

The Power of His Resurrection

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. **Phil 3:8-14**

Introduction

So many commentators fail to understand what Paul is getting at in this passage. It behoves us to look at this very carefully and try to see what Paul is affirming. Indeed, I find it sad that many eminent and godly commentators fail to discern Paul's entire point.

What it is not teaching is that Paul doubted his salvation and was struggling to hope that he would be resurrected at the end. In fact it is nothing to do with the last day at all; it is about sanctification.

Paul's Assurance

We must first establish that Paul had assurance of salvation and resurrection; indeed it must be so since he taught about the importance of a believer being assured. We could turn to many passages but these will suffice.

Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. **Rm 5:2**

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father'. **Rm 8:15**

Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. **1 Cor 9:26**

By one Spirit we were all baptised into one body. **1 Cor 12:13**

Through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. **Eph 2:18**

Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. **Eph 3:11-12**

I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. **2 Tim 1:12**

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. **2 Tim 4:7**

There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.
2 Tim 4:8

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. **Heb 10:22 [I take Paul to be the writer.]**

There is no doubt whatsoever that Paul was assured of salvation; indeed, not only of salvation but also of his own reward for faithful service.

Thus most commentators cannot be correct in their interpretation.

What is the context?

It is about pressing on and being more and more like Jesus, not trusting in human achievements (Phil 3:4-8) or strength (Phil 1:19). It is about working out your own salvation with the power that God gives (Phil 2:12-13). It is about being lowly and humble like Jesus (Phil 2:3-5).

It is about our conduct being worthy of Christ (Phil 1:27). It is about the good work that God has begun in our lives, something that he will also finish (Phil 1:6). In short it is about Christ being magnified in our bodies (Phil 1:20).

This is the key to this passage – Christ being magnified in our body.

According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. **Phil 1:20**

Paul is actually dealing with the doctrinal subject of sanctification but dealing with it in a devotional and practical manner, not theologically.

He does this with all the empathy and compassion that is due to being towards the end of his life and having time to reflect since he was bound in prison at the time of writing.

Paul is concerned with our understanding of dying with Christ and being raised with Christ, putting on Christ, which he also talks about in the other prison letters, Ephesians and Colossians, but there he talks more theologically and practically.¹ He has also taught about this theologically years before:

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfil its* lusts. **Rm 13:14**

As many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. **Gal 3:27-28**

In Philippians he explains this from the viewpoint of resurrection; that is the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹ Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-12.

What is Paul teaching?

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection

This is not a reference to experiencing the resurrection that comes after the Second Coming of the Lord. It is not about the general resurrection at all. It is not connected to salvation but to sanctification. I will explain this in a moment.

The goal of true Christians that know Christ is to experience the power of his resurrection. Now believers do experience this in seed form when they are regenerated and receive eternal life, but Paul is talking about the consummation, the end goal of this new life. This is the power that comes from the risen, exalted and glorified Christ in heaven.

This power is evident in that we have been raised together with Christ (Col 3:1) and made alive together with Christ (Eph 2:5-6). Now Paul wants to know the resurrection power of Christ in heaven even more in sanctification.

And the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death

This is equivalent to the putting off of the old man / nature in Ephesians and Colossians. Being conformed to Christ's death is the process of mortification.

Sufferings are vital in this enterprise as they constantly keep us dependent upon God's grace. The more we suffer, the more we are conformed to Jesus' death and cry to God for divine strength.

Being conformed to his death is the process of sanctification, learning to die to the flesh and put on Christ (2 Cor 4:10). Sanctification is about dying to what is me by nature and choosing Christ instead.

If, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead

Suggested meanings discounted

- The resurrection of the body, the end of sanctification.
- The general resurrection of all.
- The first resurrection of saints.
- The fulfilment of regeneration.
- The completion of our calling.

The latter two are getting close to Paul's meaning but do not explain it. In a sense Paul is talking about the consummation of both our calling by God and our regeneration by the Spirit.

The first three are way off-beam, as I explain in this paper, as they contradict Paul's demonstrable assurance.

Resurrection

To help us have a clue that this is something unusual that he is talking about Paul uses an unusual word for resurrection. This is the word *evxana, stasij* Strong's 1815, *exanastasis*, meaning: a rising up, a rising again, resurrection. The word is made up of two Greek words, the ordinary word for 'resurrection' (*anastasis*) with the prefix *ex* which means 'out of, from, out from, away from; by, by means of, by reason of, because; for; on, at; of'.

This is a late Greek word that does not appear in the LXX² but it does in Polybius³ and one papyrus example. It only appears here in the NT. Here it means 'out-resurrection' or 'out from resurrection'. Very few commentators observe this and fewer understand it.⁴

There is also a slight difference in manuscripts here.

The eclectic (Alexandrian) UBS4-NA27 text reads: *ei; pwj katanth,sw eivj th.n evxana, stasin th.n evk nekrw/nÅ*

The Byzantine text (Scrivener 1881-Beza 1589, equals TR) reads: *ei; pwj katanth,sw eivj th.n evxana, stasin tw/n nekrw/nÅ*

The difference is an additional *ek* (the same word as *ex*; *evx* is before vowels) in the UBS text it is, 'out-resurrection from (or 'out of') the dead' [*th.n* is a definite article, accusative, feminine singular]. The Textus Receptus reads: 'out-resurrection out of/from dead'. While *tw/n* is still the definite article, in the genitive it means 'of' or 'from'.

The question is that is 'of the dead' (as KJV) or 'from the dead' (most other versions) the better translation? The UBS text (and most commentators) take it as 'from the dead'. The TR would favour 'of (the) dead'.

Thus most commentators read that Paul is referring to the general resurrection, a hope of attaining to resurrection to life at the end. But this does not fit with Paul's obvious assurance. He was certain of his resurrection at the end and did not hope to attain to it. Ten years beforehand he could write:

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. **1 Thess 4:15-18**

These are not the words of someone uncertain about his future bodily resurrection.

Therefore, Paul is speaking about a different kind of resurrection.

He was anxious to see the dead resurrected in his own life. Here 'the dead' is the old nature, or sinners in general considered as spiritually dead. It is a resurrection of the dead. Paul wanted to be a shining light (Phil 2:12) in the world, seeing Christ resurrected out of his dead life. In other words, a perfect putting on of the new nature without failing.

² The Septuagint Greek translation of the OT.

³ Polybius (c.200–c.118 BC), Greek historian; see Polybius 2: 21, 35. His forty books of Histories (only partially extant) chronicled the rise of the Roman Empire from 220 to 146 BC.

⁴ William Hendriksen is an exception.

What it means

Paul is talking about attaining to something in this life; something connected to glorifying Christ in his body, Christ being magnified in his body. He is not talking about a hope for eternal life, something he was sure of.

Paul wants to press on to perfection. He knows that perfection is not possible in this life where we have an old nature to contend with; but there is the hope of so controlling the old nature that there is as close to constantly walking in the new nature as can be.

This is constantly putting on Christ and walking in the Spirit so that we are manifesting Christ in all that we do for continued period of time. Of course, we will always fail at some point but Paul sought to control his old nature by putting it off and seeing Christ revealed in his body as much as possible.

The ultimate goal would be a constant resurrection of Christ's life out of his dead body, something he says that he has not yet attained but strived for. This is the 'out-resurrection', Christ being revealed in his body in fulness. When people saw Paul they were seeing the character of Christ.

This is the ultimate goal of progressive sanctification – perfection. It isn't possible in this life but it is a goal to be strived for.

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

This perfection of expression of Christ's character and virtue had not yet been attained, and would never be; but Paul was motivated to strive for it. This sentence also shows that my exegesis of the previous sentence is correct, Paul was striving for perfection (an out-resurrection).

The attitude of the believer in Christ is always to press on, whatever the hardships and sufferings. But even in the absence of afflictions we must still press on to attain to perfection.

Notice that the perfection is something that Paul strives for; it involves pressing on. Perfection is not achieved by adopting a faith-stance or by some mystical second blessing experience as preached by so many heretical sects in history. This is a satanic lie to stop saints from pressing on.

'Press on' is the word *dioko* meaning: to make to run or flee, put to flight, drive away, to run swiftly in order to catch a person or thing, to run after, to press on: figuratively of one who in a race runs swiftly to reach the goal, to pursue (in a hostile manner), to run after, follow after: someone; metaphorically, to pursue, to seek after eagerly, earnestly endeavour to acquire. Clearly pressing on involves effort and commitment; it is not something done passively.

Paul wants to gain that for which Christ gained him; i.e. to achieve the purpose Christ had in saving him; viz. magnifying Christ in his body.

Parallel passages

This concept of being absolutely reflective of Christ in the human body had gripped Paul during his imprisonment where he had time to ponder deep spiritual truths without being distracted by the pressures of church planting and evangelism. Indeed, this was God's plan for him being so imprisoned because we got Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians from this incarceration.

[As an aside, consider the plan of God in our lives. So often we view setbacks, persecutions and afflictions with disquiet and beg to be released from them. Being in chains in a Roman prison (and later house arrest chained to a soldier, Phil 1:13) for four years would be considered by us as challenging and negative. Yet God inspired Paul to write the three most sublime NT books in this imprisonment. God knows best and our sufferings are opportunities. When afflicted, seek what good can come out of it and spend more time reflecting on God's word.]

Consequently, we see descriptions of Christ's resurrection power in changing us spoken of in different terms, such as:

[I] do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us [lit. in us] who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*. **Eph 1:16-20**

That I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. **Eph 3:8-11**

That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height -- to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us. **Eph 3:15-20**

For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him. **Col 2:9-13**

Conclusion

Unlike modern leaders who are focused upon fleshly works and power to affect physical bodies in healings and such like, Paul was concerned with spiritual power, the power of

Christ's resurrection. This was not the power to do miracles (he could already do that as God led him) he was concerned with something far greater.

What Paul sought was moral power, virtue, living a godly life that was so like Christ it was hard to see Paul anymore.

Brethren, we are called to glorify Christ in our bodies and this means dying to ourselves. But this self-denial leads to putting on Christ and seeing him be glorified in our bodies.

Paul's hope was to press on so that this magnification of Christ in his personality was complete and continual; an 'out-resurrection'; the power of Christ's resurrection manifest in a frail human body.

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