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“IF BY ANY MEANS . . .”

by DONALD L. NORBIE

MR. NORBIE examines Paul's words "if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3: 11), and concludes that they do not imply any doubt on Paul's part about his participation in the resurrection of the just. While the premillennial, two-resurrection schema with which he operates will not command the agreement of all our readers, the main thrust of his study is independent of one school of eschatological interpretation or another.

THESSE words were written by Paul after having known Christ for about twenty-five years and having been greatly used of God. They merit careful study.

Phil. 3:11 reads "... if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead" (A.S.V.). These words breathe the passionate desire of Paul to be with Christ in his resurrection body. They parallel the thought expressed in verse 14 of Paul's race consummating in the "upward calling of God". Death is not the goal of the believer, but resurrection (2 Cor. 5:4).

First of all, one should note the resurrection, that is described. It is not a general resurrection, but a resurrection out from (ἐκ) the dead. The majority of the dead are to be raised later for judgment. Daniel hints at a difference in resurrections in Daniel 12:2, although not stating a time lapse between them. The Lord Jesus refers to this statement in John 5:28, 29, and in Luke 20:35. He implies that one blessed resurrection precedes a general resurrection. This is the resurrection out from (ἐκ) the dead. Christ's resurrection is the first fruits (1 Cor. 15: 23) and thus is also a resurrection out of the dead (Acts 4: 2; 1 Peter 1: 3).

It is interesting that here in Philippians the noun used is unique in the New Testament. It is a compound noun, ἐξανάστασις, literally an "out-resurrection". This noun with the preposition emphasizes the "out-from" character of this resurrection.

In Revelation the time lapse between these two resurrections—and there are only two—is given (Rev. 20:5, 6). Compare also 1 Cor. 15:23, 24: "Christ the first-fruits; then they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end [the judgment of the great white throne, etc.]" (A.S.V.). This first resurrection then is for those that are Christ's, all believers in Him.

Let us look at another word in our verse, the word "attain". It means simply "to come to," "to arrive at" or "to reach". It

does not really shed too much light on one's interpretation of the verse.

The pivotal and controversial words are εἰ πῶς, “if by any means.” Do these words imply uncertainty, the likelihood of failure? Is Paul here denying the certainty that one can know he has a part in the first and blessed resurrection?

Paul in other places has said, “I know ... and am persuaded” (2 Tim. 1:12), speaking of his salvation. Speaking of the resurrection body he wrote, “We know ... we have a building from God” (2 Cor. 5:1). At the end of his life there is a triumphant ring of certainty, “I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7). He is confident of acceptance with the Lord. Previously he stated with joy, “We all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed” (1 Cor. 15:51). Does he here change his attitude?

There are only four appearances of this expression εἰ πῶς in the Greek New Testament. These are Acts 27:12; Rom. 1:10; 11:14; and Phil. 3:11. In Acts the mariners, wishing for a better port for the winter, advised to put to sea “*if by any means* they could reach Phoenix, and winter there.” Certainly there was not real doubt in their minds as to their arrival or they would never have set sail. Of course, the unexpected could happen, but their firm belief was that they would anchor safely in Phoenix. Strong desire, a desire to use any means, is expressed by these words, not doubt.

Romans 1:10 gives Paul's prayer, making request, *if by any means* now at length I may be prospered by the will of God to come unto you.” The words express the longing of Paul's heart to visit the believers at Rome.¹

In Romans 11:14 Paul boasts in his ministry to the Gentiles, “*if by any means* I may provoke to jealousy them that are my flesh, and may save some of them.” Once again strong doubt or uncertainty is not the point, but a desire so strong that it will go to all lengths to achieve its goal.

This we take to be the stress of the εἰ πῶς in Phil. 3:11. In verse 10 Paul states he is “becoming conformed to his death.” This is a continual process of not only morally taking one's place in death with regard to the old life (Col. 3:5), but of such devotion to Christ that physical death for His sake is not dreaded but almost expected (1 Cor. 15:30, 31; Phil. 2:17). This is truly taking one's place with the Crucified One.

¹ See also for another example Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, p. 561.

Paul thus expresses a willingness to go through even a martyr's death to reach resurrection. Any means, any way, only let me reach the goal — such is the fervent cry of this soldier of Christ.

R. C. H. Lenski states it well :

Neither *ei* nor its addition intends to express doubt; B.-D.² is right, it expresses expectation. Paul confidently expects that "some-how" the conformation God is working out will attain its goal and make him arrive at last at the blessed resurrection from the dead.³

It is such a passionate desire to be with Christ and like Christ that causes words like these to well from the heart :

Blessed Lord, our souls are longing
Thee, our risen Head, to see;
And the cloudless morning's dawning
When Thy saints shall gathered be :
Grace and glory,
All our well-springs are in Thee.⁴

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² Blass-Debrunner, *Grammar of N.T. Greek*.

³ *The Interpretation of Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians*, p. 844.

⁴ Mary Bowley Peters.