

What is Jesus doing now?

Part 1 – Jesus is transforming us into his likeness

At the heart of Christian belief is Jesus' resurrection from the dead. And on that point there is no debate for Christians, because **"if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith," 1 Corinthians 15:14.**

If there's any possibility or hint, therefore, that Jesus didn't actually come back from the dead, then we might as well throw in the towel, because if he wasn't resurrected there's no hope of us being resurrected either. No resurrection also makes a mockery of our Christianity, because **"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men," verse 19.** Why pitied? Because without a resurrection **"you are still in your sins," verse 17,** which is tragic because it means Christians have put all their hopes and dreams in Jesus Christ for nothing. And how embarrassing is that? It would prove our **"faith is futile."** Without a resurrection from the dead, the reason for Christianity no longer exists. Our preaching and faith, therefore, are a total waste of time and energy.

So if our entire Christian belief and credibility rest on Jesus' resurrection, what on earth is the proof that it happened?

Well, the proof is shockingly simple - the proof being that WE are raised from the dead. And that's the staggering challenge to anyone who thinks we're being **"false witnesses about God"** for pronouncing so adamantly that **"God raised Christ from the dead," verse 15.** The challenge, simply put, is this: We Christians will readily admit that **"God did NOT raise Christ IF in fact THE DEAD ARE NOT RAISED."** In other words, if WE aren't raised from the dead, then neither was Christ.

Paul makes it nice and simple, **verse 16:** **"For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either."** If we Christians, then, can't come up with any proof that we are raised from the dead we will state (just as adamantly) that Jesus' resurrection was a hoax and a sham of epic proportions. We will also publicly admit that we have falsely testified about God, **and** that we were simpletons and fools for being so easily deceived. We will then join in willingly with the rest of the unbelieving world and how it lives, **verse 32,** for **"If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'"** We'll stop all this talk about Christ's resurrection and of a life after death, and live simply for the pleasures of each day like non-religious people do.

But what if we **can** prove we are raised from the dead? Then what?

Well, let's find out **what the proof is** first, a glimpse of which Paul gives us in the same chapter, **verse 49**: "And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, **so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.**" The proof that we are raised from the dead is that we're taking on the likeness of Christ.

Paul offers that as proof in several other verses too, like:

- 1) **2 Corinthians 3:18** - "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, **are being transformed into his likeness** with ever-increasing glory...."
- 2) **Romans 8:29** - "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be **conformed to the likeness of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."
- 3) **Philippians 3:20-21** - "And we eagerly await a Saviour....the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, **will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.**"

Are these verses only talking of the future, though, when we're given a new body at Christ's return? Or are they talking about a transformation into the likeness of Christ's body right now, as well? Well Scripture says it's both - now and future - but the staggering part of the Christian life is that it's actually happening now too. And, what's more, we **know** it's happening now as well, as Paul points out in:

- 1) **Ephesians 3:17-19** - "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all saints...**THAT you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**"
- 2) **Ephesians 4:13** "...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and **become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**"

Paul is talking about what's happening to us now. His hope and prayer is that his fellow Christians experience being filled with the likeness of Christ more and more in their present lives. It's in the **present** tense when Paul writes, "**we are BEING transformed into his likeness.**" It's already begun. We don't have to wait until Christ returns, because he's already providing us with the power, the love, the faith and the knowledge to attain to his fullness. It's right now, therefore, that we're being "**rooted and established**" and we "**become mature.**" So it's right now, as well, that we "**bear the likeness of the man from heaven.**"

And why would Paul pray that Christians "**have power**" in Ephesians 3 above, if there's not something happening to us right now that we **need** power for? What's the point of all that power? Well, as Paul writes, it's so we can "attain" to, "mature" toward, and be "filled" with as much of the likeness of Christ as possible, in this life right now.

If, therefore, we can prove it's happening to us right now - then what?

Well it proves there's something **extraordinary** going on in a Christian's life, involving some real and very noticeable power.

Paul even talks of it in **Ephesians 1:19** as an "**incomparably great power for us who believe.**" So where does this extraordinary power come from? It comes from "**the working of God's mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.**" The power is God's, which he gave to Christ at his resurrection, **power which Christ now gives to Christians, verses 22-23: "And God placed all things under his (Christ's) feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."**

The formula is quite simple, therefore: **IF** there's the kind of power in a Christian's life that Paul's talking about here, then that's the proof that Christ is alive because **Christ is the one providing the power.** If it really is the power of God, though, it ought to be truly amazing, utterly extraordinary, undeniably obvious and vividly noticeable, right?

So is there evidence of such amazing power in a Christian's life?

Well, let's start with some obvious facts **before** we became Christians, says Paul, based on the best evidence there is - our own experience. And what do we know to be true from our own experience? Well, Paul goes right for the jugular in **Ephesians 2:1** with some very personal and very obvious facts that we can *easily* recognize as true:

Number One: "**As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world.**" First obvious fact: We went with the crowd like all the other dead fish floating downstream. True?

Number Two: "**All of us lived among them (all the other dead fish) at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.**" Second obvious fact: Our desires and goals were much the same as anyone else's, driven by the usual three biggies of our sinful nature - lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh and the pride of life. We couldn't help it, didn't stop it, and probably didn't care, right?

In other words there **wasn't anything extraordinary going on** in our lives, involving any real and very noticeable power. Where the culture went, we went with it, and we lived our lives stuck in that rut until we died, where our families would find little to talk about at our funerals beyond a few fond memories of some good and funny things we might have done, because in reality we lived a life of blind hopelessness, and most of it utterly selfish. It was all pretty boring really, and **certainly not extraordinary.** We were dead fish floating down the same old human stream with no hope whatsoever of escaping that useless, dead existence. Not a nice thought, but undeniably true. Right?

But for some of us dead fish something remarkable happened. While we were floating helplessly and blindly downstream, suddenly, “Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified,” **Galatians 3:1**. And it was like the lights went on. We saw what was happening to us. We saw the stream, full of dead fish, and ourselves just as dead floating along with them. And it was awful.

And then we realized **why** Christ died. It was God’s way of “**rescuing us from the dominion of darkness and bringing us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins,**” **Colossians 1:13-14**. And that really meant something to us. It meant we could step out of that dead, awful stream, clean off all the smelly dead fish stuff we’d been floating around in for so long, dry ourselves off, have that entire nightmare put behind us, and step into a whole new world where God had “**raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,**” **Ephesians 2:6**.

In other words, **we were raised from the dead**. Because here we were stuck in a dead, hopeless existence offering no hope whatsoever of any life after we died, and then, suddenly, **verse 5**, God “**made us alive with Christ.**” Or, as **Colossians 2:13** phrases it, “**When you were dead in your sins and in the circumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ.**” We went from death to life, a total transformation, a resurrection no less from a total non-existence to finding ourselves in a world where Jesus is alive and we are alive with him.

And as our eyes opened to this world, what did we see? We saw in Jesus’ crucifixion and burial that “**our old self,**” **Romans 6:6**, had been crucified (verse 6) and buried (verse 4) with him. And since we’d been “**united with him in his death,**” **verse 5**, we’d also been “**united with him in his resurrection.**” Whatever **Christ** was in his resurrected state, therefore, **so were we**. And what did that do for us? Three truly amazing, utterly extraordinary, undeniably obvious and vividly noticeable things:

- 1) First of all, **verse 9**, “**since Christ was raised from the dead....death no longer has mastery over him.**” And since **we share in Christ’s resurrected state**, death doesn’t have mastery over us either, a point made very noticeable and obvious by Christians all through the centuries, who show no fear of death at all. Death’s “**sting**” for Christians has been totally removed (1 Corinthians 15:55).
- 2) Secondly, **verse 11a** (and again because we share in Christ’s resurrected state) “**count yourselves dead to sin,**” a point also made obvious by Christians who live completely free of worry and guilt, realizing sin has no power over us either.
- 3) And thirdly, **verse 11b**, we come “**alive to God,**” a point also made obvious by Christians who live for exactly the same thing the resurrected Christ lives for, **verse 10**: “**the life he lives he lives to God.**” Trusting and loving God are what we set our minds on, therefore, “**not on earthly things,**” **Colossians 3:2**.

Now that's remarkable, because no earthly power yet has been able to stop our human fear of death, put an end to our worry and guilt, or concentrate our minds on a life of trusting and loving God. Instead we're consumed with extending and embellishing **this** life for ourselves, and creating all kinds of gods and religions of our own making to ease our conscience and make death not so scary. The fact, therefore, that Christians **aren't** consumed with those things tells of something **extraordinary** going on in their lives, and of powers in operation beyond the realm of our world and ability.

And, what's more, we Christians know this is happening to us. Just as we know what our lives were like **before** we were Christians, we know what our lives are like **since** we're Christians. There are clear and obvious differences. Real things have happened to us, extraordinary things, as Paul demonstrates very clearly in **Galatians 3**, where again he goes right for the jugular. Just as he got personal in Ephesians 2 about what we were like in the past, he gets very personal again in Galatians 3 about what we are like now, because again the facts are obvious. And again we know *why* they're obvious - because they come from the very best evidence there is: our own experience.

So what is our experience as Christians? Paul puts it in the form of a question in **Galatians 3:5** - "**Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?**" Ever since we understood and believed why Christ died (verse 1), what has been our experience? It can be summarized in just one incredible and amazing word: "**MIRACLES.**"

Miracles are things outside the realm of human and earthly powers. They fit the bill perfectly, therefore, as "truly amazing, utterly extraordinary, undeniably obvious and vividly noticeable," all the things we need to prove that we Christians have been raised from this dead, useless, powerless existence into a completely different realm where incredible things are happening that prove there is an "**incomparably great power**" at work in us, and therefore that Christ is alive since the power is his.

But how do they prove that Christ is alive? Because the miracles happening to us are creating in us exactly what he is. They are raising us up into the same resurrected state he is in, as we saw in Romans 6. We're not afraid of death; our consciences are clear, and we trust and love God. And it's all happened since we became Christians. Look what happened to the Colossians, for instance, when the gospel of "**God's grace in all its truth**" was preached to them, **Colossians 1:6**. Their lives suddenly became filled with "**faith and love,**" **verse 5**, the very opposite to fear and worry, providing marvelous proof of a LIVING power at work, operating at full bore in their PRESENT lives, and even surprising Paul at how widespread (verse 6) this amazing miracle was happening.

There was clearly an extraordinary, miraculous and living power at work in them. But to Christians in any age that power is just as real, just as it is in OUR experience too.

So with all this in mind, how does it affect the challenge Paul faces us all with, Christians and non-Christians, in 1 Corinthians 15?

Here's the challenge again, in **1 Corinthians 15:16**: "For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either." So if we Christians can't prove we are raised from the dead then we must publicly state that Christ wasn't raised from the dead either, and admit that the entire basis for our Christian belief and preaching is null and void. We will shut up, therefore, and talk no more of resurrections.

But it's too late for that, isn't it, because we know too much. We know what the Galatians knew. We know what the Colossians knew. We know, just like them, that miraculous things have happened to us that are obviously and vastly different to what was happening to us before we were Christians.

And, what's more, they're different enough for NON-Christians to realize there's something extraordinary happening to us too, a prime example of which Jesus gave in **John 13:35** (The Message), "This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples - when they see the love you have for one another." Now there's another challenge: Jesus is saying Christians are clearly recognizable. You can pick them out in the crowd very easily, by a visibly identifiable and vividly noticeable sign. They love each other with a love you won't find anywhere else on Earth.

And what would this obvious and extraordinary love prove? It proves the truth of **John 17:26**, where Jesus prays to his Father, "I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself might be in them." The love we have is extraordinary because it's coming directly from a living Christ who is CONTINUALLY providing that love in us because HE HIMSELF is in us.

The obvious and very visible result of that being, we bear the marks of his likeness. What he is, we are. It's just as Paul said back in **1 Corinthians 15:49**, that "just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven." And that's the sign we've been raised from the dead. It's because we're like Christ. And we're like Christ because he's making us like him. And he's making us like him because he's **alive** to make us like him, filling us Christians continually with all that he is in his resurrected state, the proof of which is nothing like this is happening to anyone else but Christians.

Is he therefore raised from the dead? Yes, because he's clearly raised us from the dead too, lifting us into the realm where he lives, where he now lives his life in us. The proof that Jesus is alive, therefore, is that we Christians are becoming evermore like him, and that could only happen if there's an extraordinary power causing it to happen, because we can't make it happen ourselves.