

## Understanding Apostle Paul's Belief of Overcoming Physical Death

("Attaining to the Resurrection while in my mortal body...")

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Philippians 3:11 "That if possible I may attain to the [*spiritual and moral*] resurrection [*that lifts me*] out from among the dead [*even while in the body*].

1. Paul is looking to "attain" –
  - a. to reach as an end : GAIN, ACHIEVE - *attain* a goal
  - b. to come to as the end of a progression or course of movement
2. He is weighing all that he has "given up" to follow Christ as a possible step in attaining to the resurrection.
  - a. Paul was a Pharisee, a Doctor of the Jewish Law believing at the time that he had through perfection of the Law within Rabbinical Judaism, attained to special "God privileges," i.e. the power to judge and sentence to death those who were in His elite estimation guilty of punishment (even death) – The stoning of Stephen (Acts 6:9 – 7:59)

### A Look at Pharisaical Rabbinism:

For the rabbis, the Torah, God's revelation, is incarnate in the sage (mystic scholar, through much depth of personal insight and wisdom of things) who as a result can use the power of God to perform wonders. Like Moses, whose wonders were achieved through special capacities granted him by God, in Pharisaical theology, so the sage can carry out astounding acts that are deemed legitimate and appropriate, having insight given to none other.

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### **Special Powers by Virtue of What?**

Indeed, a particular sage's prestige would be substantially enhanced should it become clear that his knowledge of Torah in conjunction with other characteristic rabbinic virtues had given him supernatural powers (Yerushalmi

Taanit 3:11, IV):

"There was a house that was about to collapse over there (in Babylonia), and the Rabbi set one of his disciples in the house, until they had cleared out everything from the house. When the disciple left the house, the house collapsed. And there are those who say that it was R. Adda bar Ahwah. Sages sent and said to him: 'What sort of good deeds are to your credit (that you have that much merit)?'

He said to them: 'In my whole life no man ever got to the synagogue in the morning before I did. I never left anybody there when I went out. I never walked four cubits without speaking words of Torah. Nor did I ever mention teachings of Torah in an inappropriate setting. I never laid out a bed and slept for a regular period of time. I never took great strides among the associates. I never called my fellow by a nickname. I never rejoiced in the embarrassment of my fellow. I never cursed my fellow when I was lying by myself in bed. I never walked over in the marketplace to someone who owed me money. In my entire life I never lost my temper.'"

The correlation of learning as a Pharisee or Doctor of the Law, and virtuous behavior with the ability to work wonders is here explicit. The following passages, which appear at Bavli [Sanhedrin 67b-68a](#), ultimately make clear the way in which such laudable use of rabbinical power is distinguished from the magical deeds performed by non-rabbis. The magic tricks of non-rabbis, but not those of a rabbi, render the lay magician culpable for death.

3. Paul, from his prior experience in Rabbinical Judaism as Saul of Tarsus, understood the privilege of being a Pharisee.

Philippians 3:3-16 For we [*Christians*] are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit *and* by the Spirit of God and exult *and* glory *and* pride ourselves in Jesus Christ, and put no confidence *or* dependence [*on what we are*] in the flesh *and* on outward privileges *and* physical advantages *and* external appearances-- (4) Though for myself I have [*at least grounds*] to rely on the flesh. If any other man considers that he has *or* seems to have reason to rely on the flesh *and* his physical *and* outward advantages, I have still more! (5) Circumcised when I was eight days old, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew [*and the son*] of Hebrews; as to the observance of the Law I was of [*the party of*] the Pharisees, (6) As to my zeal, I was a persecutor of the church, and by the Law's standard of righteousness (supposed justice, uprightness, and right standing with God) I was proven to be blameless *and* no fault was found with me. (7) But whatever former things I had that might have been gains to me, I have come to consider as [*one combined*] loss for Christ's sake. (8) Yes, furthermore, I count everything as loss compared to the possession of the priceless privilege (the overwhelming preciousness, the surpassing worth, and supreme advantage) of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord *and* of progressively becoming more deeply *and* intimately acquainted with Him [*of perceiving and recognizing and understanding Him more fully and clearly*]. For His sake I have lost everything and consider it all to be mere rubbish (refuse, dregs), in order that I may win (gain) Christ (the Anointed One), (9) And that I may [*actually*] be found *and* known as in Him, not having any [*self-achieved*] righteousness that can be called my own, based on my obedience to the Law's demands (ritualistic uprightness and supposed right standing with God thus acquired), but possessing that [*genuine righteousness*] which comes through faith in Christ (the Anointed One), the [*truly*] right standing with God, which comes from God by [*saving*]

faith. (10) [*For my determined purpose is*] that I may know Him [*that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and more clearly*], and that I may in that same way come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection [*which it exerts over believers*], and that I may so share His sufferings as to be continually transformed [*in spirit into His likeness even*] to His death, [*in the hope*] (11) That if possible I may attain to the [*spiritual and moral*] resurrection [*that lifts me*] out from among the dead [*even while in the body*]. (12) Not that I have now attained [*this ideal*], or have already been made perfect, but I press on to lay hold of (grasp) *and* make my own, that for which Christ Jesus (the Messiah) has laid hold of me *and* made me His own. (13) I do not consider, brethren, that I have captured *and* made it my own [*yet*]; but one thing I do [*it is my one aspiration*]: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, (14) I press on toward the goal to win the [*supreme and heavenly*] prize to which God in Christ Jesus is calling us upward. (15) So let those [*of us*] who are spiritually mature *and* full-grown have this mind *and* hold these convictions; and if in any respect you have a different attitude of mind, God will make that clear to you also. (16) Only let us hold true to what we have already attained *and* walk *and* order our lives by that.

#### 4. Jesus and the Pharisees –

[Luke 5:17-26](#) One of those days, as He was teaching, there were Pharisees and teachers of the Law sitting by, who had come from every village *and* town of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was [*present*] with Him to heal *them*. (18) And behold, some men were bringing on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed, and they tried to carry him in and lay him before [*Jesus*]. (19) But finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him with his stretcher through the tiles into the midst, in front of Jesus. (20) And when He saw [*their confidence in Him, springing from*] their faith, He said, Man, your sins are forgiven you! (21) And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason *and* question *and* argue, saying, Who is this [*Man*] Who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone? (22) But Jesus, knowing their thoughts *and* questionings, answered them, Why do you question in your hearts? (23) Which is easier: to say, Your sins are forgiven you, or to say, Arise and walk [*about*]? (24) But that you may know that the Son of Man has the [*power of*] authority *and* right on earth to forgive sins, He said to the paralyzed man, I say to you, arise, pick up your litter (stretcher), and go to your own house! (25) And instantly [*the man*] stood up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went away to his house, recognizing *and* praising *and* thanking God. (26) And overwhelming astonishment *and* ecstasy seized them all, and they recognized *and* praised *and* thanked God; and they were filled with *and* controlled by reverential fear and kept saying, We have seen wonderful *and* strange *and* incredible *and* unthinkable things today!