

A Theology of Offerings

Rev. David Lipsy

- Scripture Reading: 1 Chronicles 29:1–22
- Psalter 133:all
- Psalter 342:2-3
- Psalter 183: all

We sing God's praises. We hear His Word read. We pray together. But then there is that moment when several men whom we call deacons, get up and pass around a collection plate into which people place money. Does that activity belong in a worship service? Wouldn't it be better to provide a box or some other means to gather the gifts of those who want to contribute? What about people who visit the church? Will they, because of this, think that the church is focused on money, that it is a money-making venture? Most importantly, what does God think of this activity being a part of a service dedicated to His praise and worship?

Let us pray to the Lord that our brief treatment of the subject of offerings may not only inform the mind but also stir the heart so that also this part of our worship service brings glory to God and holy gladness to our souls.

Our text is, in part, taken from 1 Chronicles 29:1-22. At this time, let us read again verses 10-14: "Wherefore David blessed the LORD before all the congregation; and David said, Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee."

Setting

The setting of our chapter is relatively straightforward. King David is about to be succeeded by his son Solomon. Preparations are being made for the building of

the temple of the Lord. And these two matters are being brought before the assembled Israelites.

In anticipation of this momentous and important building project, David himself donates an enormous amount of his wealth to the work and encourages others to do likewise, which they subsequently do. But far from a mere fundraising drive, the whole tenor of this passage, and more particularly of the giving, is worship rather than mere philanthropy. It has a clear God-orientation. It is this orientation that we want to observe and impress upon our minds, not only from this passage of God's Word but from the principles we find in several places of Holy Scripture. Let us begin by first considering these passages to get a sense of the history and development of offerings in Scripture.

1. Bible history of offerings

It should be clear that the very word offering has a dual sense to it. On the one hand, we might think of the sacrifices that God instituted. From the very dawn of time, already seen at the time of Cain and Abel, such offerings pointed people to the coming Savior. They clearly teach that something other than ourselves is needed in order to please the Lord, know His favor, and enjoy His salvation.

But it ought also be clear to us that there soon developed another dimension to the whole idea of offerings in the history of redemption. God would have His people express their gratitude and their dedication to Him and His service by giving a portion of their goods as a sacrifice of praise to Him and as important symbolism that all that they were and all that they had they attributed to Him.

We see this aspect of the offering first expressed in Abraham's time. You may recall when that mysterious figure, Melchizedek, came to meet Abraham after Abraham defeated the assembled kings. Scripture says Abraham gave to Melchizedek "tithes of all."

This principle is seen much more clearly developed in the unfolding of regulations regarding offerings in the worship of Israel. Second Chronicles 29 speaks of "thank offerings." In other places, we read of various dedication ceremonies with their accompanying offerings. We also read instances where persons not only gave a tithe of their goods to the Lord but more besides out of a

sense of thankfulness. By the time Moses begins to foretell the temple that would one day be built in the Promised Land, he speaks of a variety of offerings spanning a plethora of expressions, saying in Deuteronomy 12:6-7, "Thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks: and there ye shall eat before the LORD your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the LORD thy God hath blessed thee."

Our Lord, through the prophet Malachi, challenged Israel to continue offering to the Lord even when times were very difficult, encouraging their faith in Him by saying, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" Mal. 3:10).

So our attention is drawn not only to Christ as the Savior, but also a thanksgiving to the Lord as His people's benefactor, the One who blesses, provides for, and protects His people.

When we consider the chapter that we read together, we see more than duty and obligation on display. There is real joy shown to the Lord. For example, in verse 2, David says, "Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God," and in verse 3, "Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house." In verse 6, we read that the leaders then offered willingly. In verse 9, we read, "The people rejoiced for that they offered willingly." Upon seeing all this, David bursts forth in a prayer of praise (vv. 10ff). It is a marvelous prayer indeed in which David blesses God, extolling God's greatness and supremacy above all others, tracing all the blessings they enjoyed, including what they gave to Him, thanking God and praising Him for all, but then also counting it a peculiar blessing of God upon him and the people that they were able to give something of what He had given them.

But then notice in verse 17 how David fully recognizes that the outward act of

giving isn't enough to satisfy God, saying in prayer, "I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart and hast pleasure in uprightness." By grace, David could then add, "As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee."

We find the same kind of attitude and practice in the New Testament church. In Acts 2, immediately after the spiritually refreshing outpouring of the Spirit of God, we read this description of the fledgling Christian church: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers... and all that believed were together and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people."

A little later, in Acts 4, there is added, "Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."

Right after this, the Lord gives us Barnabas as a positive example of this spontaneous generosity and Ananias and Sapphira as wicked examples.

Our Savior also addressed the subject of offerings, laying down important principles that we ought to consider. But this consideration leads us to our second main point.

2. Biblical principles concerning offerings

It is important that we as Christians consider the histories that give us examples of giving, but we must then try, with God's help, to trace out principles that these histories and other texts of Scripture give us to help us develop a theology of giving. In this way, whatever decision we come to regarding offerings would be informed as much as possible by principles derived from God's Word.

As we do this, we need to realize that examples in the Bible are not always meant to be a pattern for what we ought to do. Sometimes God leaves on record

actions of people professing faith that are, upon further consideration, either not good in themselves (because ill motivations prompted them) or that prove to be unworthy of example because other passages of Scripture cast additional light on the matter, steering us away from them.

For example, the actions of Ananias and Sapphira were, on the surface, the same as others in the church. But the Word of God peels away the curtain, revealing their heart and showing that what appeared generous and good was really deceitful and wicked.

In the chapter we've been looking at, David, giving in the integrity of his heart much of his goods, actually announced to all Israel the quantity of his gift (vv. 4-5). This practice, because of what we learn in other passages of Scripture, would clearly not be something the church today would practice (see Matt. 6:3).

So we approach with prayer and care the process of deriving principles from Scripture. Perhaps it would be good to begin this section on principles by looking at our Lord's teaching in Matthew 6 since that is so often referenced in discussions about offerings. Consider verses 1-4;

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

It would appear at first glance that our Lord here condemns anything like giving of alms in a public setting, a point people raise in favor of having a box or some other means tucked away in a discreet place in the church so that a person's giving would be somewhat private.

But a careful reading of this passage and a comparison with other New

Testament texts shows that the operative words in this passage are "to be seen of them." "Take heed that ye do not your alms before me to be seen of them."

Notice how this caution, in almost exactly the same words, is given by Christ in His teaching on prayer. In verse 5, He says that the hypocrites pray publicly to be seen of men. In His teaching on fasting, Jesus says the same thing—that the hypocrites desire to appear unto men to fast. If our Lord truly meant that all prayer was meant to be in secret, then all corporate prayers found in the New Testament, and in families and church services today, would have to be counted disobedience to such a prohibition. A single example of God's conspicuously favorable response to the corporate prayer of the early church in Acts 4:23ff should be sufficient to prove that such a prohibition was not our Lord's intention in Matthew 6, namely, that all prayer should be done in secret. Yet it is true that all prayer must not be done to be seen of men, i.e., for the purpose of gaining favor or admiration of people.

Thus we apply this same understanding to Jesus' teaching regarding giving alms. If our Lord meant there was to be no giving of alms in a public setting, then the early church, under the direction of the apostles, must have missed that point entirely not long after the directive was given. In Acts 2 and 4, Christians would sell their possessions and, as described in Acts 4:34-35, "Brought the prices of the things that were sold and laid them down at the apostles' feet." When our Lord spoke to His disciples in Mark 12:42-44, He contrasted the rich and what they put into the temple treasury with the little bit which the widow contributed. He did not condemn either for doing what they did in a public manner, this being a practice dating back to Old Testament times. His observation instead concerned how sacrificial her giving was, putting all her living into the treasury as compared to the rich who gave only of their abundance.

In light of such passages, let us now proceed to set down some principles regarding giving, particularly in a worship context, as drawn from Scripture.

First, we find in both the Old and New Testaments the principle of expressing praise and thanksgiving to God by means of giving. This was obvious regarding that which we read about in 1 Chronicles 29, and it is also clearly part of the newly converted multitude's response to the gospel on the day of Pentecost and afterward.

Second, we certainly see that offerings of all kinds were woven by God into the public, corporate worship of the Old Testament church. As stated before, there were specific offerings for thanksgiving and for dedication of oneself to the Lord that were part of the ceremonial system God gave to Israel, pointing them to Christ.

Third, we see that the act itself is not sufficient for God to be pleased. One's inward motivation of heart is essential — that we do not give to impress others or even ourselves but instead to give as unto the Lord.

Fourth, Scripture teaches us to give willingly and cheerfully: “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). We see evidence of a corporate joy in both the ability to give and the willingness to give offerings to God, exemplified in the Old and New Testament passages we've been considering. A church should think long and hard before depriving God's people of the joy of praising and thanking God in this way.

Fifth, perhaps the biggest question one faces is whether the so-called regulative principle of worship warrants the inclusion of offerings in worship service. In other words, did the New Testament church include giving in their corporate worship?

Admittedly, good Christians differ as to their conclusions regarding this matter. The fact is, we have precious little detail given us in Scripture about just what a New Testament worship service looked like and consisted of. We do know, for example, that the Lord's Supper was celebrated by the church in a corporate, worshipful setting (1 Cor. 11:20ff). We know the saints gathered around the preaching of the Word (Acts 20:7). Gentile believers sang Psalms during worship services (1 Cor. 14:26). But do we have any indication that almsgiving had a part?

Perhaps it might be helpful in answering this question to ask a question. If offerings of thanks, praise, and alms were clearly an integral part of Old Testament worship, is it necessary for God to repeat Himself, as it were, for us to believe it is His will that this practice is to be continued in New Testament worship, especially if there is no indication of the abrogation of this practice?

We know the sacrifices are no longer part of New Testament worship because the book of Hebrews and other parts of God's Word clearly teach us that these

symbolic, ceremonial aspects of worship have been fulfilled by Christ and are therefore done away by Him. He is our great High Priest, our Passover Lamb, our everything. So even though, for example, the laying down of alms at the apostles' feet might not have been part of a formal worship service, such practices were clearly a vibrant part of the corporate life of the New Testament church and not simply individual Christians giving their alms solely by private means.

Furthermore, we also have that curious reference in 1 Corinthians 16:2 which reads, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." Admittedly, this is not the easiest passage to understand. But we may at least discern, first, that the apostle is referring to almsgiving. That becomes very clear from the verses following (vv. 3-4), where he offers to accompany whomever the church appoints to bring the alms to the poor saints in Jerusalem. Second, the apostle purposely refers to the first day of the week, the day the New Testament church gathers for corporate worship. In this context, it appears the apostle is saying that on that day we ought to have our alms readied by the time we gather for worship, so there be no gatherings of alms. When the apostle comes to bring them the Word of God, he would not have them scrambling here and there at the last minute, preparing their gifts to the poor.

We should heed this exhortation ourselves. Perhaps all of us will at times forget to prepare our offering ahead of time. But if giving is to be part of our worship of God, we ought not only to prepare our hearts before coming to worship Him, but we should thoughtfully and prayerfully prepare our offerings as well. When the deacons alert us to special needs, we ought all the more seriously consider what we may do as opportunity presents itself to help (Prov. 3:28).

It is my desire to take this matter and elevate it, as Paul would say, to show you a more excellent way.

3. Biblical worship and offerings

In Hebrews 9:14 we read, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" At the first Lord's Supper,

Jesus said, "This is my body which is given for you." In Galatians 2:20, Paul writes, "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." In the greatest act of public worship ever to take place on earth, the Lord Jesus gave Himself as an offering for the poorest of the poor. We are debtors to God in the greatest sense of the word; every sin we commit plunging us deeper into debt, every good thing that we omit doing sinking us deeper still. He gave not alms but Himself, to the death of the cross, so that our debts could be paid and our souls and lives cleansed from all sin.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." The offerings we give in church ought to be symbolic, representative of a wholehearted, whole-lived offering of ourselves unto God. Our bodies, our minds, our all were given to us by Him and ought to be yielded by us to Him in return. Isn't that what David said in the chapter we considered earlier? "O LORD our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine holy name cometh of thine hand and is all thine own." No, we can never throughout all eternity repay the Lord for all He has given us or done for us; that could never be. Yet it should be the desire of our hearts to do all that we can for the glory of Him that loved us and gave Himself for us. Is that the case with you, beloved? With me?

So I pray you, brethren and sisters in Christ, the next time the offering is received by the deacons and you reach out to put your alms in the plate or bag, please pray that this offering would be a token of your wholehearted surrender to the Lord, a giving of yourself in dedication and loving service to Him. What did He spare so that we might be saved? Nothing! "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

So let us never view the offering as just a "necessary evil" kind of thing. Let us participate wholeheartedly in this part of worship just as we do the rest: cheerfully, generously, and worshipfully, thinking each time again of the infinite sacrifice Christ made for us. May our response of praise to Him be as that which is expressed by Psalm 116:12, "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?" Amen.

The Father's Unspeakable Love

Rev. Bartel Elshout

- Scripture Reading: John 3:1-21, 35-36
- Psalter 261:1, 2
- Psalter 399:1-4
- Psalter 233:2, 3, 6
- Psalter 4:3-5

Beloved congregation,

The Altar of Burnt Offering was the largest and most prominent piece of furniture in the Tabernacle of Israel. The reason for this was an important one, for the Altar of Burnt Offering prefigured or typified the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. By means of this altar, and the daily sacrifices performed there, God wanted to teach the people of Israel that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins (Heb. 9:22). By means of that altar, and the sacrifices connected with it, Israel had to learn the centrality of the bloody sacrifice in God's redemptive purposes: without that bloody sacrifice, it would be impossible for God to be their God, it would be impossible for Him to dwell in their midst, and it would be impossible for Him to be gracious to them. Because of the bloody sacrifice, however, God could dwell in the midst of sinful people. The bloody sacrifice, pointing to the one sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ brought in the fullness of time, made it possible for God to pardon their sins freely. He was able to declare to them, "And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people" (Lev. 26:12).

And thus, congregation, the rich symbolism of the ceremonial law teaches us that the cross is the central and core element of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Without the cross, there is no gospel; without the cross, there is no salvation; without the cross, there is no forgiveness of sins; and without the cross, it would be impossible for God to be the God of sinners as we all are. It is therefore most profitable for the church of God to be directed ever and again to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that we would glory in nothing else save Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2).

In this message we want to direct your attention to Christ by way of the text that is so rarely connected to the cross — a text quoted more than perhaps any other text from the Word of God. It is a text that truly represents the heart of the gospel and came from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In it we hear the heartbeat of the triune God.

With God's help, I therefore wish to say a few words about John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Congregation, the theme of our text is *the Father's unspeakable love*, for it is the Father who "so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." This love of the Father is unspeakable indeed, for, as we shall see, it is a love of infinite dimension. I wish to develop this theme by way of three points:

First, I wish to speak about the wonder of this love—the wonder that God so loved *the world*.

Secondly, I wish to speak about the measure of this love. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son."

And thirdly, I wish to speak about the promise of this love, namely, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

1. The Wonder of the Father's Love

The love spoken of in our text is that love of which John speaks in his first epistle, declaring that "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). We cannot begin to understand the depth and glory of this text unless we first focus on the fact that when we say that God is love, this relates first and foremost to the fact that the Father loves His Son. In fact, eight times John tells us in his gospel that the Father loves the Son — for instance, in John 3:35, "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand."

This means that the Son of God is the infinite object of His Father's love. From eternity to eternity, the Father loves His Son with an unspeakable and infinite love — a love that is beyond our ability to grasp. And so it must be, congregation! An infinite God who has infinite love must have an object for His love that is like unto Himself. We may say, therefore, that the Trinity is first and foremost an everlasting

love relationship between the Father and His only begotten Son, who love each other in the Spirit and commune with one another in the Spirit. The love of God can therefore only be measured in terms of His only begotten Son.

It is in His Son that the love of God the Father is most gloriously and fully revealed — and also defined. Thus the Father's love for His Son motivates Him in all that He does. This is underscored in Colossians 1:16, where Paul tells us that all things were not only created by the Son, but also for the Son. In other words, when the Father created the universe, He created that universe for and to the glory of the Son of His love. When the Father saw the work of His hands, He was well pleased with His creation for He saw in it the reflection of the glory of His only begotten Son who is "the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person" (Heb. 1:3). It is a glory of which the psalmist declared, "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1). In light of this, the Apostle Paul tells us that all things in heaven and in earth were named after Him (Eph. 3:15).

The Father's love for His Son is the fountainhead of all theology. We will neither understand Scripture correctly, nor will we understand the whole work of redemption correctly, unless we understand that it all flows out of the fact that the Father loves His Son. All that the Father does is motivated by that love.

This means that the entire work of redemption is not first and foremost about us. Rather, it is about the Father's beloved Son! This parallels what Copernicus discovered about nature. Contrary to what always had been believed, he discovered that everything did not revolve around the earth. Instead, he discovered that everything in our solar system revolves around the sun. It is therefore not at all accidental that Scripture also refers to the Lord Jesus Christ as the "Sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2), for He is at the very center of His Father's thoughts and purposes.

All of this was most gloriously unveiled in and accomplished by the creation of man. Man was the masterpiece and crown jewel of God's creation, for he was in the fullest sense of the word created for and to the glory of God's Son. This was supremely manifested by the fact that Adam, as the created son of God (Luke 3:38), was created in the image of the eternal Son of God.

How can we arrive at such a conclusion? We may conclude this by considering

what the goal of redemption is, for then we will also know what the goal of creation was. In redemption, God accomplished what He originally set out to do in creation: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29). In other words, the people of God have been predestinated by the Father to be like His Son. John clearly alludes to this when he writes, "We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). This means that God's redemptive activity will ultimately bring forth those who not only will have been redeemed by Christ, but who shall also be like Him, for that was God's original purpose in creation. He originally created man to reflect the glory of His only begotten Son in a wonderful and unique way, and that is why God's delights have eternally been with the sons of men (Prov. 8:31). Consequently, God loved Adam with the same love with which He loved His only begotten Son, for He saw in Adam the image of His Son.

Against that background, consider the wretchedness of man's fall. What is it that makes the fall so very dreadful? Was it because Adam and Eve sinned by transgressing God's commandment? Yes, it was; but it was worse than that. When Adam sinned, and we in him, he was guilty of despising the love of his heavenly Father. He stepped on the heart of his Father. He despised the love that God has for His Son, a love that also included him, and in so doing he lost the image of God's Son. His grievous rejection of His Father's love and the loss of the image of His Son made Adam reprehensible in the sight of God, worthy of being expelled from His presence and fellowship

What could have been God's just response to such wickedness? What could have been His just response to men and women such as we who, as Adam, by nature also despise the love of God? It would have been entirely just if God would have revealed and manifested His infinite wrath only for the despising of that love.

You well know that in this vast universe of ours, this world is but like a speck of dust. In one moment, God, in His wrath, could have obliterated this planet and created a new world and a new humanity. *And yet it pleased Him not to do so!* That is the amazing truth revealed in our text. Instead of this text reading, "For God so hated the world that He poured out His wrath," this text tells us, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son."

Someone might immediately ask: "What exactly did Jesus mean when He used the word 'world'?" I am quite certain that John would have been rather astounded if he were to come back today and hear what explanations have been given for this text, particularly what meanings have been ascribed to the word "world." For a correct understanding of the meaning of "world," we need to recognize that John wrote his gospel and epistles at the end of his life, after having witnessed something that had never happened before in the history of mankind. John observed that God was no longer the God of the Jews only, but that He was now also the God of the Gentiles. In other words, salvation was no longer limited to the Jews, but salvation was now for the world. And so when John uses the word "world," he is simply referring to a world of Jews and Gentiles. We should read our text as follows: "For God so loved a world of Jews and Gentiles that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever, whether he be a Jew or a Gentile, would believe in Him, he should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Therefore, in this context, Christ is especially referring to fallen humanity. He is referring to wicked, ungodly, and rebellious humanity that by nature hates the Son of God. The Lord's Christ is ultimately the object of man's hatred, a hatred stirred up by Satan himself. We read of this enmity and hostility in Psalm 2:2, "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed." That is the humanity and that is the world of which Christ is speaking here. It is a world that hates the Son of God—a world that conspires against the Lord's anointed, against His Christ.

And yet, our text says, that God so *loved* this world! What an astonishing declaration this is! A greater contrast than we observe in our text is not imaginable — the contrast between the great and glorious Creator of the universe and this wicked, perverted, and rebellious world of ours. That is what makes the truth of this text so stupendous!

The fact that our text teaches that God so loved a fallen humanity by no means implies that Christ is teaching universal atonement. The word "world" is used in a generic sense; that is, it describes the human race generically rather than referring to every human being individually. In other words, our text is . saying that God so loved this fallen humanity (generically speaking) that He gave the very Son whom

this humanity hates. That is amazing! The Father gave the Son of His eternal love, the Son of His bosom, and the Son in whom He has eternally delighted Himself to a world that hates His Son.

How astounding it therefore is that "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17); "...that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor. 5:19)!

Having said this, however, let us also make a very personal application. Dear believer, who has been drawn by the cords of God's love out of darkness into His marvelous light, you may also insert your name in this text. The wonder becomes so amazing and so very personal, for God so loved you that He gave His only begotten Son specifically for you! This is all the more remarkable upon considering who you once were. Who were you before God dealt with you in His grace? What sort of a man or woman were you? The Bible answers these questions very clearly. You were by nature an enemy of God. You had no use for the Word of God or for the Son of God — and yet God so loved *you*. He loved you with an everlasting love, and He specifically gave His only begotten Son that you might be saved. He gave His Son to those who never asked for such a Savior and never desired such a Savior. And this also applies to you, dear believer, for you also never sought after God and never asked for Him. And yet, from all eternity, God was moved with love towards you!

In order to save you and make you a recipient of the love wherewith the Father loves His Son, He gave that very Son of His bosom and that Son of His love!

2. The Measure of the Father's Love

Our text confronts us with a profound dilemma. How can this God, who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, who cannot look on iniquity, and who has said that He will by no means clear the guilty, love such wretched, filthy, abominable, and wicked humanity? How can God love such a sinner as I? How can God love a world that hates and conspires against His Son?

That brings us to the word "gave." The Father gave His only begotten Son. The implication of the original Greek word is that the Father gave Him as a sacrifice.

There is the solution to our dilemma! There is the answer to how God can be the God of such sinners as we are. There is the answer to why God can love people like us who are worthy of His wrath.

However, in order to accomplish that, God had to give everything He had. The Father had to part with His own Son, the Son whom He loves with an everlasting love, whom He delights in, and for whom He does all things. *That Son* He had to give as a sacrifice for sin. Why? Because God cannot manifest His love in contradiction to His justice. The justice of God demands that the integrity of His law be maintained and vindicated. It demands the punishment of the transgressor of God's law, demanding that His wrath be poured out upon all those who hate Him and who hate His only begotten Son. Therefore, the only way God could love sinners like you and me is by giving the very object of His love, the Son of His eternal good pleasure. That Son had to come into this world and take upon Himself our human nature. That Son, the Son of His love, had to become the subject of His Father's wrath.

This makes the cross such an unfathomable mystery. It is not a mystery for me why the cross had to come. It is not a mystery for me how we, sinners, benefit from the cross. But the mystery of the cross is this, that the Father who loves His Son and who does everything for His Son, a Father who from all eternity is preoccupied with His Son and who aims for His glory — that He gave that Son to be a sacrifice for our sin. What a mystery indeed!

Behold Him hanging on Calvary's cross — the Son of the Father, forsaken by His own Father! Reverently speaking, it was even a mystery for Him! That is why in those awful hours of darkness, when the Son of God descended into the depths of hell, when the billows of God's wrath came upon His head, even He cried out in holy astonishment, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken *me*?" (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34).

Luther, when meditating upon this, was dumbfounded. For several hours he did not leave his study until finally his wife asked him, "Why have you been here all this while?" All he could stammer was, "God forsaken of God. Who can fathom that?" Who can indeed fathom this, congregation? On the one hand, we have the clear testimony of Scripture that everything the Father does is because He loves

His Son, and we also know that the ultimate outcome of the work of redemption will be the everlasting glorification of His only begotten Son. And then, on the other hand, we see this Son being subjected to His Father's wrath!

Oh, how amazing is the love of God and how amazing is the outcome of the cross! Precisely because the Son was forsaken by His Father and was subjected to the wrath of His Father against sin, hanging there as the Substitute for an innumerable multitude of men and women representing all of humanity, all nations, and all tongues, sinners like you and me can become the recipients of the same love with which the Father loves His Son. That is amazing indeed, for on the basis of that sacrifice a holy God can love unholy sinners! More specifically, Jesus declares in John 17:23 and 26 that the Father loves His people with the same love wherewith He loves His only begotten Son. Can you fathom that?

Dear people of God, God's Word declares that you are chosen in Christ, the Father's Son, from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). You were chosen in Him in order to be redeemed by Him, that you might become the recipients of the love wherewith the Father loves His Son. That is amazing love! That is a love that never began; a love that never wavers; a love that never ends.

However, in order to make that possible, the cross was an absolute necessity. It was demanded by a God of infinite love, because only there could the love of God and the justice of God embrace each other. They kissed each other (Ps. 85:10). On Calvary's cross, both the justice of God and the love of God were fully vindicated. The Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of the Father, transformed the symbol of God's curse into the symbol of God's love.

This brings us to the heart of our second point, for when it says, "God so loved the world," the measure of this love is expressed in the fact that the Father gave His Son to this fallen world. Thus, the miracle is not so much that God loved the world, but that He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. In other words, the Father's gift of His Son, of His only begotten Son, is the true measure of His love.

If you would say about someone who is a giant of a man with bulging muscles, "You know what? That man is able to hold a grain of sand in his hand," you would have said absolutely nothing about the strength of that man. And since God's love

is infinite, when you say that God so loved the world's fallen humanity, you have said nothing about the measure of His love. The measure of His love is, however, defined by that little word "so." "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son," that He gave Him to be the sacrifice for sin. *That* is the measure of His love!

John therefore testifies in 1 John 4:9-10 that in this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world." This expresses the same truth as our text. Notice also how this particular passage continues: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and here it comes again] sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Thus it is the sending of His Son into the world that defines the Father's love.

Has this ever caused you to worship in holy adoration? Have you ever been overwhelmed by this astounding reality? This truly becomes a matter of holy amazement for the people of God, for the more we get to know ourselves, the more we become acquainted with the ugliness of our sinful flesh, and the more we see the sinfulness of our lives, the more amazing this truth becomes.

Dear believer who loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, God gave His Son to be a sacrifice for your sins in order that your sins could be blotted out—so that you could be reconciled to God and become the recipient of the love wherewith the Father loves His Son. The Apostle Paul ran out of words in attempting to express this wonder, saying in 2 Corinthians 9:15, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!"

3. The Promise of the Father's Love

It is because of that unspeakable gift of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary's cross that our text ends with the promise of the Father's love, namely, "... that whosoever believeth in him [in this crucified Christ] should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Lest there be any misunderstanding, it should be noted at the outset that there is one thing the text does not say, namely, that everyone will be saved. Our text becomes very specific when it says, "...that whosoever *believeth in him* should not perish, but have everlasting life."

And yet, what a marvelous promise this is — a promise that comes from none other than Christ Himself! Here the Son of God, whom John says in John 1:1 is the Word of the Father, the living Word, declares to us the promise of the gospel, saying "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish."

What is it that makes this promise so beautiful? It is the realization that this promise is made to men and women like you and me, to boys and girls — to sinners who deserve the very opposite. It is made to men and women who deserve to perish. It is by way of the gospel that Christ promises to sinners worthy of condemnation and the wrath of God, "If you believe in Me, whosoever you may be, if you believe in Me, the Son of the Father, you will not perish, but have eternal life."

This defines what grace is. It is not merely the unmerited favor of God. It is indeed that, but it is much more than that. I once heard a brother in the ministry define grace as follows, "Grace means that God gives you the exact opposite of what you deserve." Think about that! As sinners, we deserve the wrath of God, and yet He is pleased to bestow His love on sinners. We deserve condemnation, and yet He gives unto us eternal life. We deserve to be cast out of His presence, and yet He offers peace and pardon to us. In His Son, the Father promises us the exact opposite of what we deserve!

Has this ever become a reality to you? This is indeed how the Spirit of God works. In order to make room in our hearts for this Christ and for this gospel, the Spirit will teach us that the nature of our sin is such that we deserve the wrath of God. It will then become real to us that "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10). Why is it that the Spirit of God needs to teach us this? Because without an experiential knowledge of this, the promise of our text will never have meaning nor value for our soul, for by nature we do not desire such a Savior.

There is not a sinner here today who doesn't need this Christ. But what a wonder it is that the Spirit of God continues to work, and that He convicts of sin, especially the sin of unbelief. He will bring a sinner to the place where it becomes utterly amazing to him that for such a wretch, for such a man or woman, boy or girl, who deserves hell and condemnation, there is a gospel message that God so

loved such sinners that He gave His only begotten Son, and that whosoever believes on Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

This marvelous promise flows directly out of the cross. Christ also merited the proclamation of the gospel. Had there been no cross, there would have been no gospel. This is a promise made by a Father who is so well pleased with the work of His only begotten Son! This Father, when His Son cried out triumphantly, "It is finished" (John 19:30), could no longer refrain, and rent the veil to demonstrate that the wall of separation had been removed by the blood of the Lamb of God. He resurrected His only begotten Son as a demonstration that He was well pleased with the work of His Son.

Because He is so well pleased with the work of His Son, He now offers His Son to hell-worthy sinners such as you and me. Today He offers to you His only begotten Son who was crucified on Calvary's cross, who has accomplished a perfect and complete redemption and who has done a complete work. Therefore, He can now freely offer salvation to you, a sinner, without money and without price. Why can He do so? Why is it that grace is entirely free? Why is His offer without strings attached? It is precisely because the price for salvation was completely and fully paid by the eternal Son of God who became the Son of Man.

The apostles did not hesitate to offer Christ freely. in their preaching. Take the time to read the sermon Paul preached in Antioch of Pisidia, recorded in Acts 13. You cannot help but be struck by how he ends that sermon, saying, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." That is the gospel! That is the good news we may proclaim to you, namely, that "through this man is preached *unto you* the forgiveness of sins."

And now the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ invites sinners like you and me to believe in the Son of His eternal love, the Son of His eternal good pleasure, and the Son of whom He declared, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5).

You cannot please God more and you cannot honor Him more than by believing on the Son of His eternal love! We often use the expression that God must be exalted to the highest. And indeed, this must be the goal of all ministry.

However, how do we accomplish this? God will be exalted to the highest when we believe on His Son, for the Father loveth the Son, and has committed all things into his hands" (John 3:35). Only when we believe on His Son do we truly endorse all that God has revealed of Himself in His Word. Only then do we truly say "Amen" to all of God's attributes.

John therefore writes in the same chapter, "He that hath received his testimony [the testimony of his Son] hath set to his seal that God is true" (John 3:33).

There is therefore nothing that so pleases God and so stirs Him to the very depth of His being as when a poor, needy, guilty, and condemned sinner takes refuge in His Son. Then the Father will truly be well pleased! And then, reverently speaking, He will not be able to refrain Himself any longer, and He will freely bestow eternal life on a repenting and believing sinner. The Lord Jesus Himself affirms this in John 6:40: "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life."

Perhaps you will now ask, "But how do I know that I am included in that invitation? How do I know that such a salvation is also offered to me?" The answer is expressed in the precious word "whosoever." John had witnessed the reality of this "whosoever" during his lengthy ministry. He was ninety years old when he wrote his gospel and epistles, and he had preached the gospel to all kinds of Gentiles who had lived in sin and wickedness. He had seen those men and women repent of their sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. He observed repeatedly that whosoever believed in Christ was saved.

To grasp the preciousness of the word "whosoever," We must look at the two verses preceding our text. In Order to instruct Nicodemus about the gospel of the cross, the Lord Jesus uses the history of the brazen serpent, saying, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). He then immediately proceeds to utter the magnificent words of our text: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son."

The affirmation of this was observed in the camp of Israel. Whosoever — regardless of who they were, whether they belonged to the rabble rousers who spoke against Moses and against the Lord, whether they were young or old —

whosoever looked at the brazen serpent was healed immediately. These bitten Israelites responded to God's message spoken by the mouth of Moses, proclaiming to them that there would be instant and complete healing if they would but look upon the brazen and exalted serpent. Can you imagine if Moses would have placed all kinds of conditions before these people? Imagine if Moses, surrounded by people that were dying by the thousands, dropping left and right, would have told them, "You may only look at that serpent if you first draw all the poison out of your wounds, or if you first get as close as you can. You must have as clear a view of the brazen serpent as you possibly can. And only then may you look." Had he said that, multitudes would have perished. Instead, however, Moses had a simple message for his dying people: "Whoever you are, wherever you are in the camp, just look! Oh, look at that brazen serpent, and I have a message from God that if you but look at this divinely provided remedy, you shall not perish but you shall live!"

I may likewise say to you that you are included in the promise of the gospel. No matter who you are, no matter how much and how long you have sinned, no matter how far you have departed from God, no matter how cold and hard your heart has become, I may say to you that if you believe in Christ alone for salvation you will "not perish, but have everlasting life."

Some of you may know that John Bunyan was so happy that it says "whosoever" in our text. Why? He reasoned that if the text would have said, "...that if John Bunyan should believe in him, he would not perish but have everlasting life," he would have been convinced that there was another John Bunyan somewhere in England, and that he was not addressed by the invitation of the gospel. To his joy, however, he concluded that it says "whosoever." That included even him!

The word "whosoever" includes the very chief of sinners. It includes a thief on the cross; it includes a Manasseh; it includes a Saul of Tarsus who persecuted the church of God; and it includes a John Newton who lived in great wickedness. It includes all sinners throughout the ages who have been saved by grace alone. Let me illustrate the all-inclusiveness of the gospel by way of a dramatic example. The gospel is so all-inclusive that even if Osama Bin Laden or another terrorist would

believe, even he would be saved!

And, therefore, my friends, if you perish, it will not be because the gospel invitation excludes you. If you perish, you will perish because you did not believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God. Someone has rightly said that when you live under the gospel, God places His Son on the pathway of your life. To go lost means that somehow you have to work your way around Him and His gospel. You will perish because of your unbelief. That is also the warning implied in this text, namely, "that whosoever believeth *not* on him, shall perish and have everlasting condemnation."

Listen to the explicit testimony of God's Word regarding this in the same chapter in which our text is found: "He that believeth on him is not condemned but he that believeth not is condemned already"; and then listen why, "...because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).

God's wrath is His just response to our unbelieving rejection of His beloved Son. Thus, the wrath of God is the negative manifestation of the love the Father has for His Son. That is why there is a hell! There is a hell because the Father loves His Son. He loves His Son so much that there is only one appropriate and fitting punishment for all those who have no use for His only begotten and well beloved Son, and that is hell. Hell is a place where the infinite wrath of God will burn — the wrath of a Father who loves His Son.

My friend, if you are still unconverted because you do not believe the testimony of God's Word; you belong to those human beings of whom it is true that the wrath of God is already currently abiding on you. Why? Because you do not believe in His only begotten Son! Again, hear the witness of God's Word: "And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." And then listen carefully: "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgèth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall jud in the last day' (John 12:47–48). Then there are these striking words from 1 Corinthians 16:22: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema"; that is, "Let him be accursed."

Do you understand why God's wrath burns against those who do not love the Lord Jesus Christ? Precisely because He is the Object of His Father's love. You cannot offend God more and provoke Him more than by not believing and loving His only begotten Son. Indeed, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed!"

So I ask you, do you love the Lord Jesus That is the pressing question of the moment for the Lord Jesus Christ is the ultimate mark of grace. It is the mark of all marks! If that mark is missing, religious experience is but a vain illusion. How can know whether you are converted? The answer is simple: Converted people will always love the Lord Jesus Christ! The Apostle Paul therefore ends his epistle to the Ephesians by addressing those who "love the Jesus Christ in sincerity" (Eph. 6:24).

My friends, my urgent question to you is, "Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ?" Your answer to that question is the real litmus test of your spiritual state, for "unto you therefore which believe he is precious" (1 Pet. 2:7). Your answer will determine your eternal destiny!

Listen once more to the explicit testimony of Scripture; "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed." Consequently, the apostle writes in Hebrews 2:3, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" And indeed, how shall we escape if such a Christ has been preached to us, if such a Christ has been offered to us, and if such an invitation has been extended to you that whosoever believes on Him will not perish but have everlasting life? If you will yet go lost, you will then perish because you have neglected so great a salvation and so great and willing a Savior. How will you escape?

No wonder that this same apostle declares, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). It will be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Father whose Son you have rejected in unbelief. That is why you will not escape the wrath of a Father whose Son you have spurned. That is why judgment came upon the keepers of the vineyard when they killed the master's son, for his wrath was roused. Therefore, oh sinner, I conclude by urging you with all the love of my heart to consider this text. You may bow your knees even now, however cold, hard, or indifferent you may be, and say, "Lord, I heard today that if

I would believe in Thy Son, then even I shall not perish, but have eternal life."

God is so pleased when we come to Him with His own words! He loves His written Word because it is about His Son, the living Word. He delights in His Word, and He is delighted when you, as a poor and needy sinner, honor His Word by taking hold of His Word and promises, saying, "Lord, hast Thou not said, hast Thou not promised, that whosoever shall believe shall be saved, and that if I come I shall in no wise be cast out?"

Therefore, sinner, come! Come without delay! Come, lest you perish. As Moses spoke to dying people, so I say to you, "Look, sinner, to a crucified Christ. Behold Him, the eternal Son of God who became the Son of man. Believe on Him and put your trust in Him. Touch the hem of His garment, even this very day and this very hour."

And so we are, and do stand before you, as "ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life," I lovingly urge you to kiss the Son of God by faith. Hear the Word of the Father as it comes to you today, "Kiss the Son, lest he [the Father] be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they [and they alone!] that put their trust in him" (Ps. 2:12).

How Does Christ's Resurrection Shape Our Hope?

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

- Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1–28, 42-44, 50-58
- Psalter 267: all
- Psalter 364: all
- Psalter 28:3-5
- Psalter 31:1, 4, 6, 7

We all live by hope. If you are an unbeliever, you put all your hope in this life. You get some satisfaction out of life, due to God's common grace, but ultimately your hope is vain, for it will perish. If you are a believer, you build your hope on a different foundation: you build your hope on the sure, unchanging foundation that Christ has been raised from the dead. For you, life is like a long trip or a spiritual pilgrimage to reach Christ and to be with Him in glory. Everything about your hope depends on Christ being alive and almighty.

Let us look more closely at how our hope is affected by Christ's resurrection. In the process, we will examine our hope, our life, and our attitude to the resurrection. We will pursue this theme via various portions of 1 Corinthians 15, which is Scripture's most profound, doctrinal defense of the church's confession, "I believe in the resurrection of the dead." Let us specifically focus on verses 19-20: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept."

With God's help, we wish to address the question, How does Christ's resurrection shape our hope? We will consider three points: a momentary yet miserable hope, a magnificent yet moderate hope, and an unmovable yet moving hope.

1. A Momentary Yet Miserable Hope

The Corinthian Christians did not deny the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, for as Paul says in the opening part of 1 Corinthians 15, hundreds of living witnesses testified (v. 8) of the resurrection. Indeed, the resurrection was already part of the apostolic tradition.

Some Christians at Corinth, however, had difficulty believing in a general, physical resurrection of the dead. They could not believe that all believers would be raised like Christ and that their bodies would be reunited with their souls and become like the glorious body of the Lord Jesus.

These Christians were influenced largely by Greek philosophers who believed that, when we die, our souls enter another world but our bodies perish forever. Unlike many philosophers today, they believed that though the body perished, the soul was immortal. Plato, for one, taught that the body is imprisoned by the soul. When someone dies, Plato said, his soul escapes the body like a bird escapes from its cage. For Greek philosophers, the soul was everything; the body, nothing. It was even less than nothing; it was the soul's prison.

Influenced by this Greek philosophy, some Christians at Corinth did not view the bodily resurrection as a privilege. For them, resurrection was purely spiritual.

Today, many modern theologians embrace a parallel error. They say Christ's resurrection refers only to the resurrection of the spirit or the teaching of Christ. They claim that the body of Jesus still sleeps in the tomb, but His soul goes marching on. Only Christ's teaching, doctrine, and spirit are still alive, they say. They believe only the doctrine of Christ is immortal. That doctrine, not the Person of the resurrected Christ, will one day overcome evil and Satan.

This theology is altogether mistaken in denying the bodily resurrection. It defies the express teaching of the Bible. When Paul instructs the Christians at Corinth about the resurrection, he first strongly asserts that Christ died, was buried, and rose again, all according to the Scriptures (vv. 3-4).

Under the Spirit's enlightening wisdom, Paul then tells the Corinthians the consequences of disbelieving in the bodily resurrection of Christ. In verse 13, he says, "But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen." The apostle basically says: If you do not believe in a physical resurrection and deny that the saints will once receive a body like Christ's, then Christ has not been raised, for He is the head of the body, and believers are members of His body. You cannot separate Him from His church. If the church will not be raised, then Christ is not raised, either. If we believe only in a spiritual resurrection after we die, then we can

only believe in a spiritual resurrection of Christ.

The consequence of this denial, Paul says, is the absence of hope and salvation: "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ" (vv. 14–15). If Christ was not raised from the dead, there is no gospel to preach to the lost. There is no gospel of salvation, of deliverance from death, and of eternal life. If Christ was not raised, we have no message of forgiveness, no message of victory over death and hell, no message of eternal life. If Christ was not raised, we have only a momentary hope, which will not carry into eternity

Christ's resurrection from the dead proves that His sacrifice has been accepted. It proves that His sacrifice has met every requirement of the justice and holiness of God, that God was satisfied by the work of Jesus. If Christ was not raised, the sin question is not settled, the devil is not defeated, atonement is not made, and there is no salvation for lost sinners. F. F. Bruce says, "If Christ had not been raised from the dead there would be no New Testament, no Christian faith, no Christian church, and the story of Jesus of Nazareth, crucified under Pontius Pilate would never have been told. The disciples, in their mourning after Christ's crucifixion, in their perplexity and unbelief, would have wandered off and found some other pursuit."

If Christ was not raised, our preaching is nothing but a lie, and your faith is in vain. All your trust and reliance upon Christ is an empty hoax. You trust nothing more than a bruised reed. You will be deceived in the end.

We recently witnessed the space shuttle docking with the space station. After they docked, everything in the space station could come into the shuttle, and all the supplies from the shuttle could come into the space station. A remarkable union brought the two together in the darkness. This was Paul's idea of faith: it docked the sinner with Christ. In the midst of the darkness and hopelessness of sin, we look to Christ and dock with Him by faith. As a result, all that is in us is transferred to Him, and all His righteousness and good works come through the channel of faith and are credited to us.

The space shuttle brought new batteries and sources of energy to the space

station, which had lost much of its power. Likewise, when Christ and the sinner come together, the power of Christ gives the sinner power over sin. It enables us to fight against sin and brings power into the heart. What a blessed docking this is between a hell-worthy sinner and the living Christ! As soon as that connection is made, life purges the sinner's bad record and gives power to the sin-fatigued heart.

Paul says here, in effect, that if Christ was not raised, we have no one to dock into. We have no hope of union. We become like any pagan in the street, trying our best to get to heaven by our own efforts. Then we are still sinners in the darkness, wandering further and further into outer darkness, with no hope of union with someone who can save us. What a terrible consequence!

Your only hope, Christian, of having your abhorrent records blotted out and all that Christ did written in its place and credited to you is burned into ashes if Christ was not raised! Your hope of gaining power over your habits that are so self-destructive and of getting power from above is gone! It is dashed into pieces! You are still mired in your sins.

Paul goes on to say in verse 18 that those who have fallen asleep in Christ have also perished, if Christ was not raised. In other words, those who died hoping in Christ were deceived in their hope. They have not entered into the place of eternal bliss.

Paul concludes in our text: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (v. 19). If Christ was not raised from the dead, He can only help us believers while we are alive. He cannot be our Savior in death and our Redeemer after death. We can expect nothing from Him after this life if He cannot lead us through the dark valley of the shadow of death into the kingdom of His Father. If that is so, we are of all people most miserable. We believers are the most pitiable and unhappy people in the world, for we have placed all our hope upon the Savior's redemptive work—in vain. We have given up the world with all its pleasures and follies and friendships—in vain. We have exposed ourselves to the hatred, the reproach, and the persecution of the world—in vain. We have been chastised by God—in vain. We have been harassed and tempted by the devil—in vain; we have fought against the world, sin, and Satan—in vain. We have prayed—in vain.

If Christ was not raised from the dead, all our hope, our religion, and our Christianity is a colossal mistake. It is nothing but a dream. Of all people, we are to be most pitied, for we are going to lose both this world and the world to come. If Christ was not raised from the dead, we have no hope or expectation for a better world. We have no future. Abraham and all other believers have sought in vain for a city which has foundations. Moses and the children of Israel have chosen in vain to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. In vain we have counted all things loss except for the excellence of Christ. In vain we have denied ourselves and crucified our flesh. In vain we have been oppressed; in vain we have hoped and believed.

But did you notice Paul's emphasis on the little word *if*? Paul says, "*If* Christ be not risen, then our preaching is vain...our faith is vain. *If* He is not risen, then those who have fallen asleep in Jesus have perished. *If* Christ is not risen, then of all men we are most miserable!" The apostle is saying in effect, "But God be thanked and blessed; it is not so!" Verse 20 says, "*But now* is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept."

2. A Magnificent Yet Moderate Hope

The truth of Christ's resurrection changes everything. Instead of having only a miserable, mistaken hope, we may now say that we are the most blessed people on earth, for we have a magnificent hope. *Now* we of all people are most happy and hopeful, for God has accepted the sacrifice of His Son, and there is no condemnation to those who are in Him. Our faith is not in vain but is the power of God unto salvation. *Now* preaching is full of power and comfort. *Now* those who have fallen asleep in Jesus, expecting salvation from Him, have entered into eternal bliss! *Now* all their sins are forgiven and buried in Jesus' empty grave.

This resurrection hope is like a beautiful, glistening diamond in our hands, which we can view from several different angles to appreciate some of its breathtaking beauty. Let's look at some angles of resurrection hope:

- *Consider the resurrection's magnificent Christ-centered hope.* Our resurrection hope is built on Christ's resurrection in three important ways:

First, the resurrection of Christ is God's validation of Christianity itself.

Without Christ's resurrection, Christianity would have been just another sect, quick to die out. But because Christ's tomb was empty on Resurrection Sunday, believers can triumphantly declare: "Death has lost its sting, sin is subdued, the world is overcome, and Satan is trodden underfoot. Christ, who was delivered for our offenses, was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25)!

On a tour of Israel, we approached the supposed sepulcher of Jesus and read on the door: "He is not here, for he is risen" (Matt. 28:5). Our guide said, "This is the best news you'll hear in all of Israel or the world." He was right! It is no wonder, then, that the New Testament believers greeted each other with "The LORD is risen indeed!" Christ's resurrection was the crowning event of His church — the V-Day. It guarantees our salvation as believers. Luther says, "Christ's death and resurrection are the two hinges on which the door of salvation swings open."

Have you ever cried out in awe: "Jesus is alive! Every stone is rolled away. Redemption is accomplished. Eternal life is secured. Justice is satisfied. The curse of the law is buried. Debt is cancelled. God's amen on His Son's work has resounded throughout the universe, for Jesus is alive. Christianity is objectively, certifiably real and true!"

Second, the resurrection of Christ is God's guarantee of our resurrection and our ultimate conformity to Christ. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:20-22, "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." He elaborates further in verses 45-49: "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly."

Paul clearly states that our resurrected bodies as believers will resemble Christ's resurrected body. He underscores that in 1 Corinthians 13:12: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall

I know even as also I am known." The apostle John is even more explicit in 1 John 3:2: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

The resurrected body of Jesus teaches us much about our resurrection bodies. The risen Jesus appeared in the same body that had been crucified. His wounds were apparent; His new body was very much like what He had prior to death. He was recognizable. Although on some occasions, such as with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, people did not immediately recognize Him, some familiar mannerism or expression eventually showed them that He was indeed the Lord. Also, His body could be touched by Thomas or other disciples. He was no disembodied spirit or ghost. He ate food with His disciples after the resurrection on more than one occasion, as recorded in Luke 24 and John 21.

Our ultimate end is to be like Christ; therefore, the Holy Spirit is increasingly conforming us to the image of God's dear Son. Paul says in Romans 8:11, "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." The Spirit of Christ is a marvelous guarantee of our ultimate destiny in His work in our lives. But even more marvelous is the truth that our existence will be ultimately like that of the risen Christ. That is what we, who are believers, can look forward to.

Third, Christ's resurrection guarantees that we will forever focus on Christ in glory. Revelation 7:15 says Christ will sit on the throne of glory forever in the midst of His people. Forever they will bask in His smile, worship at His feet, feast in His presence, bathe in His glory, and delight in His communion. Though they will enjoy the fellowship of saints and angels, Christ will be their all in all (Col. 3:11).

- *Consider the resurrection's magnificent conscience hope.* The resurrection of Christ is not just the objective cornerstone of our salvation; it is also the subjective hope of our conscience. The Holy Spirit usually leads sinners to that hope by first convicting them of their sin and making room within them for Christ in His resurrection power. He then shows them their miserable hope in themselves. He

makes us feel how poor, miserable, wretched, and naked we are in ourselves. We learn what it means to be without God. We learn what it means to be created for eternity, yet be separated from God and from His favor. We feel what it means to be deprived of God's presence and His love.

At such a time, we say to ourselves, "Is there anyone as miserable as I am-without hope, without God, without Christ in the world?" We are convicted by our sin. We feel the curse of the law, the judgment of God, the solemnity of our unreadiness to meet Him. We see that we will be miserable as long as we are without Christ, for to be without Christ is to be without holiness, without righteousness, without a Savior, without an advocate, without a Mediator between God and us. To be without Jesus is to be under the curse of the law and under the wrath of God

Every God-taught soul feels the need of Christ. They feel an unbearable burden on their shoulders which no one but Christ can take away. Normally, the Holy Spirit leads them to see themselves under the wrath of God and to realize that no one but Christ can save them from the wrath to come. They feel the sentence of death in their soul. They are brought to a crossroads: either Christ must justify them or they must burn in hell forever! They must either have Christ to bring them to God, or they must be shut out of God's presence forever. Like a martyr's last words at the stake, they cry out, "None but Christ!" So, if Christ has not risen from the dead, if the justice of God has not been satisfied, if no Savior lives to save sinners, if no blood cleanses from all sin, we would be of all people the most miserable.

But Christ *has* risen from the dead! That means that our Savior lives and can save us — even to the uttermost. That means the justice of God has been satisfied and salvation is offered freely to lost and wretched sinners.

Some believe that Paul's words, "Christ has been delivered up for our offenses, and has been raised for our justification," refer to a custom in the Middle East. If you want an article displayed in the market place, you can bargain with the merchant before deciding what to pay for the article. You then write out your price and lay that on the article. The merchant can either pick up the price or ignore it. If the merchant picks up the price, the offer is accepted.

Well, dear friends, Jesus Christ was delivered up for our offenses on Good Friday! He paid the full price for our sin and iniquity. And on resurrection morning, the Father accepted the price; therefore, the resurrection is the cornerstone of our salvation. Without it, we would not know that God was satisfied; we would not know that our sins were blotted out. God the Father accepted the price of His Son! So now, Paul says, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom 8:33-34).

When we understand these things by faith and the Holy Spirit applies them to our heart, we miserable sinners are set free in our consciences and we overflow with magnificent and joyous hope in Christ Jesus, which more than compensates for all our losses in this life!

- *Consider the resurrection's magnificent corporate hope.* Many of us have heard from childhood the question: "What is the chief end of man?" We readily answer: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." You and I strive to glorify and enjoy God in this life. No doubt we also look forward to how we might glorify and enjoy Him after death. But I fear we tend to stop at that point. We identify with Paul in Romans 7 when he says, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But we do not go on to consider that we will one day fully glorify and enjoy God in our resurrection body. So what a glorious day it will be when the bodies of the dead are raised in Christ! Paul alludes to this in his great benediction in Ephesians 3:20-21: "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end." We gain a sense of that glory and enjoyment in this life as we experience the Lord's work within us. But what will the consummation be like in the resurrection?

In Ephesians 1:18-21, Paul says to believers that they have been enlightened "that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he

wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set 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 world, but also in that which is to come."

In a holy and mysterious way, even our Lord's glory awaits the time when He gathers all His people with Him in glory and presents them to His Father, saying, "Here am I, Father, and all those that Thou hast given to me." Christ longs for the time when He will have His church, His bride, joined to Him in the resurrection.

Dr. David C. Jones, writing in the Fall 1985 issue of *Presbyterion* on Jonathan Edwards' dissertation concerning the end for which God created the world, says: "The corporate implications of glorification are not to be missed." Quoting Edwards, he says, "Thus the church of Christ, toward whom and in whom are the emanations of His glory and the communication of His fullness, is called the fullness of Christ, as though He were not in His complete state without her, like Adam without Eve." Jones then says,

Man's chief end is to glorify God in a body, in a corporate entity, organically united to its head, and not simply as individuals having no connection with one another. This is so much the case that eschatological glorification, which entails the resurrection of the body, is consistently represented in Scripture as taking place at the same time. The supreme good is the glorification and enjoyment that comes in the union of the risen Christ with His bride, the risen church. And the delight of that union will be like the physical and spiritual delight of the union of husband and wife. It is that towards which all of God's creation is leading. That fulfillment of man's chief end, the full glorifying and enjoying of God, will come when we, as His bride, the church, in our resurrection bodies, will be united with Christ in His resurrection body, and we shall be like Him, and so will we ever be with the Lord.

What a day it will be when our whole being, body and soul, praises the Triune God forever with no more sin in our soul, no more sin in our body, and no more

temptation to sin! We will forever be what we have always wanted to be from the moment of our new birth — sin-free! We will be so sin-free that our holy, spotless Bridegroom will look at us and say, “I see no spot in my Jacob, and no transgression in my Israel.”

Amazing grace! I will finally be a worthy, perfect bride in the presence of my worthy, perfect Bridegroom, and enjoy an eternally perfect marriage!

- *Consider the resurrection's corporeal or physical hope.* Our resurrection bodies will have continuity and identity with our present bodies and yet be substantially different. To explain this, Paul uses the image of a seed that is planted and gives birth to a plant. The seed doesn't actually die, but exists no longer as a seed but as a life-giving nutrient to the plant. Paul's point is that the seed's identity continues in a different form.

We are already familiar with this transition in life. We look at baby pictures of a friend and see some features in the adult that were already evident in the baby. And though we are told that our entire physical molecular composition changes every seven years, we still look much the same. Still, we wonder what our resurrection bodies will be like. If a baby dies, will she be resurrected as an infant? We do not know the answer, but we do know we will be recognizable. When Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John immediately knew who they were. Likewise, when we sit down to eat with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in heaven, we will not need name tags for identification.

First Corinthians 15 offers the fullest explanation of the differences between our present body and our glorified body. In verse 35, Paul asks, "How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" He answers, "And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be.... But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him.... So also is the resurrection of the dead" (vv. 35, 37, 42a). Paul goes on to mention five differences between our present body and our glorified body in heaven.

First, he says, in verse 42b: "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption." I am dying as I write this. Your bodies are dying as you read this. Our teeth get cavities, our eyes grow dim, our hearing fails us. There is an

inevitable process of deterioration at work in every cell in our bodies, which is remorselessly going on until we die. Paul tells us that in heaven there will be no such deterioration. Our bodies will be imperishable and incorruptible. We will be rejuvenated beyond the reach of sickness and injury and death. Imagine what it will be like to have a body that never knows pain, disease, or weakness!

Second, Paul says in verse 43a, "It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory." A casket contains the poor, weak, wasted shell of someone who has been ravaged by disease. If you look at that poor, dead flesh, which will decay to dust, do you not agree that it is sown in dishonor? But Paul says, "It is raised in glory." I do not know everything that means, but the verse does assure us that in heaven our bodies will be healthy and radiant. Jesus said, "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Our culture puts a high premium on appearance, but no matter what you look like today, you will be even more beautiful in your resurrection body. You will be strong and glorious and magnificent!

Third, Paul says in verse 43, "It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power." How weak we are! We so often have to put up with our lack of strength, our fatigue, our weariness. We get tired and fall asleep, we are stressed and feel we cannot cope, and our energy drains away because of problems and people.

Do you have some disability that you have coped with all your life? Like the lame and blind people who were healed by Jesus, you will one day experience deliverance from that limitation, not only in the functions that you regard as normal in this life, but also in powers you can scarcely imagine. Think of people with mental impairments who will one day operate faster and more accurately than any computer. Think of a world beyond this world of color that will be so multidimensional and so glorious that we will realize what we see today is but a shadow. "Raised in power" means that our bodies will pulsate with energy and dynamism and power. We will not know weariness. No disability will hinder us. We will carry out all the impulses of our holy wills and our holy desires, engaging in continually blessed, worshipful activity forever and ever!

Fourth, verse 44 says, "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." The word *natural* here means our bodies are subject to the limitations of this age,

implying they are weakened and damaged by sin. The natural body is what we have inherited from Adam. It was created good, as only God could make it. But what awaits us in the resurrection is even better — we will have bodies like the resurrected body of Christ.

Cornel Venema says, "The word *spiritual* here harks back to Genesis 1 when Adam was breathed into by God's Spirit and he became a living soul. It was an in-souled body. The language used for the spiritual body is that of a body that is animated and energized by the Spirit."

Gerhardus Vos says *spiritual* here should have a capital "S." What Paul means is that we will have physical, material bodies of flesh and blood that are energized and ruled by the Spirit. A spiritual person not only thinks about spiritual things; he is indwelt by the Spirit. A spiritual body is not a non-material body; it is a body irradiated by the Holy Spirit and perfectly suited to the environment of heaven. Our bodies will be the servants of our spirits in heaven. Our body and spirit together will enable us to serve and worship God.

So *spiritual* here means our bodies will be totally submissive to the Spirit of God. Jesus was totally submissive to the Spirit while He was incarnated, yet He was subject to temptation in His natural body. But in our resurrection bodies, we will enter into the ultimate freedom that Augustine says is not the ability to sin that Adam had, or the ability not to sin that the redeemed now have as compared with the inability not to sin that characterized our unredeemed state, but rather, in our spiritual bodies we will have the greatest freedom of all — the inability to sin." Our resurrection bodies will no longer experience the temptations to which we are now subject.

Finally, in verses 53-57, Paul says the "mortal must put on immortality." All the wonderful traits of the resurrection body already described will not end in death. Our bodies will be the same in essence, but they will have new qualities designed for immortality.

When Christ raised Lazarus from the dead, Lazarus still had to die again. I have often wondered how he felt about that. He must have been torn; happy to be raised for the glory of Christ, yet longing to be with Christ forever in glory. Paul says those raised by Christ at His Second Coming will not have such mixed feelings.

Christ is "the firstfruits" (vv. 20, 23) and "the firstborn from the dead" (Col. 1:18). Those who follow Him will be raised with bodies that are immortal like His, no longer subject to death. You can see why Paul, in Philippians 3:10–11, says he longs to be with Christ in eternity: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." In the end, the resurrection makes us like Christ.

- *Consider the resurrection's comparative hope.* What kept the Apostle Paul going in all of his sufferings was knowing that the good he would have in glory would be so magnificent that it would make the troubles of this world seem miniscule. Those joys and comforts are negative, but they are also positive.

The negative is that all the troubles that we experience with Satan, the tempting world, our old nature, tears and sorrow, ill health, and ill treatment from others will pass away when we get to heaven. We will never again fear temptation, death, falling, bringing shame on our Savior's name, or departing from the faith.

Heaven will be full of positives. The greatest positive is saying like Robert Haldane, who witnessed revival in Geneva when he preached to students: "Oh to be forever with the Lord!" In heaven, Christ will never be out of your sight, dear believer. He will be in your eyesight, before your face, and within earshot for you to talk to, to worship, to question, to understand the Word of Life, to adore, and to thank Him for what He has done for you.

Heaven will be a place of perfect worship of God, perfect service to God, perfect reigning with Christ, perfect fellowship with saints, perfect education about God and His truth, and perfect rest. It will be a place of gracious reward for faithfulness on earth and abundant compensation for suffering on earth. Heaven will be a place of perfect holiness—an eternal Holy of Holies and a sin-free land. As Rowland Hill says, "If an unholy man were to get to heaven, he would feel like a hog in a flower garden." Heaven will be pure and clean. There will be no infirmity there and not one speck of dust. All evil will be walled out; all good walled in.

Finally, heaven will be a world of love. Spurgeon puts it this way: "A fish can more easily drink the oceans dry than we can ever exhaust the love of God in

heaven." He adds: "Drink away little fish, you'll never drink it all dry!" Oh, magnificent hope, magnificent love! Edwards says God's love in heaven is an ocean without a floor and without a shore!

Our magnificent hope of heaven ought to teach us not to live just for this life and this world. In living more for the world to come, the Christian should moderate his hopes for this world. Throughout his writings, Paul says that the true Christian has the best of this world, though his heart is not here. His hope in this world falls far short of his hope for the life to come. It is a moderated and tempered hope that comes out of the "now-not-yet" tension of this present age. Now we are in Christ and live by hope, but we are not yet what we will be in glory.

You might say, "What should my attitude be toward this life if I am focused on the life to come? How can I live out this moderate hope with regard to this world?"

Following the teachings of Paul, Calvin teaches us that though we live in hope in the world today, afflictions and cross-bearing are necessary for us to learn contempt for the present life when compared to the blessings of heaven. This life is nothing compared to what is to come. It is like smoke or a shadow. Calvin asks, "If heaven is our homeland, what else is the earth but our place of exile? If departure from the world is entry into life, what else is the world but a sepulcher?" He adds, "No one has made progress in the school of Christ who does not joyfully await the day of death and final resurrection."

Calvin uses an argument of opposites to find a middle way between them when explaining the Christian's relation to this world. On the one hand, cross-bearing crucifies us to the world and the world to us. On the other hand, the Christian enjoys this present life, but with due restraint and moderation as he learns to use things in this world for the purposes that God intended them. Like Paul, Calvin enjoyed good literature, good food, and the beauties of nature. But, also like Paul, he rejected all forms of earthly excess. The believer is thus called to Christ-like moderation, which includes modesty, prudence, avoidance of display, and contentment with our lot, for the hope of the life to come gives purpose to the enjoyment of our present life. Like Paul, Calvin says, "We have here no continuing city, but seek one to come." This life is always straining after a better, heavenly life.

How is it possible for a Christian to maintain a proper balance so he enjoys the gifts that God gives in this world while avoiding the snare of over-indulgence? Calvin offers three principles gleaned from Paul:

1. Remember that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift. This should restrain our lusts because our gratitude to God for His gifts cannot be expressed by a greedy reception of them.
2. Remember that we are stewards of the world in which God has placed us. Soon we will have to give an account to Him of our stewardship.
3. Remember that God has called us to Himself and to His service. Because of that calling, we strive to fulfill our tasks in His service, for His glory, and under His watchful, benevolent eye, always aiming for the maturation of the saints and the salvation of the lost.

In summary, what Paul and Calvin teach is that a Christian *should not expect to find all joy in this present life*. This truth is obvious but worth stressing because we believers tend to feel sorry for ourselves about having to live in self-denial. Deep down, we don't truly believe that denying ourselves for Christ will give us joy in Christ. We struggle against the unfairness of seeing unbelievers living at ease and in prosperity in this world while we carry our crosses to the bitter end. It is hard to accept that throughout life we must put base desires behind us while all around us people are freely acting out their ambitions. They don't have many restraints, while we are called to be temperate and self-controlled, refusing to hanker for things that the world enjoys but which would compromise our holiness and obedience to God.

Having said that, we go on to say that the Christian has many blessings, comforts, and joys in this life, and God who is rich in mercy has given us these things to enjoy. He keeps back no good from those that love Him, even now. Even so, the Christian must deny himself many things in this life and must expect that he will not get full joy in this life because of certain things that belong to the essence of Christian faith and life.

The art of being a Christian is not expecting too much of this life. We do not expect God to give us everything; rather, He gives us only a modest share of joys and comforts. In this world, God feeds us with a spoon. In the world to come, God will feed us with a ladle.

3. An Unmovable Yet Moving Hope

In 1 Corinthians 15:58 Paul says: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." You may wonder why Paul adds this verse after an entire chapter devoted to the resurrection. Actually, Paul applies the entire doctrine of resurrection by teaching us that we are not simply to say, "The Lord is risen indeed! Now let us sit back and wait for God to apply the resurrection power of His Son."

Rather, Paul says that because believers are recipients of this magnificent resurrection hope, they must be steadfast and unmovable. What difference does it make whether our Lord comes today or tomorrow, and in a moment or a twinkling of an eye? If He is coming today, I want to be ready. I want to live in anticipation of what will be mine when Christ comes. Paul says that, in rising from the dead, Christ is the firstfruits of those who sleep. So for those in Christ, who now reigns, rules, and brings all things into subjection to Himself, the final enemy to be subjected is death. Believers live in anticipation that this corruptible will put on incorruption and they no longer are in their sins but are justified and being sanctified. So "Thy kingdom come, Lord, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," is a prayer born of this resurrection hope. If you believe in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the resurrection hope, then you must stand firm — immovable and steadfast — for Christ and His gospel.

Second, Paul says we are to be moving and active. We must be motivated by our steadfast resurrection hope to become active in the work of God. We must be willing to die every day for the sake of the gospel, says Paul, who fought with wild beasts in Ephesus. Why would Paul do that if Christ had not risen from the dead? But He has, and that puts wind in Paul's sails! It gives us strength and hope-filled expectation! It makes us want to be about the business of the King. We want to aim for our Father's glory, for the edification of the saints, and for the salvation of the lost.

Many people around us today have no sense of direction and no future. Their lives are vacuous; they live as though they were just killing time. We have a message for them: Christ was crucified for sinners and raised for their justification.

He will come again at the end of the age, and every believer will share in His resurrection victory in the world that will come when He appears. Believe in Him so that you may live in hope today and in the world to come. Amen.