
The Unity of the Spirit

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"In the Bond of Peace"

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Dear Fellow-Believers:

Just for a moment think of all the key world events in your lifetime. There has been the fall of the "Iron Curtain" and the literal fall of the Berlin Wall. We've seen the Persian Gulf war and the conflict in Bosnia. We have experienced the "El Nino" weather events.

Or go back a little further to the political crises of Watergate. The wonder and amazement of men actually landing on the moon. Or perhaps you can remember even back to World War II. Now go back further in history. The fall of the Bastille. The American Revolution. The discovery of the "New World." The invention of the printing press. The signing of the Magna Carta. The fall of the Roman Empire. Each of these events has made a significant impact on our world. But none of them has had the kind of monumental, world wide, and eternal significance that one event 2000 years ago claims to have. That event is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The most extravagant claim of Christianity is that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and is still alive. Humanity, from the very beginning of time has tried to defy and deny the reality

of death. But only Jesus Christ has conquered it and deprived it of its terror over others (Hebrews 2:9, 14-18).

Two important questions, however, are raised by the claim that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. First, did Christ's resurrection really occur? Secondly, what does it mean? What is the relevance of this past event to us today? In answer to the first question, "Did it really happen?" the Bible states clearly that it did. The book of Acts begins by declaring that Jesus

...presented Himself alive after His sufferings by many infallible proofs, being seen by them [the disciples] during forty days. (Acts 1:3 NKJV)

References to the post resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ can be found in Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20, Acts 1& 9 and 1 Corinthians 15.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was an objective, historical fact that has far more historical evidence for it than any event recorded in the ancient world. Indeed the event was datable. It occurred on the third day after his death. Here are two examples of what two highly respected historians have written about the evidence presented in the New Testament about Christ's life, death and resurrection:

"I claim to be an historian. My approach to the Classics is historical. And I tell you that the evidence for the life, the death, and the resurrection of Christ is better authenticated than most of the facts of ancient history." [E.M. Blaiklock, Professor of Classics, Auckland University].

"If the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt." [F.F. Bruce, Manchester University].

Granted that there is historical evidence for Christ's resurrection, the next question is, "Does it really matter whether it happened?" Let me say simply, it matters! Christ's resurrection is the only solid rock upon which a life of faith, hope and peace can be built. The resurrection validates Jesus' ministry, it assures us of forgiveness, it confirms God's power over the grave and His ultimate triumph over all His enemies. The apostle Paul put it all into perspective when he wrote,

Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witness of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up – if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. (1 Corinthians 15:12-19)

Christianity is Christ and Christ is nothing if he is still dead. The man and the mission of Jesus Christ are the rock upon which Christianity is built. If he is not who he said he

is, and if he did not do what he said that he came to do, the very foundation of our faith crumbles. If Jesus Christ is not raised from the dead, the power of the gospel is gutted. Without his resurrection, our faith will never radically change our lives now, nor will we have any hope for the future. If the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a hoax, we are pitiable and pathetic people. But Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and because of this we can walk in newness of life. As Paul states,

Therefore, we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4).

Because Jesus Christ is alive and we are united to him, there is divine power in our lives, the very same power of God that raised Christ from the dead (Ephesians 1:19-21). And this power enables us to live a life of victory; having power to overcome sin in the present, and to rejoice in the hope of eternal life in the coming kingdom of God (Romans 6:5-14; 1 Corinthians 15:20-24).

A "Peanuts" cartoon pictured Lucy and Linus looking out the window at a steady downpour of rain. "Boy" said Lucy, "look at it rain. What if it floods the whole world?" "It will never do that," Linus replied confidently. "In the ninth chapter of Genesis, God promised Noah that would never happen again, and the sign of the promise is the rainbow." "You've taken a great load off my mind," said Lucy with a relieved smile. "Sound theology," said Linus, "has a way of doing that."

It is my prayer that the articles in this Spring issue of "The Unity of the Spirit" newsletter will provide you with the sound theology concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ, so that your life can be full of godly hope, joy and power as you live a life in service to him.

Chuck LaMattina

**The Resurrection:
"Christ, the Firstfruits;
Then, those who are His at His
Coming"**

By Scot Hahn

Cary, North Carolina

During the month of March in Central North Carolina the earth begins to awaken from the sleep of winter. The flowers begin to bloom, the birds begin to sing and the voices of the children of the neighborhood once again fill the air. Watching this change of things from dormant to vibrant is an annual reminder to me of the awakening to life that will occur when our Lord returns. This awakening from death, or resurrection, which all believers have to look forward to is an important topic to explore. A lot goes into understanding this great subject but we will focus our inquiry on one aspect. What are the guarantees that believers have of their coming resurrection? Two answers to this question are: 1. the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and, 2. the gift of the holy Spirit which believers possess.

In Acts Chapter 2 just after the outpouring of the holy Spirit the apostle Peter speaks concerning the life of Jesus Christ.

"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."

There are a couple of good points to draw out from this statement about Jesus' ministry.

The first is the picture of death which it paints. Death is coupled with terms such as agony. It is said to have its hold on a person. Elsewhere death is said to be an enemy which must be destroyed. We should not make the mistake of thinking of death in terms which are positive. Death is not the avenue for being ushered into the presence of God. Instead, death is an enemy which must and will be overcome by the power of God. It is God who raised Christ from the dead and he will raise us also. Second, it is important to note that Jesus was a man who died. He felt the agony of death. In this regard Jesus is not unlike all men. We are all mortal. We will all die. But Jesus was not abandoned to the grave. Instead God raised him from the dead. Praise the Lord! Death could not keep its hold on him and it can not keep its hold on all those who belong to him.

The Bible uses different terms to describe Jesus' role as being the one who blazed the trail from the grave to glory. But they all imply that there will be others to follow behind. Jesus is described as being "the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead", the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" and the "pioneer and perfecter of our faith".

In Colossians 1 verses 17&18 we read,

"He is before all things and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy."

The idea of Christ being the "beginning and the firstborn from among the dead" is important to our study. The word beginning is an everyday term which means to start something. Christ's resurrection is simply the start of something which will find its fulfillment when the "trumpet call of God" awakens all the other believers who sleep. The idea of Christ being the firstborn has equal significance. The firstborn implies not only that Christ was the first one in time to be

resurrected but also that he is the eldest in a family of which we are all members. We are in a sense on the same plain as Christ. He has led the way for his brothers and sisters to follow. Like Christ, we too will one day live a new resurrection life.

The apostle Paul, writing to the church in Corinth, speaks to the issue of the resurrection and has much to say about our subject.

"Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn; Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him." I Cor. 15:20-23

Paul here describes Christ as "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep". The people to whom he wrote, living in the first century in an agrarian society would have understood this term firstfruits well. They knew what it was like to get the first taste of the grain, figs or olives that would soon be ready for harvest. Those first few mature fruits which come before the full harvest signify what kind of crop you will have and that it is soon on its way. They are a part of the harvest but are designated the firstfruits because the full harvest has not yet come.

This is what Paul was saying of our Lord. Christ had been raised from the dead, as the firstfruits. The people were able to know him and see what the full harvest would bring. Christ is not of a different kind than those who will soon be raised. He is the firstfruits and in him we know that our resurrection is near and we see what we have to look forward to. The possession of the gift of holy Spirit by each individual believer also serves as a guarantee of our future resurrection. The books of II Corinthians and Ephesians both contain sections which throw light on our subject.

"Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." II Cor. 1:21-22

"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of his glory." Eph. 1:13-14

In both of these verses the holy Spirit is described as a deposit guaranteeing our share in the future inheritance of believers. The holy Spirit is a portion of that inheritance that we will receive. Just as the resurrection of Christ was the beginning of the resurrection of all believers, the holy Spirit we now have is the first taste of the feast we will enjoy when Christ returns.

In Christ's resurrection and the gift of the Spirit we are guaranteed our own resurrection. His resurrection has begun the final resurrection. He is the firstborn in a family of redeemed humanity of which we are all a part. And he is the firstfruits of the full harvest of believers who will be raised to life when the time is ripe. The holy Spirit which all believers possess is the very life-giving force by which Christ was raised and by which we will all be raised as well. Therefore we can wait patiently for our Lord's return, living for God and looking forward to that day because,

"we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence" II Cor.. 4:14

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Resurrection Proof

By Jeff Tideman

Northfield, Illinois

Do you remember "doubting Thomas"? The other disciples told him the Lord had risen and that they had seen Jesus. Thomas said,

"Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." (John 20:25 NKJV)

Eight days later (poof!), Jesus appeared in their midst and granted Thomas' request saying,

"Reach your finger here and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." (John 20:27)

This just shows that we should be careful what we ask for! Then in verse 29 Jesus said something very important,

"Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed."

Our Lord Jesus foresaw the time when such tangible evidence as Thomas received would not be available. After Jesus ascended permanently to God, all those who believe in his resurrection would do so without the benefit of seeing the resurrected Lord. It is clear in many places in the New Testament that God in His wisdom selected our believing in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus as a requirement for salvation. For example in his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote,

that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

While God places the greatest importance on our believing in the resurrection of Christ, we aren't asked to accept it by blind faith. The Scriptures give us solid proof that the

resurrection of Jesus Christ is irrefutable. In the beginning of the book of Acts Luke writes,

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom he presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them for forty day and speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:1-3)

In order to give his apostles confidence to present his message, our Lord gave his people many infallible proofs that he was indeed raised from the dead. These proofs included his entering a locked room (John 20:19), showing his wounds (Luke 24:39), and eating and drinking with the disciples (Luke 24:41-43). The apostle Paul also attests to the historical validity of Christ's resurrection saying that,

...He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that he was seen by over 500 brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all he was seen by me also... (1 Corinthians 15:5-8)

Today, the average person we meet may have doubts about the historical reliability of the Bible's historical accuracy. But what is history? Where do historians start to piece together the past? They look for source documents around the time of the person or event they are studying. They look for writings that contain eyewitness accounts of events. If there are eyewitness accounts of several people and those sources can be considered reliable the historical evidence grows stronger. Then they look for facts or accounts that might disprove the earlier evidence and if there is nothing to disprove it, then the information is considered quite reliable.

It is by these standards that we believe what we have about historical figures from Alexander the Great to Marie Antoinette. Noted historians have concluded that for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the evidence is overwhelming. Professor Arnold Thomas, author of the famous book, *History of Rome*, and appointed to the chair of modern history at Oxford, said, "I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign that God has given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead."

Here are some points to consider concerning the evidence that Scripture gives us:

1. Christ was confirmed dead.

After Jesus died the soldiers stabbed him with a sword or spear in the chest to make sure he was dead (John 19:34). Mark 15:42-45 reports that when Joseph of Arimathea begged Pilate for the body of Jesus, Pilate sent for the centurion to be completely sure that Jesus was dead.

2. The burial

John 19:39-41 says that Nicodemus carried out the proper burial custom of having Christ's body wrapped in linen strips prepared with about 100 pounds of perfume and spices in a sort of mummification process. We know that the tomb was hewn out of Rock and was big enough for at least two people to go in, so the size of the stone that covered the opening was large and extremely heavy.

3. The tomb was sealed and guarded

It is ironic that while the disciples were thinking about properly embalming the body assuming Jesus was dead to stay, the chief priests were paying more heed to what Jesus had said about his resurrection. They had

remembered that he had said that he would rise from the dead after three days. And so they requested of Pilate that the tomb be officially sealed and guarded.

The consequence for the unauthorized breaking of a Roman seal was death. And a Roman soldier who fell asleep at his post was put to death, often by setting his clothes on fire and burning him alive as an example to the others. So the performance of guards on duty was usually flawless! Matthew 28 records that when the mighty angel appeared and rolled back the stone, these guards shook and became as dead men. The guards reported all of this to the chief priests who decided to pay the guards a very large sum of money to say that while they slept, the disciples stole Jesus' body.

Again, it seems that the enemies of Jesus were quicker to understand the implications of the empty tomb than his followers were. Notice that the chief priests and elders made no attempt to deny the empty tomb at this time or later in the book of Acts when the apostles were preaching the resurrection. So, logically, all Jerusalem knew of this empty tomb and no one denied it. This makes Christ's resurrection an historical fact to which the behavior of an entire city attests.

Other Jewish and Roman historical documents mention the empty tomb as well. Therefore to argue against the resurrection on historical ground, you have to come up with another plausible explanation for the empty tomb. You have to believe that trained Roman guards were asleep so soundly that the disciples could come and roll away a huge stone and then steal the body of Jesus.

4. The lives of the witnesses were changed

There were hundreds of eyewitnesses who saw the resurrected Christ. Indeed, a historian must view these witnesses as exceptionally credible. They lived the rest of their lives in witness to the resurrection enduring persecution and often martyrdom for their testimony. In the

record with Thomas mentioned earlier, the apostles were behind closed doors for fear of the Jews. Fifty days later they are boldly preaching Christ's resurrection to thousands of people. By the way, how do you think the crowd would have reacted to Peter's sermon on Pentecost if there were any doubts about the empty tomb?

Brooke Foss Wescott, an English scholar said,

"Ranking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is no historic event better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Nothing but the antecedent assumption that it must be false could have suggested the idea of deficiency in the proof of it."

That is precisely correct! Some have their mind made up ahead of time that it is false. The chief priests and elders wanted to guard the tomb against Jesus' claim that he would rise from the dead. They were told by the guards that an angel rolled back the stone. In front of them was the evidence that would shatter their religious order and power, so they used bribery and intimidation in an attempt to suppress the truth. Some hearts are so hard that they will refuse to accept the truth no matter what the proof. I have witnessed to people who could see the truth and seemed about to accept it and then ran the other way. They too could see that the truth would shatter their comfortable order and take them into an entirely new direction. Even as believers we sometimes run the other way when we are confronted with truth that will change previously untouched parts of our lives. We pay a high price when we are blind to the truth of God's Word (John 9:39-41).

God knows that proof for the resurrection was and is important and He has amply provided it. Even more important is whether one reacts to that proof with blindness of believing. "Blind faith" is a term that the world uses, but to God, it is those who refuse to have faith in the gospel who are blind. God does not want

anyone to perish and His gentle love calls us to go beyond proof to faith in Him who so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son to die and rise again that we might live forever.

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"Remember that our Lord was committed to the grave as a hostage. "He died for our sins." Like a debt they were imputed to Him. He discharged the debt from us to God, on the tree; he suffered to the full, the great substitutionary equivalent for our suffering, and then he was confined in the tomb as a hostage until His work should be fully accepted. That acceptance would be notified by His coming forth from durance vile; and that coming forth would become our justification – "He rose again for our justification. If He had not fully paid the debt...if Jesus had not made effectual, total, final atonement, He must have continued a captive. But he had done it all. The "It is finished" which came from His own lips, was established by the verdict of Jehovah, and Jesus was set free." [Charles Spurgeon, a 19th century British preacher]

"The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no-one dreams of questioning. And if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt. ... From the viewpoint of the historian, the same standard must be applied to both. But we do not quarrel with those who want more evidence for the New Testament than for other writings; firstly, because the universal claims which the New Testament makes upon mankind are so absolute, and the character and works of its chief figure so unparalleled, that we want to be as sure of its truth as we possibly can; and secondly, because in point of fact there is much more evidence for the New Testament than for other ancient writings of comparable date. [F.F. Bruce, The New Testament Documents, Are They Reliable, p. 15, Eerdmans]

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Compare the Versions

The Resurrection Hope (I Cor. 15:12-23)

KJV

Now if Christ be preached that He rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen: And if Christ is not risen, then is our preaching in vain, and your faith is also in vain. Yea, and we have been found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ: Whom He raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ is not raised, your faith is vain; yea are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, then we are of all men most miserable.

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's, at His coming.

NIV

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ we are to be pitied more than all men.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

The Relevance of the Resurrection

By Chuck LaMattina

Chicago, Illinois

When our faith grows in the fertile soil of Scripture our fears fall away and we are filled with hope and confidence. And when our confidence and hope in God overflows, we live differently. That's the power of divine truth and this is why the relevance of Christ's resurrection is so important for us today. The resurrection of Jesus Christ speaks to our real needs and concerns as no other event in human history. It is the solid rock upon which a life of faith and hope, and peace and joy can be built. There are several reasons for this. The resurrection of Jesus Christ

- proved his Sonship
- assures us of forgiveness
- provides power and wisdom for all our present needs
- and it guarantees our ultimate victory over death and our eternal glory.

How do we really know that Jesus is the true Lord and Savior? The answer is his resurrection. No other religious leader of any of the world's religions has ever been proclaimed as a risen Savior. Instead, many have shrines at their grave. They lie there decayed, with nothing remaining except the dust of their bones and their man made religious teachings. The resurrection proves that Jesus was sent by God. The apostle Paul writes that Jesus was

...declared to be the Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead. (Romans 1:4)

The word "declared" is translated from the Greek word *horizo* from which we get the English word "horizon." Just as the horizon serves as a clear demarcation line, dividing the

earth and the sky, so the resurrection of Jesus marks him off from the rest of humanity. God's mighty deed in raising Jesus from the dead clearly marked him out as the promised Messiah. It proved that he was more than just another religious leader. It powerfully validated both his mission and his message. In fact, in his first sermon Peter says that Jesus' resurrection (and his ensuing exaltation and giving of the holy Spirit) assures us

"that God has made this Jesus...both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36)."

This being true, we are also assured of the effectiveness of his sacrifice and the forgiveness of our sins. In Matthew 26:26-28 where Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper, he states that his blood would be shed for the forgiveness of our sins. Christ links our forgiveness with his death. The apostle Paul links the forgiveness of our sins to the blood of Christ as well, in Colossians 1:13, 14. It is because of Christ's death, his being the ultimate and final sacrifice for sin, that we can be forgiven. But what proof do we have that God accepted Christ's sacrifice? The answer is the resurrection. In Romans we read,

[Christ] was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification...Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 4:25-5:1)

Jesus Christ was raised from the dead on account of our justification. It proved that he was a worthy sacrifice to secure our salvation. Therefore, if Jesus is risen from the dead, and he is, then we are justified and made righteous, forgiven of all our sins.

Mark Twain once said, "Man is the only animal that blushes – or needs to." All of us have skeletons in our closet. And in our better moments we all know it and are ashamed. We all know that we are sinners. And no one is free who sins and is not forgiven (John 8:31-34). Without the assurance of the forgiveness of our

sins through Christ, all of us would hide and cringe before God like Adam and Eve did in the Garden.

The story is told of Bill Wilson, who was the Psychology department head at Duke University. A Vietnam war veteran was in the hospital where Wilson served with severe psychological problems due to his involvement in the war. Nothing could be done medically to help this poor man. And he kept drifting further and further away from life. Finally, one day Dr. Wilson walked into this man's room and told him that he had a message for him from God. He said that through faith in Jesus Christ he could be cleansed of all his sins and be reborn. The man started to cry and this was the first emotional response he had made to anyone in many months. The veteran came to faith in Christ and his life turned around 180 degrees!

Not only does Christ's resurrection prove his Sonship, and that our sins are forgiven, it assures us of God's power and wisdom for all of our present needs. As much as we need God's forgiveness for our past sins, we need His power to sin no more! And we need His wisdom to live life with great peace and joy and hope. We need God's wisdom and power today, because we don't just want to be forgiven people, we want to be different people. We want to be better than we are.

So the questions come up, "Can fearful people become confident? Can selfish people become giving? Can immoral people become self-controlled?" The answer is a resounding "Yes"! 2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us that,

if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

No one is a clearer example of this truth than the Corinthians themselves. The apostle Paul wrote,

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do

not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

Now, if these people can change, anyone can! In Ephesians, chapter 1, we have a prayer that the eyes of our understanding might be opened, so that we might know the awesome power of God that is available to us for all our pressing needs and to help us walk a Christ like life. The prayer is that might see,

What is the exceeding greatness of His [God's] power toward 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 own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. (Ephesians 1:19-21)

The very same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead and exalted him to the right hand of God is ours when we believe! We now have power to overcome temptations and sin. We have power to overcome our fears and anxieties. We now have, through the risen Christ, the power to become the kind of people we have always wanted to be in the depth of our hearts. In fact as Ephesians 3:20 declares, God,

Is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.

And Philippians 4:13 encourages us that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Colossians 1:27 tells us that the riches of the mystery is *Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

Our confidence of divine enablement, of living a new kind of life here and now, is the power of God in Christ, dwelling in us, and this confidence depends on the resurrection of Christ. One of the great tragedies of Christianity today is that it tries to minimize the power that is available to us in Christ. People talk of becoming a Christian as if it meant no more than just making a few superficial changes, like going to church and being a little more religious. But according to the Bible, to become a Christian is to undergo the most radical and profound change possible. In Galatians 2:20, Paul says,

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave His life for me.

Our lives can be different today and tomorrow, because God raised Christ up from the dead. And finally, the resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees us our ultimate victory over death and our eternal glory.

One of the great differences in religions and philosophies concerns their vision of the future. Some religions offer little hope teaching us that if we are perfect and spotless, or if we do enough good works, we may gain eternal life. Then there are the religions that offer the hope of reincarnation, where you keep coming back into life after death as another person, or an animal, or a bug until you get it right and enter Nirvana, which equals no-existence. Then there are the secular humanists that dream of taking control of human destiny by means of social and genetic engineering. Finally we have the atheists, like Philosopher Bertrand Russell who said,

"All our labors of all the ages, all the devotions, all the aspirations, all the noon day brightness of our genius are destined to extinction in the vast death of the universe."

For Russell, there is no hope beyond the grave. Comedian Woody Allen, in an article in Esquire Magazine, jokes about death saying, "It's not that I'm afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens." But Allen's humor can't hide his true fear. Later he says, "The fundamental thing behind all motivation and all activity is the constant struggle against...death. It is stupefying in its terror and it renders anyone's accomplishments meaningless."

As Christians we have been set free from this terror (Hebrews 2:14, 15). We know the promise is true that says,

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

We know that we have eternal life and this life is in Christ (1 John 5:11). We know that we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, and that when Christ, our life appears, then we shall appear with him in glory (Romans 4:14-18; Colossians 3:4).

There is a day coming when God will judge the world in righteousness through Jesus Christ. And He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:31). Believers have escaped this judgment and look forward to living eternally in the kingdom of God.

What's the relevance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ? It is more important than most people ever imagine. Christ's resurrection and its implications make our preoccupation with Easter eggs and bunnies seem absolutely absurd!

The resurrection of Jesus Christ authenticates his ministry and message. It assures us of the forgiveness of our sins and of divine power for godly living. And it guarantees our hope of eternal life and glory. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the solid rock for

all of life. It is the only firm foundation to build on in an insecure and unstable world.

The Unity of the Spirit is a free newsletter published quarterly through the *Foundation for Translation of Biblical Studies, Inc.* and *Grace Ministry USA*. The purpose of *The Unity of the Spirit* is to help Christian believers to better understand and live according to the truth of God's Word so that we may grow together as the one body of Christ. All scripture citations are from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted. Unsigned articles or notations are by one of the editors: Richie and Dorota Temple, Chuck and Marilee LaMattina and Scot Hahn.

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