

PAULINE APPEALS TO HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

W. Harold Mare, Ph.D.*

Modern theologians have expressed varying views regarding faith and history, such as that of Oscar Cullmann of the Heilsgeschichte School who maintains that authentic Christian faith is not possible without belief in the historical fact that Jesus regarded himself as Messiah¹ and Bultmann² and the Bultmannians who deprive faith of any ground in the historical Jesus and center it in the kerygmatic Christ.³

From an evangelical viewpoint we maintain that God has worked through objective, verifiable events in history and has given men objective, verifiable meaning and interpretation of those events⁴ and that such events and their meaning have been given to us in authoritative, inerrant Scripture all of which is appropriated by a reasonable saving faith.

Thus in discussing Pauline Appeals to Historical Evidence, we begin with the following presuppositions: (1) it is logical that God, as a rational personal being, in creating man, also a rational being, would communicate with, and reveal Himself and His plans to, His created, rational being in a verbalized intelligent way and that His verbalized communication would be written and fully truthful;⁵ (2) this written communication of history and doctrine, that is, the Bible, is verbally inspired and inerrant in the original manuscripts, among other things, because of the nature and testimony of the Scripture itself (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21; 2 Peter 3:16); (3) to these propositions our Christian faith is in agreement, a faith which is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8); and (4) a part of this history and doctrine of the Bible is that written by, or quoted or summarized from, the Apostle Paul.

In examining the preaching and teaching of Paul as exemplified particularly in Acts 17 and also in 1 Corinthians 15, we will take into consideration the *sitz im leben* (i.e., "situation in life") presented by the author in which this kerygma is found.

*Professor of New Testament Language and Literature, Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri

1. Carl F. H. Henry, ed., *Jesus of Nazareth: Saviour and Lord* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), p. 17.
2. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. II (New York: Scribner, 1955), pp. 75ff.
3. Henry, *Ibid.*
4. Althaus has commented that preaching (kerygma) includes two inseparable parts in its content: a witness to events in human history in place and time; and a witness to the significance and meaning of these events for salvation and judgment. (Paul Althaus, "Fact and Faith in the Kerygma," in Henry, *Jesus of Nazareth*, (p. 207.)
5. See Gordon H. Clark, *Karl Barth's Theological Method* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co., 1963), pp. 224, 225.

It is our proposition that Paul as an independent apostle (Galatians 1, 2) and not necessarily bound to the traditions of the New Testament Jewish Church (compare the problem of circumcision, Acts 15:5), although he gladly worked within the framework of it (Acts 15:25 presented clearly and objectively salient, historical evidences concerning objective, verifiable events and objective, verifiable interpretation of those events, which events concern the Gospel message of God's work and salvation in Jesus Christ, all of this Pauline message correctly answering to the *sitz im leben*, the demands of the geographical situations to which the message refers and in which it is given.

The Sermon and Historical Situation of Acts 17:16-34.

The Sitz im Leben

Our first concern is for the life setting for the historical appeals of the sermon to the Athenians. It is to be noted that the material in Acts 17:16-34 presumably comes to Luke, the author of Acts,^{5a} second hand through Paul, since Luke seems to have been left at Philippi where the "we" material stops (Acts 16:16). This material would include both Paul's sermon and the historical background, but we can be certain that following his policy of careful investigation (Luke 1:1-4) as attested by his accuracy concerning such historical situations as the death of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12) and the proconsulship of Gallio over Achaia (Acts 18), Luke was certain of his historical facts. Presumably being a Gentile, and possibly a Greek (his stay at Philippi, Acts 16:16 and 20:5), Luke himself may have had some first-hand knowledge of Athens.

Athens, one of the chief cities of ancient Greece, whose foundations went back into the Neolithic Age (before 3,000 B.C.)⁶ and which was so prominent in world affairs in the Classical Greek period, was a city filled with evidences of Greek polytheistic objects of worship in the days when Paul visited it about 51 A.D. (Acts 17:16-34), spent some time going through it (*διερχόμενος*),⁷ and examining carefully (*ἀναθεωρῶν*)⁸ the religious objects, whether statues and temples of gods or memorials of men.

Presumably Paul took the same general tour as did Pausanias about a century later⁹ and saw most of that which Pausanias describes, all of which included (as he traveled in a northeasterly direction toward the agora and the Acropolis) the Dipylon Gate, the agora with its temples of

5a. See F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953).

6. J. Finegan, "Athens" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. I (N. Y.: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 307.

7. A word which with the present tense action and use of *διὰ* emphasizes a thorough continual journey through an area. Compare its use in Acts 13:6 (through the island of Cyprus), Acts 19:1 (through Galatia and Phrygia), and Acts 20:2 (through Macedonia).

8. The present participle with the prefix, *ἀνά*, stresses viewing again and again, that is, a careful observing (of a number of objects)

9. See Pausanias, *Description of Greece*.

Hephaistos and Ares, the stoas of Zeus and Attalos, and the Altar of the Twelve Gods, the Areopagus, (as he traveled to higher ground), the caves of Apollo, Zeus and Pan (on the north slopes of the Acropolis), the Acropolis with its temples of Athena Nike, Parthenon, Erechtheion and Rome, and the great altar of Athena, below which to the south was the Theater of Dionysos and to the east the temple of Zeus Olympios and shrines of many other gods.¹⁰

The extent of Paul's ministry at Athens covered three major areas, the synagogue, the market place,¹¹ and the Areopagus, and four groups of people: in the synagogue, the Jews, and the "God-fearers" (Acts 17:17), those who espoused Jewish monotheism but fell short of circumcision; and in the agora, the visitors to the area as a whole (πρὸς τοὺς παραιτυχάνοντας), and the philosopher class in particular. This latter group is singled out (τινὲς δὲ) because mention of it gave occasion to elaborate on what seems to be Paul's most significant discussion in Athens with men of this group on a subject about which he had been elaborating at considerable length εὐηγγελίζετο, imperfect, descriptive action)¹² before all, that is, on *the* Jesus and *the* resurrection (τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν), and in connection with which they thought he was introducing a strange deity¹³ and a more strange activity, a resurrection from the dead (Acts 17:18).¹⁴

The Epicureans steeped in the philosophy that the gods, materialistic in nature, lived in eternal calm, far removed from, and unconcerned for, men and that pleasure (ἡδονή) was the chief goal of man, and the Stoics, thinking that God pantheistically is the World-soul of which man is a part and that virtue (ἀρετή) was the only good and man governed by reason was to live consistently, with pride and self-sufficiency, in moral earnestness,¹⁵ these were the ones particularly struck by this new doctrine, and they spent some time conversing with him (συνέβαλλον, imperfect, progressive) about the subject. Paul's sermon certainly fits the

10. For further details see W. A. McDonald, "Archaeology and St. Paul's Journeys in Greek Lands: Part II, Athens," IV, 1 (1941), pp. 1-10, and Oscar Broneer, "Athens, City of Idol Worship," XXI, 1 (1958), pp. 2-28 both in *The Biblical Archaeologist*.

11. That the synagogue evidently was not located within the agora is seen in Luke's separating the two by separate ἐν phrases. Compare W. A. McDonald, "Archaeology and St. Paul's Journeys in Greek Lands: Part II, Athens," B. A. IV, 1 (1941), p. 3.

12. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), p. 883.

13. They associated Paul's ideas with "strange" which were thought of sometimes in Greek writings as divine Powers (Hdt 5:87) or inferior divine beings (X. *Mem.* I, 1, 2; Pl. *Ap.* 24c).

14. See also Acts 17:31. More shall be said about this matter below. It is possible that they understood ἡ ἀνάστασις with its feminine article as a separate divinity from ὁ Ἰησοῦς. In support of this it is to be noted that Greeks sometimes had religious cults connected with abstract ideas. See W. H. Mare, *A Study of the Greek Βωμός in Classical Greek Literature*, a Ph.D. dissertation in Classical Studies for the University of Pennsylvania, 1962), pp. 118-121.

15. See F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 332; F. W. Beare, "Epicureans" and "Stoics," in Vols. II and IV respectively of *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*.

sitz im leben here as, taking up relevant points, he presents deity in a far different light from that with which they were familiar.

The agora (17:17), the market place, was the common center of Athenian public life, located on the Panathenaic Way from the Dipylon Gate to the Acropolis. Luke's depiction of Paul's activity there in the first century A.D. fits the archaeological and literary evidence of the times.¹⁶

Concerning Paul's appearance at the Areopagus (Acts 17:19), the text can be taken to mean that the Apostle was brought up to the Hill of Ares (ὁ Ἄρειος λόγος), or brought before the Council which met on the hill. The latter view is preferable, inasmuch as in Roman times the Areopagus Council had supervision over religious education and visiting lecturers,¹⁷ it, therefore, being logical for Paul to appear before such a council meeting on the hill, being almost forcibly brought before it (17:19, ἐπιλαβόμενοι)¹⁸ rather than for him to speak to an unorganized group at the place. That (ἐπὶ) with the accusative means here "before, in the presence of" (Hdt. 3.156, Matt. 10:18) agrees with the picture (17:22) of Paul standing in the middle of (ἐν μέσῳ), not on, the Areopagus and then going out, not from the hill, but from them (ἐκ μέσου αὐτῶν, 17:33), Dionysios, the Areopagite (17:34) being a member of this group.

The accurate explanation in Acts 17:21 regarding the curiosity of the Athenian people is borne out in ancient Greek literature.¹⁹

Into the middle of this historical situation of the first century A.D. came the Apostle Paul, his activity and preaching (kerygma) there being a direct result of two important facts: on the one hand, the death and resurrection of Christ (compare Acts 17:18), the impact of which came to him as a result of the historical appearance of Jesus to him a few years before (Acts 26:19-23); and on the other hand, the disconcerting historical situation παρωξύνετο, Acts 17:16) of the total commitment of Athens to idolatry, even the philosophers, along with men of other viewpoints, despite their doubts, being willing to endure and to participate in, the outward forms of the religion of the state.

Sermonic Appeals to Historically Meaningful Words and Ideas

Paul in his sermon employs a number of words which referred to situations which were meaningful to his first century A.D. Athenian audience and were, and are, historically verifiable from physical remains and from other literature. There is no record of their correcting or criti-

16. See the references to Athens above.

17. W. R. Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953 (1911), pp. 101-105; Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 333; Thalheim in Pauly-Wissowa, *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, II, 1896 (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1894-) pp. 627ff.

18. On ἐπιλαμβάνω as "take hold of," "grasp," compare Matt. 14:31; Acts 21:30; 21:33.

19. See Thuc. iii, 38, 5 and Demosthenes, Phil. 1, 10

cizing the Apostle for his presenting false information about their culture or handling facts involving their background inadequately. Their objection is to the resurrection which one would think Luke (and Paul from whom he got the information) might have suppressed if it were his purpose to give a positive presentation only.

Paul, first of all, comments about their religious nature, using a word, (δεδωδαίμων) which could be taken in a negative sense as "superstitious," or positively as "religious."²⁰ the latter idea fitting the situation,²¹ since the Athenians, of course, could see for themselves their σεβασματα, or, objects of worship (temples, altars, and statues to which Paul also refers in verses 23, 24 and 29).

The altar alluded to by Paul (17:23), a βωός the ordinary word used as the object upon which heathen sacrifices were offered and therefore not used elsewhere in the New Testament, which shown by an inscription, presumably inscribed some time earlier²² and with which the Athenians were obviously acquainted, was dedicated to an unknown god, has not been found in the agora at Athens,²³ but literary evidence bears out the fact that there were such altars in the city.²⁴

The term, κύριος, Lord, used in 17:24 of God was meaningful at this time to the Athenians, for this term applied in honor of deified rulers²⁵ was being so designated by the time of Claudius,²⁶ also possibly being used of Nero in Acts 25:26.

An arresting thought over which the philosophers at Athens were called to ponder was that quoted by Paul from one of their Greek Stoic third century B.C. poets, Aratus.²⁷ Paul's application to the living God must have sounded strange to their ears. Then, too, the idiomatic touch in the reference to τὸ θεῖον, divine being or "divinity," used in such authors as Thucydides (5, 70); Plato (*Phaedr.*, p. 242 c), and Polybius (31, 15, 7) must have rung true in the ears of the Athenians, further verifying to them that Paul had some accurate knowledge of native Greek, linguistic usage.

These distinctive words and phrases in Paul's sermon with their implication of being rooted in objective history whether present or past

20. For the meaning, "religious," compare X. *Cyr.* 3, 3, 58; Aristot. *Pol.* 5, 11, p. 1315a 1.

21. Archaeological work in Athens bears testimony to this. See H. R. Willoughby, "Archaeology and Christian Beginnings," *Biblical Archaeologist* II, 3 (1939), p. 33.

22. The pluperfect, ἐπεγέγραπτο.

23. Oscar Broneer, "Athens," *op. cit.*, B.A. XXI, 1 (1958), p. 20.

24. Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll. Tyan.* vi, 3, 5; Pausanias i, I, 4.

25. A. Deissmann, *Light From the Ancient East*. tr. L. R. M. Strachan (Grand Rapids: Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 356.

26. P. Oxy. 37, 6; Ostraka II, 1038, 6; see W. F. Arndt & F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: U. of Chic. Press, 1957), "κύριος".

27. Aratus, *Phainomena* 5, τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν; Cleanthes, *Hymn to Zeus*, has a similar phrase, ἐκ σοῦ γὰρ γένος ἐσμέν. Bruce comments, "The Zeus of these Stoic poets is course the λόγος, or world-principle, which animates all things." (Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 338).

being accepted, according to Luke's record, by the Athenian hearers as properly historically oriented and objectively verifiable from the physical evidence at hand as well as by written Greek record, argue for the historical validity and verifiability of the rest of Paul's message.

Sermonic Appeals to Historical Evidence of the Christian God and Gospel

In addition to the historically meaningful words and concepts just examined, Paul in his sermon presents very clearly historical evidence for the Christian God. He makes the transition from the unknown god of impersonal, pantheistic essence (the neuter, ὁ . . . τοῦτο, 17:23), which these philosophers considered in their system of thought, very clearly to the personal God ὁ θεός, masculine, 17:24).

This Christian God Paul sets forth as acting historically in time²⁸ and space, as He is presented as having worked in this world in the time past (ὁ ποιήσας,) v. 24 and (ἐποίησεν, v. 26) and having determined to overlook²⁹ the times of man's ignorance³⁰ in the past (χρόνους, v. 30), times, when men knew God but glorified Him not as God nor retained Him in their knowledge (Rom. 1:21, 28). He is also, says Paul, the God who works and acts in the present time, for the Athenians must understand that this God in His currently existing (ὑπάρχοντα, v. 27) and acting (ἀπαγγέλλει, v. 30) does so without being served by anyone (θεραπεύεται, v. 25), but is ever giving to men's needs (διδούς, v. 25), all of these finite verbs and participles expressing by their present tense descriptive, continuous time activity.³¹ But the Apostle goes on to state that the Christian God will operate in the future in history according to His plan,³² μέλλει, v. 31).

But Paul who presents his God as God acting in the world in the historic past, present, and future goes on to give theological meaning and interpretation to this activity which He has exhibited in time and space.

First of all he describes the characteristics of the Christian God as He acts in relationship to His universe generally, depicting Him as a personal being (ὁ θεός, v. 24) who in the past created not only the universe (τὸν κόσμον)³³ but all which is contained in it, and ever exist-

28. For a discussion of God in relation to time, see Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, tr. by F. V. Filson, rev. ed. (Phila: Westminster Press, 1964), pp. 49-55, 69-80; also J. O. Buswell, Jr. *A Systematic Theology of The Christian Religion* Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), pp. 36-47.

29. God did not "disregard" or "wink at" (as some translations have it) but rather "overlooked" man's sin, ὑπεροράω, in the sense of delaying punishment; for in the next phrase man is warned to repent in the light of a coming judgment.

30. This ignorance in putting idols and other concepts in the place of God.

31. Or, possibly present, gnomic time, meaning that the statement is true of God, at whatever time He works and acts in history. Robertson, *op. cit.*, pp. 879, 866.

32. Which was quite contrary to the tenets of Epicureanism which held that no purpose or design, unconscious or deliberate, governs the world. Beare, *op. cit.*, "Epicureans."

33. κόσμος is to be taken as "universe" here in the light of the reference to heaven and earth in the next phrase.

ing as sovereign (*ὑπάρχων Κύριος*)³⁴ over His whole creation, He is the infinite, transcendent³⁵ God, not being, or able to be, contained in any temple (v. 24) such as abounded in Athens. Furthermore, Paul's God is self-sufficient in not needing to be served nor assisted day by day (*θεραπεύεται*), as were the gods of the Athenians, as though He were a finite creature in constant need (*προσδεόμενος*) of something (v. 25). In contrast, the Christian God is a God of providence, providing continually (*διδούς*) for all of the creation's need: life, breath and everything (*τὰ πάντα*)(v. 25).

This brings Paul to discuss God's personal, historical, communicative relationship with His special creation, man, as he instructs the Athenians that the important part in creation was God's historically producing all mankind from one man (*ἐξ ἑνός*) with a two-fold purpose that he dwell on the earth (*κατοικεῖν*) according to God's ordained time (*καιρός*) and place (*τὰς ὁροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας*), and, more important, that in his inhabiting the earth he be seeking (*ζητεῖν*) God (*τὸν θεόν*),³⁶ the true God, this being possible³⁷ in the present time, for God exists (*ὑπάρχοντα*) imminently near at hand (v. 27).

Paul now faces his audience with the fact that the Christian God is of their kind (of being) since it is possible to seek and, it is assumed, have communication with, Him who, although separate from His creation (vvs. 24, 26), is imminently near, being far different from the Stoic World-soul and the Epicurean ethereal gods, and to emphasize the contrast, Paul quotes one of the philosophical Stoic poets, Aratus, regarding the nearness of deity,³⁸ removing the quotation from its Stoic framework and placing the thought within the context of a personal, living God (*ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν κινούμεθα ἐσόμεν*, v. 28).

From the historical facts of God's creation and involvement in the lives of men, Paul draws the logical conclusion that, existing as personal, rational beings—as God's kind hand—they should not conceive of deity (*τὸ θεῖον*),⁴⁰ the Creator, as being of another kind, that is, an idol, impotent, localized, inanimate and non-personal, the very creation of man (v. 29).

34. *ὑπάρχω* which can mean "be," as an equivalent of *εἶμι*, surely is to be taken as "exist" here. See Arndt & Gingrich, *op. cit.*, "*ὑπάρχω*"

35. Observe the contrast between God who does not dwell (*κατοικεῖ*) as a localized resident in earthly human temples (v. 24) and man created to dwell *κατοικεῖν* on this earthly sphere (v. 26).

36. Wherever in the sermon Paul refers to the Christian God, he uses the article: verses 24, 26, 29, 30. Contrast the anathrous, *ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ*.

37. The uncertainty of depraved man's finding God is suggested by the clause, *εἰ ἄρα ψηλαφήσειαν εὕροιν*. Robertson (*op. cit.*, pp. 1020, 1021) describes this usage of *εὕροιν* with the optative as the remote class of determination.

38. Verse 28b. *γένος* here is best taken as "kind."

39. It is preferable to take *ἐν αὐτῷ* as causal, "by Him," in the light of Paul's argument of a personal God operating independently of His creation. This phrase in v. 28a may in part be a question from another author. See Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

40. See above for discussion of this word.

On the contrary, although men have conceived of God in this way, the Athenians are instructed that the Creator in mercy now makes the proclamation (ἀπαγγέλλει) ⁴¹ that men everywhere should repent of such idolatry and disobedience (v. 30), since, being just, He will judge at His appointed day the inhabited world (τὴν οἰκουμένην) that is, all mankind (v. 31).

At this point Paul speaks of a man, God's man (ἐν ἀνδρί, v. 31) whom the Athenians, from Paul's earlier conversations in the agora, surely understood to be *the Jesus* (17:18). To Paul the crucial saving act of God in relationship to mankind was accomplished through a man, *the Jesus* of Acts 17:18. That Paul uses ἀνὴρ in the place of the Jewish υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου of the Old Testament, Daniel 7:13 and the New Testament, Matt. 24:27 ff, etc.) is appropriate to the Athenian *sitz im leben*, for the non-Jewish audience would not comprehend the latter phrase whereas they would readily understand ἀνὴρ.⁴²

That Paul had been preaching (εὐηγγελίζετο) to the Athenian crowds the Jesus (τὸν Ἰησοῦν), ⁴³ as an important topic in addition to *the resurrection*,⁴⁴ supposes that he may have expounded on certain of the historical facts about His life which are not specified in Luke's account here. Elsewhere, in Acts (chapter 13) Paul before the synagogue does tell that Jesus was born of David's seed (v. 23), that John the Baptist who preceded Him held Him in high esteem (vvs. 24, 25), and that the rulers and the people could find no fault in Him (v. 28). Similarly, in Acts 17:31, the righteous life of Jesus is alluded to, for it is His righteousness which is to be the perfect standard by which the world is judged (ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ ἐν ἀνδρί). After alluding briefly to the life of the historical Jesus⁴⁵ with emphasis upon His righteousness (compare 2 Cor. 5:21), Paul, no doubt having made a statement about His death which is to be implied from the whole context as well as from Pauline practice elsewhere (compare Gal. 2:20), emphasizes His resurrection which he had discussed earlier (17:18), making the force of it more telling by stating that it was the God

41. ἀπαγγέλλω is not "command," but "tell," "proclaim," or "declare." God does not command *all* men to repent; by His Spirit He enables men to repent.

42. See Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 340.

43. Luke uses the article with Ἰησοῦς (in addition to uses with it in cases where the demonstrative, prepositional phrases and other names in compound are used) a number of times in Acts when the human Jesus of Christianity who has been, or is under, discussion in the described situation is being presented primarily in public non-Christian gatherings, as before the Jerusalem Jews and Sanhedrin (Acts 4:18; 5:40), in the Damascus synagogues (9:20), and before the Jewish exorcists at Ephesus (Acts 19:13, 15), besides the use here.

44. Observe the separate article, feminine in gender, τὴν ἀνάστασιν. It may be for this reason that the Athenians thought Paul was presenting twin deities. Sometimes Greeks took words indicating abstractions and personified them as gods in cult practices. See Mare, *op. cit.*, pp. 118 ff.

45. Although the actual sermon was presumably longer than that which we have recorded for us, details about the life of Jesus about whom they were ignorant would have gone unappreciated by the Athenians.

of creation, to whom he had introduced them, who acted in history in raising Jesus from the midst of dead men. God's historical act in resurrection in relation to this man is His pledge (πίστιν) that there will be an historical event for men in the future, namely, the judgment day (v. 31).

Part of the test of the validity of this historical testimony regarding the man, Jesus, and especially His resurrection about which Paul was attempting to convince the Athenians is the record of scepticism set forth by Luke (οἱ μὲν ἐγχεύοντες, 17:32). The question may legitimately be asked as to why Luke injects this incredulity into his story, if there were not real opposition to the real message of a factual supernatural resurrection of Jesus which Paul was proclaiming.⁴⁶

On the other hand, Luke presents the fact that these same events and their interpretation faithfully proclaimed are appropriated through saving faith (cf. Eph. 2:8), as he records that some joined themselves (κολληθέντες) to Paul and believed, implying that they became part of the Christian church.⁴⁷

The Setting and Message of 1 Corinthians 15.

Time will permit only a brief handling of some important points of 1 Corinthians 15, with observation of Paul's approach here in comparison with that set forth in Acts 17.

The *sitz im leben* of the Corinthians in respect to the subject of resurrection was, no doubt, to some extent, the same as that of the Athenians on the same subject. It is true that Paul is talking to Corinthians who have professed faith in Christ and who are a part of the local church. Nevertheless it is to be remembered that, although in the first century A.D. they were a part of the culture of a Roman colony, many of them being Greeks (Acts 18) undoubtedly had influences exerted on them from their current as well as ancient Greek culture⁴⁸ with its pagan religious viewpoints (observe the Greek temperament exhibiting itself in 1 Corinthians 1),⁴⁹ and some of them may well have been offended at the doctrine of the resurrection as were the Athenians (Acts 17:32).⁵⁰

At any rate, in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul appeals to the historically valid resurrection (as he had done at Athens, although with a different approach), the evidences for which he had received primarily from the Lord Himself (Acts 9, Galatians 1, and 1 Corinthians 15:8) and introduces also other witnesses besides himself who had received appearances of Christ (15:5-7). Following in general the same set of events involving divine activity as set forth in Acts 17, Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 appeals

46. As a matter of fact Paul had already injected the supernatural into his sermon when he stated that God had created the world and men.

47. The pattern seems similar to that of the disciples associating themselves with Jesus, only the word for discipleship is changed, κολλᾶω instead of μαθητεύω.

48. See Oscar Broneer, "Corinth," *Biblical Archaeologist*, XIV, 4 (1951), pp. 78-96.

49. See C. T. Craig and J. Short, *1 Corinthians*, in *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. X (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), pp. 20-21.

50. Craig and Short, *op. cit.*, pp. 214-215.

not only to the historical resurrection of Christ but also to His righteous life (for only thus could He die in behalf of (ὑπὲρ) our sins (15:3) (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21), to the historic death of Christ (to which even a secular author bears witness),⁵¹ and to the historical acts of Christ in the future when the redemption of the body and victory over sin and rebellion of men will be achieved (15:23 ff.), which future events Paul roots in history by relating them in the context to God's activity in history in original creation (alluded to in 15:38) and in the creation of man (15:45) who fell (15:21, 22) to which person and event the historical Christ is compared as the second Adam (15:22, 45; cf. Rom. 5:12-21). All of these events are considered by Paul to be of equal historical importance as evidenced by the sentence structure of 15:3ff.,⁵² and in the case of two of the events (the death for sin and the resurrection, 15:3, 4) Paul feels called upon to appeal for further verification to the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Conclusion

It is seen that Paul's message and actions, as well as those of Luke who records words and actions of the Apostle, are, among other things, directed to, and based upon, the historicity of the events which he describes and interprets, which events involve a supernatural God working in creation, in the life, death and resurrection of Christ and in the future, which activities can be meaningfully related to men in an historical situation whether they live in Athens at one time or in Corinth at another, and which events and their interpretation, from the time of their recording in the original autographs, have been transmitted to us by a text that is shown, as we have demonstrated, to be verbally accurate in describing that which is required by the *sitz im leben*.

As a key to Paul's understanding that there is a historically valid relationship between historical events, preaching, and faith, it is to be observed that in 1 Corinthians 15:14ff. the Apostle asserts that Christ risen from the dead (15:20), the objective result of which event he presents in the verb as continuing to be true (ἐγγίγνεται), gives meaningful content (the opposite of κενὸν ἄρα, 15:14) both to his historically verified kerygma (τὸ κήρυγμα ἡμῶν, 15:14) as well as to their Christian faith and experience (ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν). Without these objectively verified facts, and meaningful preaching and Christian faith based upon them, Paul states that two other situations become true: men who have therefore believed falsely in Christ are yet in sin; and the dead in Christ have already perished (ἀπώλοντο, 15:18).

51. Tacitus, *Annals* XV, 44.

52. Observe the four paratactically connected δὲ clauses with indicative punctiliar aorist verbs in the case of three clauses and a punctiliar—durative perfect (ἐγγίγνεται, 15:4) in the fourth, the last verb being repeated in the same tense six other times (15:12, 13, 14, 16, 17 and 20) in which cases the conditional clauses for the sake of argument are assumed to be factually true (εἰ with the indicative), with the climax being reached in 15:20 with the clause, νυνὶ (emphatic)

53. Observe the article; it is *the* Christian faith. δὲ Χριστὸς ἐγγίγνεται ἐκ νεκρῶν.