

Attaining the Resurrection of the Dead

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Christ's resurrection was a momentous event. It means that Christians have a savior who is alive today. Islam follows the teachings of a dead prophet, Judaism speaks of the future coming of a Messiah, but Christians worship a living, ever-present savior, who continues his work of salvation for us and in us.

Christ's resurrection also reminds us that we find life's true meaning in him—in who he is, in what he did, and in who we are in relation to him. So, what is your primary hope for the future? And how does that hope affect your life today?

The apostle Paul answered this question for himself. His primary hope was to attain the resurrection of the dead (Phil. 3:11, 21). This hope affected his life: his goal was to know Christ more deeply, to know the power of Christ's resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings. In this way, he could be sure he would attain to the resurrection of the dead.

Paul's hope was that in the last day Christ would raise his dead body. Of course, Christ will raise the dead body of every human—some to honor, and some to dishonor (John 5:29). Paul was not merely waiting for this event but desired that his body be raised unto honor and glory, resembling Christ's glorious body (v. 21). He awaited the day when Christ will cause his decomposed body to exist again and renew that body, so that sin's effects are completely removed.

Every child of God must make Paul's hope their own. This hope leads us to confess that Christ will return—a confession that distinguishes Christian young people from unbelieving young people. Christ is coming again? He will raise my dead body? I will live in heaven forever? Unbelievers scoff at these ideas. Christians believe them and find them to be their hope.

To have this hope is, in a certain sense, to be dissatisfied with our present life. Note that I did not say "discontent;" by God's grace, we are content with our persons, gifts, circumstances, and positions in life. But we realize that this life will never provide the deepest joys that we will have in heaven, and we long to be there!

Is this your ultimate hope? With this ultimate hope, a Christian young person still makes plans to marry, go to college, or get a job in a certain field; but after we attain those earthly goals, we still have a higher hope yet! Or, if we never attain our earthly goals, we still have the hope that our bodies will be raised! In distinction from all earthly hopes, this hope is certain, being based on the work of Christ in his death and resurrection.

The certainty of this hope follows from our knowledge of the power of Christ's resurrection. For Jesus arose: "the third day he rose again from the dead!" Christ's resurrection was God's word saying that Christ's work on the cross was finished and complete. Also, Christ arose in order to continue his mediatorial work. Because we continue to sin, we need a mediator through whom we can ask God's forgiveness, and who can assure us that forgiveness and all the blessings of salvation are ours. Because Islam and Judaism do not view their savior as a covenant mediator, they need not speak of a living savior. But if the Christian faith is true, our Mediator must live to continue his work!

Paul's point is not to defend the *fact* of Christ's resurrection, but to emphasize its *power*

for us. Christ arose as our Head, representing *us*. God declared him righteous *as our substitute*. Christ earned righteousness for me and arose to bestow all spiritual blessings on me. That is the power of his resurrection.

Already now we experience this power in our souls. By regeneration, our souls have been raised to a new, heavenly life. Young people, confess this: “I am righteous before God in Christ *now*, and I have the power to live a godly life *now*.”

The certainty of this hope also follows from knowing the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings. Paul moves backward from speaking of Christ’s resurrection to speaking of his sufferings. He who *arose for us* also *suffered for us*!

Because we cannot bear God’s wrath, and because we need add nothing to Christ’s atoning sufferings, the term “fellowship of his sufferings” (Phil. 3:10) does not refer to these. Rather, it refers to the benefits of his death for me. Christ so really represented me, that when he died on the cross, my sins were borne, my old man was crucified with him (Rom. 6:6, Gal. 2:20), and the corruption of my nature was destroyed in principle.

If Christ already took away our sins and has begun to work in us his benefits by regenerating us, he will certainly finish that work by raising our dead bodies (Phil. 3:11)!

The apostle *lived* his hope; we must also. His hope led him to reject all confidence in himself that he might know Christ the more (Phil. 3:4–9). As a Pharisee, Paul had been taught to trust in his position, his works, his zeal. He learned to renounce this trust, even esteeming his works “but dung,” (Phil. 3:8) in order to see that his salvation is in Christ alone. Have you a gift of which you are proud? Does some circumstance make you prominent? None of this will help us attain the resurrection of the dead. We must renounce ourselves, our works, and our gifts, and make our relationship with God in Christ the most important in our life. Our desire to attain the resurrection will show itself in our desire to grow in faith, in knowing the Scriptures, in using the means of grace, and in our fellowship with godly believers.

Paul also expressed his hope by living as though he was in heaven (Phil. 3:20). We are not yet in heaven, and we cannot live sinlessly on earth. But to live now as though heaven is already our home is to express that we hope for the resurrection of the dead.

We also express our hope by following godly rather than ungodly men (Phil. 3:17). Whom are you following? Politicians? Sports heroes? Unbelieving men and women of the world? To follow them is to live as though our hopes are earthly if they are not living with a view to the resurrection! Let us follow godly men and women; ultimately, let us follow Christ.

Expressing our hope in these ways, we will busy ourselves carrying out our God-given callings. We will do our schoolwork, to God’s glory. We will earn money at jobs, but not because the love of money motivates us. We will encourage each other in godliness. We will hate and flee sin and strive to live in obedience to God’s law. We will do these things, not in order to attain to the resurrection of the dead, but to express our hope that our bodies will rise!

Are you living your hope?

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