

## RESURRECTION POWER: HOW DOES IT FLESH OUT?

“And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17).

So Paul claimed in his letter to the Corinthian Church. That is, the gospel, and all it purports to accomplish for us and the world, hinges on the bodily resurrection of Jesus the Messiah from the grave. Put another way, that Christ was raised signals the validity of all he said and did, and the victory both now and forever of **his** way over every other way. His resurrection confirms his kingship over the Jews but also over the gentiles. His resurrection sets the world on notice that at “the **end** of the day,” but also all throughout the day, it is **Christ’s** way that leads to victory and categorically not the way of Caesar.

But do these affirmations really flesh out in everyday life and, if so, how? I ask **does** it flesh out because for many it seems not to flesh out in any meaningful way. The death and resurrection of Jesus is about getting to heaven, about escaping this life safely to the next. Resurrection power, therefore, assures us that death does not have final say for us or our believing friends.

No follower of Christ could fail to say, “Hallelujah” to this! Yet it is possible, and common, to posit such faith as if that is all there is, as if resurrection reality does not flesh-out at all, as if the gospel turns out to be basically an exit strategy. To such a notion, Paul would say, “God forbid!”

(Paul’s celebrated treatment of the resurrection in 1 Cor. 15 aimed precisely at debunking the Gnostic notion that salvation was all about escaping bodily life in a material—and therefore evil—world. How ironic that often those most exercised about proving the bodily resurrection of Christ at the same time hold a view of salvation that has more in common with the Gnostic world-view against which Paul’s defense of the resurrection is aimed!)

For Paul the gospel is the announcement of God’s victory over the powers that have thwarted God’s creative and redemptive purposes, and an invitation to participate in that victory—not only at the end of the day, but all throughout the New Day that dawned with the life-death-resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.

In Paul’s letter to the Church at Rome, chapter 8, the Apostle elaborates how God’s victory, demonstrated and confirmed in the resurrection of Jesus, fleshes out in the life of those whose mortal bodies are “made alive” through the indwelling Spirit, the very Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead (8:11).

First, Paul tells us there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, (v.1). Wonderfully, we believers experience no condemnation now, nor do we dread condemnation at the end of the day. Why is that? It is because Christ Jesus has *liberated* the believer (set me free, v. 2); because in Christ Jesus God has condemned sin in our weak human flesh (v. 3) so that the life envisioned by the law would come to fullness in us who live by the Spirit (v. 4).

(Of course, I am having some fun with this term “flesh.” It has a variety of meanings—among them it denotes literally the flesh of our human bodies, or figuratively the flesh as our (un)natural (that is, not as God intended in creation) human condition when weakened, vulnerable, powerless under the sway of sin, or also figuratively the flesh as the primary instrument sin uses to hijack humanity for the evil-one’s purposes. When asking how the resurrection “fleshes-out” I want to insist that resurrection power covers the full range of meanings—that resurrection power engages us in all the ways we experience life in the here and now.)

In other words, **in the flesh** God’s Spirit works by/with resurrection power to set us free **from** the tyranny of sin and **for** the fullness of a life that pleases the Life-Giver. Paul goes on to “flesh-out” this life in greater detail: former sinful tendencies, dictated by a mind set on “the flesh” are replaced by Spirit-tendencies (a mind set on the Spirit) that lead to shalom—“life and peace.” Since we are no longer enthralled by the flesh but indwelt by the Spirit, we are able to please God, and we do (vv. 5-9). Wherever we are or have been weak, God’s Spirit strengthens us, makes us alive, with resurrection power. Indeed, “if your body is dead because of sin, your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who lives in you” (vv. 10-11).

Don’t miss what Paul implies here. We anticipate our own future bodily resurrection—in chapter six Paul describes this as “walking in newness of life—with confidence because already the Spirit (who is our foretaste and down payment of final redemption, see 8:23) makes us alive so that we please God, here and now, by living a Spirit-filled and Spirit directed life.

This is, in fact, a Christ-like life. We are filled with the same Spirit who raised him. This is the Spirit of adoption, who now inspires/authorizes us to call God, “Abba.” We are his children, as He was his Son. We share his kind of life—participating in his sufferings and in his glory. Resurrection power forms us to be like Christ, and to live like Christ in our still fallen, as yet unredeemed world.

Second, as we live the Christ-life in such a world we are a sign (that is, a reflection of what is to come and of God’s way for getting there) of the coming, full redemption of the world. The world is a place of groaning, of painful brokenness, of submission to corrupting and disintegrating powers that, if unchecked, would undo creation. The world groans and we groan with it and for it.

This is the world Jesus entered, for which he suffered and died and overcame. Now on the strength of His powerful presence within us, which gives us hope (v. 23), we find ourselves in the world in the flesh made strong by resurrection power. As Jesus overcame by deep trusting reliance on His Father, so do we. The Spirit who raised Jesus indwells us, and helps us in our continuing weaknesses. This same Spirit who makes our mortal bodies alive by resurrection power also makes our feeble prayers, our inarticulate groanings,

alive with intercessory power as we pray for those circumstances and persons caught and all but swallowed by the forces resisting final redemption.

That Spirit assures us. We **know** Paul says. Loving God and embracing his plan lead us inevitably to good (consider what “loving God” implies as response to his self-sacrificing love in Jesus for us and as a gift that inundates us by the Spirit’s indwelling). Just as surely as God answered the cross (the worst evil and defeat) with resurrection, so his plan now calls for nothing short of a humanity in full conformity to the image of his son, with all the glory and responsibility that this entails.

How does resurrection power flesh out? In bold and hopeful participation in a broken and groaning world for which there are no easy answers; in firm and confident reliance on the Spirit for weathering the weakness of our world and our lives; in intercessory prayer in situations of deep distress; in following the lead of the Spirit who shows us how to respond; and in faithfulness to his way—the life of love as the path to good and glory.

Third, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead demonstrates above all the triumph of God’s love. Made alive by the indwelling Spirit that raised Christ, we dare to trust the love of God in giving ourselves in love for the sake of the world. We may be confident that nothing can separate us from this love, nothing can overcome this love, and nothing needed to live by such love will be denied us.

The Risen Christ who gave it all for us intercedes for us and though we may be like sheep led to slaughter we have grace, hope and assurance even in the hour of sacrifice.

No rival king—not even Caesar—and no rival power—not even the evil one himself—can stand before our Lord Jesus Christ crucified, risen, and reigning. And no other way—self-sacrificing love energized by the Spirit with resurrection power—can lead to **his** victory.