

How Does Christ's Resurrection Benefit Us?

The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) embodies the commitment of the Reformation to non-speculative theology as it logically expounds core biblical truths along practical and pastoral lines for the Christian life. Beginning with belonging to Christ as our only comfort in life and in death (Q/A 1) and concluding with the prayer Christ taught us to pray with full assurance knowing God will surely listen to us in his name (Q/A 116-129), the document constantly unfolds the implications of our personal, covenantal relationship with Christ.

This is manifest in the catechism's exposition of the article of the Apostles' Creed on the resurrection of Christ. What good is it for the church to believe that on the third day Christ rose again from the dead? Is this article of faith dispensable for the Christian life? Specifically it asks, "How does Christ's resurrection benefit us?" Are these benefits something we can do without?

Behind this question is a biblical realization that just as Christ did not die for himself, but for us, so he was not raised for himself, but for us. The apostle Paul writes, "[Christ] was delivered up for *our* trespasses and raised for *our* justification" (Rom. 4:25). The question, then, is not selfish, hedonistic or man-centered, but properly Christ-centered as it shines the spotlight on his gracious role as our mediator. All of the magnificent benefits that we enjoy because of Christ's resurrection resound to the praise of God's glorious grace.

Question 45. How does Christ's resurrection benefit us? A. First, by his resurrection he has overcome death, so that he might make us share in the righteousness he obtained for us by his death.¹ Second, by his power we too are already raised to a new life.² Third, Christ's resurrection is a sure pledge to us of our blessed resurrection.³ (1) Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:16-20; 1 Pet. 1:3-5 (2) Rom. 6:5-11; Eph. 2:4-6; Col. 3:1-4 (3) Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:12-23; Phil. 3:20-21

Question 57. How does "the resurrection of the body" comfort you? A. Not only will my soul be taken immediately after this life to Christ its head,¹ but also my very flesh will be raised by the power of Christ, reunited with my soul, and made like Christ's glorious body.² (1) Luke 23:43; Phil. 1:21-23 (2) 1 Cor. 15:20, 42-46, 54; Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2

There are three benefits that the Heidelberg Catechism lists:

1. Death Has Been Overcome

“First, by his resurrection he has overcome death, so that he might make us share in the righteousness he won for us by his death.” [Scripture Proofs: Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:16-20; 1 Pet. 1:3-5]

Despite attempts to normalize death (think Lion King’s circle of life) or to distract us from its inevitable blow, the resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us the boldness to look unflinchingly into its eyes knowing that it has been overcome. The people of God, then, have every reason to be lionhearted in the face of suffering, for we know the Lion of the tribe of Judah holds in his hands the keys of Death and Hades (Rev. 1:18). “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:56-57). The glory of Christ’s resurrection shines in its power to transform our death from *a payment for the debts of our sin* into *our triumphal entrance into eternal life*. For we have come to share in his righteousness, which has opened up for us “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:4).

2. We Have Already Been Raised to New Life

“Second, by his power we too are already now resurrected to a new life.” [Scripture Proofs: Rom. 6:5-11; Eph. 2:4-6; Col. 3:1-4]

The Heidelberg catechism was well-aware of what has come to be termed the “already-not yet” of salvation. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ were not private events, but the public work of our covenant mediator who died and rose again as our representative. So “if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Rom. 6:5). By means of our union with Christ by his Spirit through faith we have already been born again to a new life (1 Pet. 1:3), made partakers of the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), and are presently seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:4-6). We cannot see this with our physical eyes and that’s ok for the present. For we are called today to walk by faith, not by sight. We might better learn to do this if we start viewing ourselves and our circumstances through our *ears* attuned to the Word of God, rather than our *eyes*.

3. Our Glorious Resurrection is Guaranteed

“Third, Christ’s resurrection is a guarantee of our glorious resurrection.” [Scripture Proofs: Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:12-23; Phil. 3:20-21]

While we have already been raised with Christ to a new life, our physical bodies remain subject to our present state of humiliation. This is the case because as Christians united to Christ we follow in his footsteps from humiliation to exaltation, from the cross to the crown, from shame to glory (you can see this pattern in Phil. 2:6-11 and Rom. 1:3-4). So the apostle Paul doesn’t care how fit you may be or how few GMOs you may consume, when he notes that our present natural bodies are perishable, dishonorable and weak (1 Cor. 15:42-43). Essential Oils will not reverse the perishability of your body. Designer clothing will not cover its dishonor. And the perfect gym routine will still leave you weak. In fact, nothing in this creation can change this description of you, save the power of Christ in his resurrection. In him *alone* is what is perishable, dishonorable and weak, raised to a new, Spiritual (note the capital “S”) existence of imperishability, honor and power. We share in his sufferings today, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible we might attain the resurrection from the dead (Phil. 3:10-11). “Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our body of humiliation [τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως] to be like his body of glory [τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης], by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Phil. 3:20-21; cf. Rom. 8:29). It is in the hope of this glorious resurrection, which Christ’s own resurrection guarantees as the firstfruits, that we live and die to the glory of God the Father.