ephesus”. These beasts must be metaphorically understood as referring to the apostle’s opponents in Ephesus. (“Beasts” should not be confused with what later took place in the history of Christianity, the martyrdom of Christians in Roman arenas in the face of wild beasts, see Fee 1988: 771). Another interpretation of these “beasts of Ephesus” is given by Guy Williams who claims that by analysing the actions of the apostle Paul described in the book of Acts, he encountered hostility not only ideologically speaking, but even demonic practices such as exorcism, occult practices of the Ephesians and the idolatry characteristic of paganism (Guy 2006: 42). So these beasts from Ephesus with which the apostle Paul fought are not of a physical nature but of a spiritual one, thus a spiritual struggle has taken place. This argument is important because it shows that the constant danger that the apostle faced was either ideological hostility or spiritual struggle. The apostle’s argument also focuses on the two total opposite effects of these two beliefs on one’s experience. If, on the one hand, in the absence of the certainty of the resurrection of the dead, the sacrifice and the risk to which the apostle is subjected by preaching the gospel is worthless, then the opposite or the extreme opposite is to live the pleasures of daily life to the fullest. By the words “let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” the Epicureans maintained that all we have is this life on earth, so man must seize every opportunity to fulfil himself. Paul argues that life without resurrection is nonsense. Verses 33 and 34 show that denying the resurrection means living in disillusionment and ignorance of God. As for bad companionship, these “sinful conversations as well as those that deny the resurrection from the dead can only have a corruptible effect on your good character” (Fee 1988: 773).

The Nature of the Resurrected Body

From verse 36 to 44, the apostle Paul appeals to the reason of the audience, presenting an image that they often saw before their eyes. Just as in the sowing process it is natural for the grain to die, so the human body must die in order to rise to a nature other than the present. After the bean dies, a spike sprouts from it, but the sprouted bean is related to the dead bean, even if it looks different, likewise the resurrection of the dead the dying body is closely related to the glorified one, even if they have different characteristics. Then arguments are made that the nature of bodies, whether we speak of animals or stars, is different. By these analogies it is argued that the nature of the resurrected body is different from the nature of the body now existing (Collins 1999: 566). Then we return to the typology between Adam and Christ (v. 45), mentioning that if Christians share the corruptible body subject to death, through Adam, they will also share the incorruptible body after the resurrection, through Christ. Christ is not only seen as having an incorruptible body

but through His resurrection He has become the source of life, of existence in the form of the resurrection (Fitzmyer 2008: 597). The Corinthians' problem with their spiritual level was that they believed that by manifesting gifts (especially the gift of speaking in tongues) they reached a maximum level of spirituality, but verses 46-49 show that the true maximum level of a believer's spirituality will be reached when the human body will be resurrected as a "spiritual" body. The "spiritual" part should not be understood as immaterial, as it entails the supernatural characteristics of our current existence. The human body will be physically adapted to the conditions of heavenly existence (Fee 1988: 792).

In the final part of his argument (vv. 50-58), the apostle Paul reassures believers that they have triumph even in the face of death. Paul presents the need to transform the condition of the human body, because in the current condition (subject to decay) it cannot correspond to heavenly conditions. This transformation is necessary both for the dead (asleep) and for those who are alive. The resurrection from the dead is in an incorruptible body, this resurrection will take place at the return of Christ (Parousia). Thus, through the resurrection, the power of death is abolished, its power being sin. In Pauline theology, sin is seen as a fatal poison (Fee 1988: 805). Therefore, we can say that what has proved to be an enemy to mankind, death, is taken by God and is used to be the solution by which sin is removed forever from man. (Man dies corruptible and rises incorruptible). Aware of this, in the last two verses 57 and 58 the apostle Paul presents a final doxology and motivates Christians to work for their Lord. Because death could not hold Christ, nor could those who are "in Christ" hold you. Blessed be the Lord of life!

With this perspective upon death, as a defeated enemy, in the face of which life has triumphed, the Christian must continue to work diligently for the kingdom of God so that if the body rises then the labour of advancing the gospel is not in vain. Through this last statement, the apostle shows that the reward of believers will take place in the new body, acquired after the resurrection, and the reward will be in accordance with the level reached by the believer at the time of death. From this we can deduce a continuity in the eternal knowledge of God. An infinite God will be revealed throughout eternity. This fact implies the continuation in the new body of the knowledge of the divine nature, this from the level of the knowledge to which the believer was at the moment of the physical death. Thus, by changing the nature of the body after the resurrection, we do not mean an infusion of equal knowledge for all believers. But the changed nature of the human body has to do with accessibility to the divine nature. By sin human nature is epistemologically limited, but by resurrection the epistemological access is full, but the epistemological process is one that will continue for eternity.

Conclusions

One of the problems that fuelled the fractional spirit in the Corinthian church was the misunderstanding of the resurrection of the dead, because some of the Corinthian Christians denied the resurrection of the dead. In order to solve this problem, the apostle first of all establishes the central and common element of Christianity – Christ risen from the dead. And then, in his argument, Paul presents the absurd implications of denying the resurrection of the dead, and then offers the significance of Christ's resurrection, which is a guarantee that believers will be resurrected. The practical arguments for the resurrection of the apostle Paul relate to his sacrifice for the cause of the gospel. And in the final part of his argument, the apostle presents the nature of the resurrected body and the need to transform the corruptible body into an incorruptible body adapted to the conditions of heavenly existence. We notice, then, that the way in which the apostle combats the factional element manifested in the Corinthian Church and through doctrinal issues and the way in which he seeks to restore unity in the church is through the assertion of true sound teaching. If under the influence of pagan teachings, some Corinthian Christians have been denying the bodily resurrection of the dead, and this teaching has divided the church and threatened its identity, the apostle restores unity by providing authentic teaching. Therefore, we will say that the doctrine, or sound, biblical teaching, also has this very important role, namely, the role of producing unity within the church.

Appendix I

The Structure of Deliberative Rhetorical Discourses Specific to the Apostle Paul's Times

Exordium – the introductory part with the role of capturing the public's attention for what is to be transmitted.

Narratio – explains the nature of the topic approached.

Partitio or propositio – follows the *narratio* or is included in this part and has the role of making known the hypotheses of the speaker and maybe those of the opponent.

Probatio – comes with arguments that support the speaker's hypothesis

Refutatio – often included in *probatio* is the part where the opponent's arguments are dismantled and disqualified.

Peroratio – resumes the main ideas of *probatio* trying to change the emotions of the audience in favor of the speaker's point of view by amplifying what had been said before.

Appendix 2

The Rhetorical Structure of 1 Corinthians

Naratio – 1:10-17, v.10 the basis for the whole epistle. The facts are presented (division)

Probatio 1:18-15:57, Evidence (presented in 4 sections)

Section 1 – 1:18-4:21. This is the analysis made by the apostle Paul to the Corinthians and presents concepts such as speech, wisdom, and knowledge. Any form of self-praise of the Corinthians is rejected.

Section 2 – 5:1-11:1. Paul addresses specific issues that divide and emphasize the need for unity. These issues are: sexual immorality, legal cases, problems related to marriage, idolatry and idolatry. Paul sets an example to follow in order to achieve unity.

Section 3 – 11:2-14:40. Manifestations of the factional spirit are discussed in public meetings: manifestations in worship, the manifestation of spiritual gifts. Head. 13, presents love as the only binder that produces unity, an antidote to the fractional spirit.

Section 4 – 15:1-57. The subject of the resurrection from the dead is addressed, which, misunderstood, contributes to the present division in Corinth.

Peroratio 15:58. call to unity. Chapter 16 presents the conclusion of the epistle, resuming the idea of unity.

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