

1 Timothy 3:16; Romans 4:16–25

“Raised for Our Justification”

April 12, 2020

¹⁶ Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. (1 Tim. 3:16)

¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring-- not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷ as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"-- in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." ²³ But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (Rom. 4:16–25)

Paul draws a direct connection between the resurrection of Jesus and our justification. Jesus was “raised for our justification.” What precisely is the relation between the resurrection of Jesus and our justification? God is the justifier; he’s the one who justifies. Justification is an act of God. God’s act of justification is both declarative and judicial. Justification is a judicial or legal judgement in which God, as the Judge, declares someone to be righteous.

When God justifies someone, he declares him to be not guilty. In fact, he pronounces him to be positively righteous. The verb “to justify” means to judicially declare or pronounce someone to be righteous. In our justification, God, as our final Judge, pronounces his legal and final judgement or verdict with respect to us. He pronounces us righteous.

Justification is the opposite of condemnation. Paul teaches that instead of condemning the elect, God justifies them. Since God is the absolute and final Judge and there’s no judgment higher than his, if God justifies the elect, then no one can condemn them. Romans 8:33–34, “Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?”

Christ Jesus is the one who died-- more than that, who was raised-- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” Paul points to the resurrection of Jesus as well as to his death as the reason why the elect cannot be condemned. God has justified the elect, and they cannot be condemned because Christ both died and was raised. Christ died for our justification, but “more than that,” he was raised for our justification.

Jesus “was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom 4:25). That statement contains two parts. Part 1 says that Jesus “was delivered up for our trespasses.” That is, he died for our sins, on account of our sins. In his state of humiliation and especially in his suffering and death, Christ identified with us in our state of sin. Although in himself he was absolutely sinless, he bore our sins. Our sins were imputed to him. God made Jesus “to be sin who knew no sin” (2 Cor 5:21).

And since Jesus took our sin and guilt on himself, he suffered the punish of sin in our place. “The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). Jesus “was delivered up for our trespasses,” which were imputed to him. Christ died for our sins (1 Cor 15:3). Consequently, God does not condemn us for our trespasses because Christ has already suffered the wrath of God on our behalf. “Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood: Hallelujah, what a Savior!” In our place, the Lord Jesus Christ stood condemned; he “was delivered up for our trespasses.” He bore our trespasses and was condemned on account of them. As our sin-bearer, Christ was made subject to the condemnation of the law. His death was the penalty of our sins.

As long as he remained in a state of death, his righteousness—his unblemished record of perfect, exact, and entire obedience to God—remained in question and, in fact, was implicitly denied. His suffering and death, Jesus was treated as if he were a sinner. He suffered the curse and wrath of God against sin; he bore the penalty of the wicked. He was delivered up to condemnation and death on account of our trespasses. His death identified him with us as an object of the divine verdict of condemnation against sinners. His death *for us* reveals his solidarity *with us* in the judgement of God *due to us* for sin. Jesus died in the place sinners bearing their sins and bearing their punishment, and as long as he remained in a state of death, he was under the divine judgment of condemnation as their sin-bearer. Christ died for our sins; he was delivered up for our trespasses. His death was the penalty of our sins.

That fact points up the theological significance of the resurrection of Jesus. If his death was his condemnation as our sin-bearer, then his resurrection was his justification. He was condemned in death but justified in the resurrection. Romans 4:25b, Jesus “was raised for our justification.” Part 1 of Romans 4:25 tells us that Jesus “was delivered up for our trespasses.” In our place, bearing our sins, he was delivered up to condemnation in death. Part 1 is about the condemnation of Jesus as our representative sin-bearer.

Part 2 is about the resurrection of Jesus as our righteous representative; he “was raised for our justification.” To understand the precise relation between the resurrection of Jesus and our justification, we need to understand that his resurrection is, first and foremost, his *own* justification. The resurrection of Jesus—the event of his resurrection—was God’s judicial declaration or pronouncement in which he, as the highest and final Judge, declared Jesus to be righteous. The resurrection of Jesus overturned the sentence of condemnation that he bore in his suffering and death. His resurrection nullified his condemnation. It reversed the judgment of condemnation that he experienced on Good Friday.

Dr. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. said, “The eradication of death in his resurrection is nothing less than the removal of the verdict of condemnation and the effective affirmation of his righteousness. His resurrection state is the reward and seal which testifies perpetually to his perfect obedience.” Geerhardus Vos, put it more succinctly, “Christ’s resurrection was the *de facto* declaration of God in regard to his being just. His quickening bears in itself the testimony of his justification.” The resurrection of Jesus was his *de facto* justification. By raising him from the dead, God vindicated him as righteous. God justified him; he declared him to be righteous.

In 1 Tim 3:16, Paul says, “Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.” Vindicated is better translated as “justified”; Jesus was “justified by (in) the Spirit.”

Paul is referring to the event of the resurrection. In the event of his resurrection from the dead, Jesus was “justified in the Spirit.” God justified him—declared him to be righteous—by raising him from the dead through the agency of the Holy Spirit. In his death, Jesus bore the guilt of imputed sin and the judicial reality of condemnation, and the only thing that could have reversed that judgment of condemnation was a judicial declaration of justification.

That’s what happened on Easter Sunday when God raised him from the dead. God overturned the sentence of condemnation that Jesus bore in his death. On Easter Sunday—in the resurrection of Jesus—God justified his Son. As Jesus was truly condemned in his death as our sin-bearer, so also he was truly justified in his resurrection. The justification of Jesus in his resurrection is a definitive and irreversible act that declares and demonstrates his absolute perfect righteousness.

The resurrection of Jesus is his own justification, but his own justification is not for his own benefit only or even primarily but for our benefit. Christ was raised not only for his own justification but for our justification (cf. Rom 4:25b).

How precisely are those two things—the resurrection of Jesus and our justification—related? His resurrection is his own justification. But his resurrection is also our justification because we are “in him.” The justification that Jesus himself received from God in his resurrection becomes our justification when we are united to the risen and justified Christ. The Holy Spirit of God

produces faith in our hearts and unites us to the Lord Jesus Christ as raised and justified, and as a result, his status as justified is imputed to us. It is because we have been raised with Christ that we are justified in him. Since Christ as raised is justified, then we who are raised with him are justified with him. We share his status as raised and justified when the Holy Spirit unites us to him through faith. That's the connection between the resurrection of Jesus and our justification. He "was raised for our justification."

An un-resurrected Christ would be an unjustified Christ because if he were to remain in a state of death, he would remain under the sentence of condemnation. So Jesus "was raised for our justification." Our justification is none other than the justification that Jesus himself received in his resurrection, which status is now shared with us because we are united to him as one who has been raised and, thereby, justified. Our justification is the justification of Jesus that he shares with us by imputing to us his own righteousness, his personal, perfect, exact, and entire obedience. His righteousness is the basis of both his own justification and our justification. That's why Paul links our justification to his resurrection.

If we understand the link between our justification and the resurrection of Jesus as his own justification, then that will help us to have assurance and certainty that our justified status—our status as those who have been accepted as righteous in God's sight—can never change. Our justification is just as certain, definitive, and irreversible as the resurrection of Jesus itself. Why? because his resurrection is our justification. We can no more lose our justification than Christ can die again. As it is impossible for the risen Christ to die, it is absolutely impossible for us to be condemned. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1).