

2. What are some of the gifts Christ has given His church so that we might "attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ?"
3. Why is the gift of the Holy Spirit especially crucial to the life and ministry of the church?
4. Why do you think Christ had to go away so that he could send the Spirit?

Christ's exaltation means he is actively praying for his church.

Christ is not only bringing his church into maturity; he is actively praying for us. Two New Testament passages reassure us that he is imminently involved in our daily lives.

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us (Romans 8:31-34).

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them (Hebrews 7:25).

1. James tells us, "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective (James 5:16)." How effective do you think Jesus prayers might be?
2. How might Jesus' prayers be different than our own?
3. How can we more fully cooperate with what Christ is praying on our behalf, even if we are not fully aware of what he is praying on our behalf?

Christ's exaltation is a preview of his return.

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:9-11)."

1. Why should believers be excited about the return of Christ?
2. How should the reality that our Lord has been raised and seated at the right hand of God and will one day return reassure us in hardship and strengthen our resolve to follow him?



We have reflected on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, but there is more to the story. The New Testament writers present Christ as our exalted Lord. His gracious ministry on our behalf neither ends at the cross or the resurrection. God raised him and seated him at his right hand, where he continues to pour out his blessings on the church.

There is no single passage that embraces the scope of our Lord's exaltation. The New Testament writers never take the time to teach us about the exaltation, but the exaltation is foundational to so much of what they do teach us.

The book of Ephesians is an excellent case in point. From Paul's opening prayer to the end of the letter, he has Christ's exaltation in mind. We'll start with Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1 and throw in a few additional passages as we consider what Christ's exaltation means to us.

¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (Ephesians 1:15-22).

Christ's exaltation means that God has accepted Christ's sacrifice on our behalf.

We often refer to the resurrection and exaltation as the vindication of Christ. Paul tells us that Jesus was "appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4)." Paul is not saying Jesus became the Son of God when he was raised from the dead; he is telling us that it became apparent that Jesus was the Son of God when God raised him from the dead. The resurrection reassures us that Jesus is everything he claimed to be and that he accomplished everything he came to accomplish.

Of course, God did far more than raise Jesus from the dead, he also "seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule, authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked not only in the present age but also in the one to come (Ephesians 1:20-21)."

1. How does Paul describe Christ's exaltation?
2. What is significant about place and name that God has given Jesus?
3. How do the resurrection and exaltation reassure us that God has accepted Christ's sacrifice on our behalf?

Christ's exaltation means he is worthy of our worship and devotion.

In the book of Philippians, there is a beautiful hymn that captures the majesty of Christ's exaltation.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! ⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11 NIV 84).

1. According to Paul, why did God exalt Christ "to the highest place and give him the name that is above every name?"
2. How do you think those who rejected Christ will respond when they see him face to face?
3. How do you think you will respond when you see him face to face?
4. How should you respond now?
5. How should we worship our risen and glorified Lord?

Christ's exaltation means God has accepted us along with Christ.

Paul surprises us in Ephesians 2. In chapter 1, he tells us God "has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3). He also tells us Christ is "seated at [God's] right hand in the heavenly realms (v. 20). In chapter 2, Paul tells us, "God raised us up and seated us with him in the heavenly realms.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:4-7).

1. One of Paul's major themes is our union with Christ. When we receive Christ, we are organically united with him. As a result, we participate in the benefits of his life, death resurrection, and exaltation. According to Ephesians 2:4-7, how have we been united with Christ?
2. How are we made alive with Him?
3. What do you think it means for us to be seated with Christ in the heavenly realms?
4. What are some of the other results of our union with Christ?

Christ's exaltation means Christ is actively present in his church.

Paul still has Christ's exaltation in mind when he turns to the subject of spiritual gifts (Ephesians 4). Notice how he sets up his argument. "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people. (Ephesians 4:8). In chapter 1, Paul describes the church as "the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (v. 23)." In chapter 4 he tells us that Christ gives gifts to his people "so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (vv. 12-13)."

From his position at the right hand of the Father, he is actively working to bring his body into spiritual fullness through the gifts he gives. The most precious gift he has given us is his presence with us in the person of the Holy Spirit. In John's gospel, the gift of the Spirit is imminently tied to Christ's exaltation. Jesus tells his disciples, "It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you (John 16:7).

1. What do you think "attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" looks like?