

The Death and Resurrection of Christ
Affecting the Behavior of Believers – Short Version

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Introduction

Many of the Apostle Paul's writings include references to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He often discusses how this historical fact should affect the behavior of Christians. Two of his letters that have significant sections discussing this matter are Romans and Colossians. In these sections Paul first argues that believers have been united with Christ in his death and resurrection. This fact should enable them to be godly people, avoiding sinful actions, and should transform their lives into suitable members of the body of Christ, the church.

Practical Results of Death and Resurrection in Romans

After writing about the justifying affect of the death of Christ, in Romans chapter 6 Paul starts discussing the believer's union with Christ in his death and resurrection. He begins this section by posing a very practical question concerning whether believers are to continue to live in sin so that God's grace would abound (v.1). Paul answers this question with a resounding, "No". Rather than moving on to simply give instructions on how to live, he bases his answer on the fact that a believer is one who has died and risen with Christ (v.2). He presents a detailed argument based on the fact of the believer's union with Christ. He explains that in baptism a believer has been baptized into the death of Christ, and thus has died in regards to sin. As Christ was raised from the dead, so the believer has been made alive to God (v.3). The believer's sinful body has been destroyed so that he is no longer a slave to sin (v.6), but rather has been freed from sin (v.7).

These factual statements regarding a believer's existence are all made in the indicative mood in Greek, presented as facts that have already been accomplished. Up through verse 10 Paul seems to pay no regard for the believer's experience, but is merely presenting the truths of the gospel concerning the believer's union with Christ. Then in verse 11 he changes to the

imperative mood. Based on the fact of the believer's union with Christ in his death and resurrection, Paul now presents the importance of the believer's cooperation with that truth. He starts using phrases that instruct the believer to consider themselves dead to sin (v.11), to not let sin reign over them, nor to obey the lusts of their flesh (v.12). He then urges the believer to present the very members of their body to God as instruments for doing righteous deeds, not as instruments of evil deeds (v.13).

It is evident from the argument that Paul makes in Romans 6 that he expects that the death and resurrection of Christ should have a profound affect on how a Christian behaves. A believer should not obey the lusts of the flesh, nor live out sinful actions. Instead a believer should live out righteous deeds. Although Paul does not give specific examples of the kind of sinful behavior he is referring to, one could easily assume it is the evil deeds that he finished discussing in the previous chapters, such as immorality, murder, envy (1:29-31), and adultery (2:22).

Practical Results of Death and Resurrection in Colossians

Paul makes this same kind of argument in the book of Colossians. However, rather than talking in general terms about being free from sin, he gives more specific details regarding the affect of this truth on the believers' lives. Just as in the Roman's passage, he starts by mentioning to the Colossian believers the objective fact that as Christians they have been crucified, buried, and raised with Christ (2:12-13). He then applies this to their experience and asks, as people that have died to this world, why should they live in subjection to the religious bondages of the world (2:20-21)? After this application of their death with Christ, Paul talks about the affect that their resurrection with Christ should have on their lives; they should seek and set their minds on heavenly things (3:1-2). He then spends the rest of chapter 3, and most of the rest of the book, with a detailed explanation of what this should look like in their practical, daily lives.

Based on the believer's death and resurrection with Christ, Paul again turns to the imperative mood in exhorting the believers regarding their behavior and relationships. He first insists that their death with Christ should cause them to deal with personal sinful habits and actions, such as fornication and covetousness (3:5), thereby showing that death with Christ means death to specific sins. He continues to explain that the believer's death with Christ should also affect their relationship with others. Thus, death with Christ means death to treating others improperly, like being angry, having malice, and lying to others (3:8-9).

Not only should the death and resurrection with Christ mean putting away sinful habits and actions that damage relationships, it also means putting on positive virtues that will allow a believer to function properly as a member of the church. In Colossians 3:12-17, Paul urges the believers to clothe themselves with the kind of godly character that would promote relationships among Christians. Believers should be compassionate, kind, meek, loving, and forgiving.

Furthermore, right after this section that talks at length about the death and resurrection of Christ, this chapter continues to argue for the proper kind of relationships among family members. Paul thus strongly implies that the death and resurrection of Christ should profoundly affect a believer's family life. He specifically explains appropriate behavior in the relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves.

Conclusion

From these two passages, it is clear that Paul expected that the death and resurrection of Christ would have a profound affect on the behavior of believers. Because of their union with Christ in his death and resurrection, they should be transformed into godly people that reject sinful habits. It should also transform their relationships with other people and thus create an atmosphere where the church of Christ can flourish.