

# JUSTIFIED BY CHRIST'S RESURRECTION: A NEGLECTED ASPECT OF PAUL'S DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION\*

MICHAEL F. BIRD, UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

## INTRODUCTION

Since the Reformation, Protestant theology has emphasised the cross as the immediate basis of justification. Accordingly, theologians have located justification as occurring primarily through the atoning and redemptive death of Christ. The consequence of this is that Protestant Christianity has concerned itself with developing a *theologia crucis*.<sup>1</sup> The cross becomes the interpretive centre of Paul and the entire New Testament. Indeed, the absolute centrality of the cross in Paul's thought can hardly be disputed. Paul considered his ministry, message and mission all in light of the cross (Gal. 2:19-20; 6:14; 1 Cor. 1:18, 23; 2:2). Furthermore, in passages such as Romans 3:24; 5:9 Paul unequivocally anchors justification firmly in the cross of Christ. By stressing this fact, however, it has led to a lopsided view of the means of salvation as Markus Barth and Verne H. Fletcher spell out:

Western theological thought, while affirming that 'on the third day he rose again from the dead,' has nonetheless given relatively more weight to the crucifixion as the primary expression of the Christ event.<sup>2</sup>

---

\* I would like to thank Dr Rick Strelan (University of Queensland) and Dr Richard K. Moore (Baptist Theological College of Western Australia) for advice in the preparation of this paper. Special thanks are also due to my on-line Pauline sparring partner Mr Joshua Jipp, an MDiv student at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Of course, any remaining errors are strictly my own.

<sup>1</sup> For a defence of a *theologia crucis* over against a theology of the resurrection see the arguments in Ernst Käsemann, 'The Saving Significance of Jesus' Death in Paul', in *Perspectives on Paul* (London, 1971), pp. 47-8, 54-9.

<sup>2</sup> Markus Barth & Verne H. Fletcher, *Acquittal by Resurrection* (New York, 1964), p. v.

The problem is that Paul's gospel knows of no divorce between the cross and the resurrection and their ensuing effect. The resurrection figures equally prominently in Paul's most concise summaries of the gospel (cf. Rom. 1:3-4; 10:9-10; 1 Cor. 15:3-8; 2 Tim. 2:8). The tendency in the Protestant tradition to view the crucifixion in isolation and as a thing in itself apart from the resurrection represents a failure to grapple with Paul's view of the indissoluble connection between the cross and the resurrection (cf. 1 Thes. 4:14; 1 Cor. 15:3-8; 2 Cor. 5:15; Rom. 4:25).<sup>3</sup> This unfortunately has had a negative effect as Richard B. Gaffin states, 'in this dominating preoccupation with the death of Christ, the doctrinal or soteriological significance of his resurrection has been largely overlooked'.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the moment one acknowledges an inseparable relationship between the cross and the resurrection it raises the question of exactly how the cross and resurrection relate together in the salvation event. Walter Künneth aptly summarises the issue, 'the question arises whether the resurrection of Jesus has a soteriological determination and if so of what kind, and what relation the cross of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus bear to each other'.<sup>5</sup>

If a solution is to afford the resurrection a due place in an outline of Paul's soteriology we may well ask what impact, if any, the resurrection has upon justification. The proximity and relation of these two concepts is not immediately obvious and only ever cryptically stated. Even on their own, resurrection and justification constitute momentous topics of discussion, let alone their intertwining relationship. Moreover, it is in Paul that they both find their most succinct expression and union. Normatively it has been asserted that the relationship between Christ's resurrection and the believer's justification is that the resurrection vindicates the redemptive death of Christ and proves that it was effective in securing the justification of believers. John Stott provides a typical summary, 'what the resurrection did was to vindicate the Jesus whom men had rejected, to declare with power that he is the Son of God, and publicly to confirm that his sin-bearing death had been effective for the forgiveness of sins'.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> James Denney, *The Death of Christ* (London, 1951), pp. 72-3.

<sup>4</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, Jr, 'Redemption and Resurrection: An Exercise in Biblical-Systematic Theology', *Themelios* 27 (2002), pp. 17-18.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Künneth, *The Theology of the Resurrection* (London, 1965), p. 150. A similar question is posed by Brian McNeil ('Raised for Our Justification', *ITQ* 42 [1975], p. 48), 'How do the cross and the resurrection belong together in the plan of our salvation?'

<sup>6</sup> John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester, 1986), p. 238.

There can be little doubt that the resurrection vindicates the message, person and death of Christ. The resurrection unambiguously announces the perfect obedience of Christ to the Father, his declared sonship and affirms the reality of his death as a sacrifice for sins.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, it removes any misunderstanding of Jesus' death solely in terms of a martyr theology. Despite this, in reading the Pauline epistles one is struck with the suspicion that the resurrection is far more intrinsic to justification than merely comprising an authentication that our justification has taken place at the cross.<sup>8</sup>

There have been several attempts to demonstrate the effect that the resurrection has upon justification and it is illuminating to outline some of the major contributions.<sup>9</sup>

The German scholar Walter Künneth wrote a significant book on the resurrection which posed an alternative to the existential and 'history-of-

---

<sup>7</sup> The vindication theme can be found in Acts 2:24, 32-33, 36, 3:15, 4:10-12; 5:30-31; Rom. 1:3-4; Phil. 2:5-11; Eph. 1:20-21; Col. 2:8-15; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 3:21-22.

<sup>8</sup> In interpreting key passages, some commentators take this line, e.g. F. Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols; Edinburgh, 1881), vol. 1, p. 311; Adolf Schlatter, *Romans: The Righteousness of God* (Peabody, MA, 1995), pp. 117-18; Murray J. Harris, *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* (Hants, 1983), pp. 75, 165; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Pillar; Grand Rapids, MI, 1988), 215-16; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI, 1998), p. 244.

<sup>9</sup> In addition to the works examined the following contributions should also be noted: B. Vawter, 'Resurrection and Redemption', *CBQ* 15 (1953), pp. 11-23; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols; NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI, 1959-65), vol. 1, pp. 156-7; Brian McNeil, 'Raised for Our Justification', *ITQ* 42 (1975), pp. 45-8; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Leicester, 1981), pp. 503-4; Peter Stuhlmacher, 'Jesus' Resurrection and the View of Righteousness in the Pre-Pauline Mission Congregations', in *Reconciliation, Law and Righteousness: Essays in Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia, 1986), pp. 50-65; Peter Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL, 2001), pp. 28-9, 53-9; Peter Head, 'Jesus' Resurrection in Pauline Thought: A Study in the Epistle to the Romans', in *Proclaiming the Resurrection: Papers from the First Oak Hill College Annual School of Theology* (ed. P. M. Head; Carlisle, 1998), pp. 58-80; Morna D. Hooker, 'Raised for our Acquittal (Rom 4,25)', in *Resurrection in the New Testament* (eds R. Bieringer, V. Koperski & B. Lataire; FS J. Lambrecht; Leuven, 2002), pp. 321-41.

## JUSTIFIED BY CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

religion' approaches dominant in his own day. Künneth also criticises traditional Protestant/Lutheran theology with its *theologia crucis* (theology of the cross) as it fails to appropriate the role of the resurrection in the New Testament message of salvation. Instead, the cross and resurrection belong together in 'indissoluble' and 'innermost' unity. The cross is the presupposition to the resurrection, but the resurrection gives the cross its meaning.<sup>10</sup>

Regarding Paul, Künneth goes so far as to say that the raising of Christ may produce a unifying core to Paul's theology. The resurrection may even provide a crucial nexus between other elements of Paul's thought. He writes:

In light of the resurrection the seemingly tangled lines of Paul's thought will unite to form a meaningful systematic whole, a grandiose unified 'worldview', in which the truths that research has discovered about eschatology, anthropology, about spirit, ethics and law, find their place, in light of the resurrection now no longer inexplicable but illumined anew.<sup>11</sup>

Coming to the topic of justification, Künneth asserts that Jesus' entry into death marks him out as *peccator* or the one who bears the sin of the world. Yet in the raising of the crucified it is revealed that the *peccator* (sinful-one) can at the same time be *iustus* (righteous-one). God deals with death and sin on the cross and overcomes them through new life and new righteousness. Consequently, it is the resurrection that establishes the economy whereby God can acquit the sinner.<sup>12</sup>

God justifies the sinner because of the new situation of being reconciled and justified which is created by the raising of the Crucified. In this situation, sinful man, in so far as he participates in it through Christ, is qualified as just before God.<sup>13</sup>

Künneth attempts to find a middle ground between a conception of justification that is synthetic (justifying verdict derives from a righteousness that is added to the believer) or analytic (justifying verdict analyses the righteousness that is within the believer).<sup>14</sup> Justification is

---

<sup>10</sup> Künneth, *The Theology of the Resurrection*, pp. 150-52.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 157-8.

synthetic insofar as it does not stem from any quality in the sinner, but is exclusively an act of God. Yet the analytic approach possesses due merit since the Risen One embodies the new reality of justification. The sinner is declared just and made just simultaneously since Christ is both forgiver and renewer.<sup>15</sup>

Künneth makes a forthright attempt to restore the resurrection to the forefront of New Testament soteriology. What detracts from his thesis is the insistence that by connecting the resurrection to justification one therefore removes the distinction between justification and sanctification classically ingrained in reformed theology. Certainly, justification and sanctification derive from the same reality of union with Christ, and any absolute bifurcation between them runs amiss, but it is another thing to say that the risen Christ produces in them a righteousness that is at once declared as well as existential and 'objectively real'.<sup>16</sup>

Catholic scholar David Michael Stanley wrote one of the first significant monographs on Christ's resurrection in Pauline theology. Although he did not compose a specific section on 'resurrection and justification', his studious survey of the resurrection in the Pauline corpus contains several comments on the relationship between the two themes. Stanley comments on Romans 4:25, 'If the verse means anything, it witnesses to a theological conception of the atonement in which Christ's resurrection plays a role, with respect to man's justification, that is in the same category of causality as his death, with respect to man's forgiveness.'<sup>17</sup> The key word there is 'causality' signifying that justification is not exclusively a function of Christ's death. Stanley avers that Paul sees Christ constituted as the second Adam through his resurrection. In view of such a role, Christ has solidarity with believers as their glorified representative, in which case the resurrection is not only Christ's personal reward but is considered a benefit applied to believers in their justification.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Stanley advocates that the entire Pauline conception of redemption is permeated by the theme of Christ's resurrection. According to Stanley, although there is a future dimension to redemption (e.g. Eph. 4:30; Rom. 8:23) there is another sense in which redemption for Paul is already an accomplished reality since it is embodied in the glorified humanity of the risen Christ. When discussing I

---

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158-9.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158-9.

<sup>17</sup> David Michael Stanley, *Christ's Resurrection In Pauline Soteriology* (Rome, 1961), p. 173.

<sup>18</sup> Stanley, *Christ's Resurrection*, pp. 274-5.

## JUSTIFIED BY CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

Corinthians 1:30 he draws the conclusion, 'In other words, it is by his death *and* resurrection that Christ has become redemption incarnate.'<sup>19</sup> However, Paul's view of redemption exploits a different string of values than popular views of Christ's death as a satisfaction for sin, as meritorious and eclipses the significance of a 'juridical notion' of Christ's death. Rather, redemption ensues because of the glorification of Christ's humanity, which becomes the perfect instrument of justification and finally of eschatological salvation.<sup>20</sup>

The most serious problem I have with Stanley's presentation is that he basically equates 'our state of justice' with the 'risen Christ's presence within us'.<sup>21</sup> There can be little doubt that redemption stems from union with the risen Christ (*cf.* Rom. 3:24; Col. 1:14; Eph. 1:7, 14), but Stanley has not properly shown how the vivifying work of Christ in taking believers from death to life relates specifically to the justifying verdict which is executed in Christ's death and resurrection. Likewise, to abandon the substitutionary and meritorious understanding of Christ's death robs justification of its very justice.

Markus Barth, son of the great Swiss theologian Karl Barth, made his own unique contribution to the topic in a short work entitled, *Acquittal by Resurrection*. Barth states at the beginning of the book that, 'The theme of this book is the resurrection of Jesus Christ understood as the foundation of righteousness and justice.'<sup>22</sup> The purpose of the study is to counteract a theological western tradition that has not given adequate attention to the resurrection.

When dealing with the question of justification Barth asks, how does God justify the wicked? What is at stake is nothing less than the wisdom and justice of God as judge.<sup>23</sup> This leads Barth to spell out the grounds of justification in negative terms. First, it is not to be found in works for Paul excluded any boasting based on meritorious works. Neither can it be found in faith itself, which would reduce justification to a 'psychic disposition'. Faith is an appropriation – never the basis – of justification. Nor is the ground of justification God's sheer mercy, for this would interfere with his impartiality.<sup>24</sup> Instead Barth advocates:

---

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 270-71, 108-11.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 271-2.

<sup>22</sup> Barth & Fletcher, *Acquittal by Resurrection*, p. v.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86-7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 93-4.

The legal ground of justification – and the reason to praise God as the justifier of the wicked lies in Jesus Christ exclusively.... It lies in his death and resurrection, not in his teaching, or in our obedience to it. Man's faith has a part in that legal ground only in as much as it is faith in *Jesus Christ*.<sup>25</sup>

Consequently the link between justification and resurrection is: (i) Resurrection is the enthronement and exaltation of the divinely appointed mediator for sinners; (ii) The resurrection ratifies the ministry of Christ; (iii) The resurrection proclaims the accomplishment of Christ's work in life and death; and (iv) Resurrection provides the grounds of certainty and trust in the final victory over sin and death.<sup>26</sup> According to Barth, Paul demonstrates that, 'the resurrection is the end of our unrighteousness and the triumph of God's righteousness – even here on earth where we live and struggle and hope'.<sup>27</sup> In a wider context the resurrection of Christ turns out to be the justification of 'the faithful God, the obedient Christ, and sinful man'.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, justification is simultaneously a theocentric, christocentric and anthropocentric act.

It is tragic that Barth's work has not received wider attention; however, the impression I gained is that he downplays the subjective role of faith in justification in favour of Christ's resurrection as the objective grounds of justification. It is probably more accurate to speak of justification *through* faith *in* Christ which gives appropriate weight to the subjective and objective elements in justification.

Richard Gaffin, in his treatment of the resurrection in Pauline soteriology, asks 'How does Paul relate the resurrection of Jesus to the realisation of redemption in the life history of the believer?'<sup>29</sup> That properly entails trying to comprehend how Paul applies the categories of justification, adoption, sanctification and glorification to the believer. Gaffin points out that to omit the resurrection from a study of redemption has inherent shortcomings.

A soteriology structured so that it moves directly from the death of Christ to the application of others of the benefits purchased by that death, substantially short-circuits Paul's own point of view. For him the

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 95-6.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>29</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Baker Biblical Monograph; Grand Rapids, MI, 1978), p. 77.

## JUSTIFIED BY CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

accomplishment of redemption is only first definitely realized in the application to Christ himself (by the Father through the Spirit) at the resurrection in the benefits purchased by his own obedience unto death.<sup>30</sup>

In discussing how Christ's resurrection relates to justification, Gaffin contends that the resurrection is the eradication of the sentence of death and the removal of the verdict of condemnation against believers. The resurrection is Christ's justification in which believers participate by faith. In short, an unjustified Messiah means an unjustified believer, making justification directly contingent upon Christ's resurrection.<sup>31</sup> After surveying the relevant passage in the Pauline epistles, Gaffin concludes

that the enlivening of Christ is judicially declarative not only, as we saw earlier, in connection with his messianic status as son, his adoption, but also with respect to his (adamic) status as righteous. The constitutive, transforming action of resurrection is specifically forensic in character. It is Christ's justification.<sup>32</sup>

The conclusion that Gaffin draws is that, justification, adoption, sanctification and glorification are not separate acts but are different facets of the one event of Christ being raised.<sup>33</sup>

The strength of Gaffin's work is that he questions the value of rigidly constructing Paul's theology along the lines of an *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) which is problematic considering Paul's eschatological framework as well as the overarching significance of union with Christ.<sup>34</sup> A slight drawback is that Gaffin confines his interaction exclusively to scholars of a reformed confessional stance and he also, in my mind, fails to explicate the relationship between an imputed and participative righteousness which believers partake of.

Mark A. Seifrid has written two influential monographs on justification and his work accentuates the significance of the resurrection in relationship to justification to a greater extent than most other treatments. Seifrid contends justification by faith is Paul's primary expression of the gospel and the gospel itself centres upon the resurrection of Christ (Rom.

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122, 124.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 132, 137-43.



1:3-4; 1:16-17).<sup>35</sup> By localising the 'righteousness of God' in 'the gospel' Paul is employing biblical language in order to convey the idea that God's righteousness is his vindicating act of raising Christ from the dead for believers.<sup>36</sup> Seifrid states, 'Just as our sin brought Christ's condemnation and death, so his resurrection announces our justification.'<sup>37</sup> Christ's death and resurrection contain a verdict – condemnation and vindication. The verdicts are present, but they are there as 'enacted' or 'executed' verdicts which amount to vindication.<sup>38</sup> The death and resurrection of Christ is God's verdict against the ungodly, and simultaneously his vindication of them. Significantly, an intimate relationship between justification and resurrection is implied. Justification is not only a function of the cross but occurs in Christ incarnate, crucified and risen.<sup>39</sup> A future resurrection of believers is the immediate effect of justification as it secures the end of the future wrath and represents the fullness of God's vindication wrought in the believer.<sup>40</sup> Seifrid writes, 'In Christ's death God has passed judgment upon sin, and has bought his contention with fallen humanity to its end. In Christ's resurrection God has granted righteousness and life to those who believe.'<sup>41</sup>

Seifrid's ability to draw both the resurrection and the cross together as integral components of Paul's understanding of justification is highly commendable and, as will be evident later, has strongly influenced my own view. Sometimes, however, he strains a little to import resurrection into a given text. For example, when discussing 2 Corinthians 5:21 Seifrid argues that God's action of making Christ 'sin' comprises a reference to his crucifixion whilst God's making believers 'the righteousness of God' refers to the resurrection from the dead.<sup>42</sup> Although somewhat appealing, this is not entirely convincing.

In view of these works the purpose of this study will be to clarify further the relationship between justification and resurrection in Pauline theology in order to elucidate a neglected aspect of Paul's doctrine of

---

<sup>35</sup> Mark A. Seifrid, *Justification by Faith: the Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme* (Leiden, 1992), p. 210; *idem.*, *Christ, our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification* (NSBT; Downers Grove, IL, 2000), pp. 47, 65.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71-2, 82, 86, 174-5.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

## JUSTIFIED BY CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

justification. A brief survey of several texts and themes in Paul's letters serve this very purpose.

### I CORINTHIANS 15:17

In I Corinthians 15 Paul is arguing against the view that there is no future resurrection and that the resurrection constitutes a dispensable aspect of his gospel proclamation. The rejection of a physical resurrection by a faction, if not all, of those in Corinth is perhaps attributable to: (i) The idea of a corporeal existence beyond death was revolting to Greek philosophy; and (ii) Some of the more wealthy class may have felt unsettled about a future resurrection which would imply a re-ordering of power. In response Paul appeals to their experience of salvation as inaugurated by the risen Christ. The apostle reasons that a denial of a future resurrection of the dead is a denial of any prior resurrection from the dead. But if there is no resurrection then Christ has not been raised as he is the first fruits of the general resurrection. Consequently, 'if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins' (1 Cor. 15:17). But this conflicts with both the gospel that the Corinthians received and with their experience of having their sins forgiven. Paul asserts that the forgiveness of sins is itself contingent upon the resurrection of Christ, demonstrating from the Corinthians' own experience that Christ must have been raised. And if Christ was raised there awaits a future resurrection of all believers.<sup>43</sup> Elsewhere forgiveness of sins is conceptually correlated with justification in Rom. 4:6-8 and Acts 13:38-39. 1 Corinthians 15:17 confirms that, according to Thiselton, 'without the resurrection of Christ, Christ's death alone has no atoning, redemptive, or liberating effect in relation to human sin'.<sup>44</sup> The problem is that Paul does not specify exactly how. Yet the overall point to be taken away is that without the resurrection of Christ there is neither forgiveness of sins nor justification.

### ROMANS 1-5

On the role of resurrection in Romans, N. T. Wright states, 'Romans is suffused with resurrection. Squeeze this letter at any point, and resurrection spills out; hold it up to the light, and you can see Easter sparkling all the

---

<sup>43</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI, 1987), pp. 743-4.

<sup>44</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids/Carlisle, 2000), p. 1220.

way through.<sup>45</sup> In Romans 1:17 Paul states that in the gospel is revealed the 'righteousness of God'. The gospel Paul has previously stated in Romans 1:3-4 centres largely upon the resurrection of Christ. Thus close to the hub of the 'righteousness of God' lies the resurrection of Christ. What this righteousness achieves is spelled out by Paul in his appeal to Habakkuk 2:4 that the 'righteous shall live by faith'. The righteousness of God, his saving activity with its creational and covenantal framework, has eschatological life as its goal. The Jewish notion of God's once-for-all act of vindication included God's great act of vivification, since it is life that is the tangible evidence of one's justification (*cf.* Rom. 5:18, 21; 8:11).<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, God *vindicates* and *vivifies* the one who believes in the crucified and risen Christ. Significantly, when Paul discusses justification in Romans 3:21-26, it is dominated by allusions to the cross and sacrificial imagery with no direct recourse to Christ's resurrection. Yet as Seifrid observes, elsewhere Paul can speak of redemption from being in 'bondage' to sin and death (Rom. 6:17-23; 7:14-25) from which the resurrection delivers believers (*cf.* Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14; 4:30).<sup>47</sup> In other contexts, God's righteousness is closely associated with the new status granted to believers in view of their union with the risen Christ (*cf.* Rom. 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:17; Phil. 3:9-10).

God's justifying action and its proximate theme of re-creating life is reiterated in the example of Abraham, who for Paul is largely a typology for believers. Abraham had faith in the creator, in his promises and gave glory to God (the antithesis to 1:18-32).<sup>48</sup> More precisely, just as Abraham exercised faith in God's life-creating power to bring life to Sarah's dead womb (Rom. 4:17), so too are Paul's readers exhorted to have a similar faith in the gospel, which focuses upon the resurrection of the crucified Christ (Rom. 1:3-4; 10:9-10). Paul endeavours to draw a tangible connection between the act of faith, the object of faith and the result of faith from Abraham to his readers. The theme of God's righteousness

---

<sup>45</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (COQG 3; Minneapolis, 2003), p. 241.

<sup>46</sup> The Old Testament provides several examples of the link between life and vindication. Job experiences a period of suffering, is declared to be righteous by God and then enjoys longevity (Job 42:7-17). The Suffering Servant of Isaiah undergoes tribulation, is declared just and then sees the 'light of life' (Isa. 53:11). In Daniel 7 the Saints of the Most High endure persecution but are vindicated by receiving an eternal kingdom. See also Jer. 26:12-15; 1 Kgs 19:14-18; Isa. 52:13.

<sup>47</sup> Seifrid, *Christ, our righteousness*, pp. 64-5.

<sup>48</sup> Peter M. Head, 'Jesus' Resurrection in Pauline Thought', p. 66.

comes to a head in Romans 4:25 where it is affirmed that sin brought Christ's condemnation and death, but his resurrection announces and enacts our justification.<sup>49</sup> This brings us to Romans 4:25 where commentators differ as to whether the preposition *dia* in the second clause should be translated retrospectively 'He was raised *because* of our justification' (NASB) or prospectively 'He was raised *for* (i.e. with a view to) our justification' (NIV, NRSV, NEB, REB, GNB, NJB, ESV).<sup>50</sup> The question before us is, does the resurrection vindicate the justification that occurred at the cross or does the resurrection genuinely cause justification?<sup>51</sup> Here, I contend for a prospective or causal translation for several reasons: (i) Although it is better to translate the *dia* in the first clause retrospectively, 'He was handed over *because* of our sins', in spite of the parallelism there is no stipulation that the *dia* in the second clause be taken as the same way as in the first.<sup>52</sup> It is by no means certain that the poetic parallelism requires a further parallelism in meaning.<sup>53</sup> (ii) The prospective meaning of the second clause can also be defended based on the fact that *dia* with the accusative can have a prospective meaning as it does in Matthew 24:22; Mark 2:27; John 11:42; 12:30; 1 Corinthians 11:9.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, in vv. 23-24 a retrospective and prospective contrast is found where Paul writes 'these things were not written (*dia*) *because* of him only' (retrospective) and in v.24 he states 'but also (*dia*) *for* us' (prospective).<sup>55</sup> (iii) The verb *dikaiosis* ('justification') stresses the *process* of justification in addition to the *result*.<sup>56</sup> By process I

<sup>49</sup> Seifrid, *Christ, our Righteousness*, p. 47.

<sup>50</sup> N. T. Wright (*Resurrection of the Son of God*, pp. 247-48) offers a translation of 'he was given up *because* of our sins and he was raised *because* of [God's plan for] our justification.' I find that this is an over translation and a failed attempt to reconcile grammar and theology. All the same, the concept possesses some truth to it.

<sup>51</sup> What follows constitutes a revision of my article, 'Raised for our Justification: A Fresh Look at Romans 4:25', *Colloquium* 35 (2003), pp. 31-46.

<sup>52</sup> Pace Schlatter, *Romans: The Righteousness of God*, p. 118.

<sup>53</sup> G. Schrenk, '*dikaiosis*', *TDNT* vol. 2, pp. 223-5; Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (London, 1980), p. 129; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (WBC; Dallas, 1988), p. 225.

<sup>54</sup> BDAG, '*dia*', 225; BDF § 222, p. 119; Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (3 vols; Edinburgh, 1963), vol. 3, p. 268; C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 55.

<sup>55</sup> William Hendriksen, *Romans 1-8* (NTC; Grand Rapids, MI, 1980), p. 161.

<sup>56</sup> BDAG, '*dikaiosis*', p. 250; *pace* Stanley (*Christ's Resurrection*, p. 173) who argues that *dikaiosis* is a synonym for *dikaioσune* and is imported 'without any appreciable change of meaning'. Although both words derive

am not suggesting a process of becoming just, rather, the eschatological nature of justification means that the verdict declared looks forward to the coming eschaton where the resurrection of believers is the implementation of their justification. This implies that the resurrection is essential to the operation of God's declarative justice that is manifested in Christ, both 'now' (cf. Rom. 3:21) and in the future judgement (Rom. 8:33-34).<sup>57</sup> (iv) An important question is whether the differentiation between the effect of Christ's death and the effect of Christ's resurrection is purely rhetorical. The juxtaposition of Christ's death and resurrection are elements of antithetical Hebrew parallelism. This potentially makes any dissimilarity between the result of Christ's death and resurrection rhetorical rather than logical.<sup>58</sup> Whilst maintaining the essential unity of Christ's death and resurrection, we may propose a concord of effect despite a diversity of function. Death and resurrection in tandem *effect* justification although their respective *functions* in doing so are not identical. Or in the words of Stanley, Christ's death and resurrection are 'conceived as two movements of the single redemptive act'.<sup>59</sup> The retributive justice of God, his verdict so to speak, is discharged in the death of Christ. The wrath of God has been propitiated with such finality and such perfection that none remains for the believer. In the resurrection, God's declaration of vindication and the enactment of it are manifested in the resurrection of Christ.<sup>60</sup>

The significance of the resurrection as constituting a prime element of God's justifying verdict is continued in Romans 5:1-21. In Romans 5:9 Paul reasons that since God has justified believers by the blood of Christ (a hard thing) then how much more is it true that the future wrath has also been averted against the justified by Christ (an easier thing). The propositional phrase *dia autou* ('through him') makes the risen Christ the

---

from the same *dik-* word group, they do differ slightly in their semantic range.

<sup>57</sup> Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Edinburgh, 1994), p. 75.

<sup>58</sup> So also C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (MNTC; London/Glasgow, 1960), p. 92; C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London, 1991), p. 100; F. F. Bruce, *Romans* (TNTC; London, 1985), p. 113; Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 129; J. A. T. Robinson, *Wrestling with Romans* (London, 1979), p. 55; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, p. 225; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York, 1993), p. 389; Douglas J. Moo, *Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI, 1996), pp. 289-90.

<sup>59</sup> Stanley, *Christ's Resurrection*, p. 175; cf. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, p. 389.

<sup>60</sup> Seifrid, *Christ, our Righteousness*, p. 71.

instrument of eschatological salvation (though without saying how). Once more, in Romans 5:10 the contrast between *tou thanatou tou huiou autou* ('the death of his Son') and *zoe autou* ('his life'), much like Romans 4:25, differentiates the function of Christ's death and resurrection. Reconciliation is wholly dependent upon the cross, but the continuing life of the risen Christ is what secures a favourable outcome at the eschatological judgement. In fact, Romans 5:18 contains a similar pattern to the cause/result model of Romans 4:25 since the *paraptomatos* ('transgression') of Adam resulted in the *katakrima* ('condemnation') of all men, whereas the *dikaïomatos* ('righteous act') of Christ led to *dikaïosin zoes* ('justifying life') for all men.<sup>61</sup> It should also be noted that in Romans 5:12-21, it is Christ as the second Adam (a status he holds only by virtue of his resurrection) that effects justification and breaks the bonds of sin and death. Finally, the later chapters of Romans also illuminate the salvific significance of Christ's resurrection. For example, in Romans 6 dying and rising with Christ transfers believers from the old age of sin and death to the new age of righteousness and obedience. Likewise Romans 7:4 sets forth the resurrection of Christ as having the principal effect of transforming believers to bear fruit to God. From Romans 8:10-11 it is apparent that the mystical union is set to come to an eschatological climax where the same spirit that raised Christ will one day raise believers due to the presence of the spirit in their bodies and *resulting in* righteousness (*dia dikaïosune*).<sup>62</sup> Romans 8:34 asserts that it is the priestly intercession of the resurrected Christ that ensures the application of the justifying verdict for which he died. The Apostle affirms in Romans 10:9-10 that it is confession of Jesus as the risen Lord that comprises the grounds of eschatological justification. One observes in Romans 11:15 that the final restoration of Israel will be a miracle on par with 'life from the dead'. Later in Romans 14:9 the purpose of Christ's death and resurrection is to extend his saving Lordship over the entire Christian community, whilst in Romans 15:12 Paul implies that the risen Christ is the instrument of the inclusion of the Gentiles into God's salvific purposes.

#### I TIMOTHY 3:16

The Christ hymn of 1 Timothy 3:16 lies arguably at the heart of the theology of the Pastoral Epistles and exposits the meaning of the

<sup>61</sup> Hooker, 'Raised for our Acquittal', pp. 324-5.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Hooker, 'Raised for our Acquittal', p. 335.

incarnation as well as its application for Christian behaviour.<sup>63</sup> What is implicit in several texts elsewhere is made explicit here, viz., that Jesus' resurrection constitutes his justification by God.

Of immediate interest to the study is the meaning of the second line *edikaiothe en pneumati* ('justified in the Spirit'). In its context, Christ's manifestation *en sarki* ('in flesh') is juxtaposed with his being *edikaiothe en pneumati* ('justified in the Spirit'). A fundamental question is whether *edikaiothe* should be translated as 'vindicated' (RSV; NEB; NIV; NRSV; NASB; ESV) or 'justified' (KJV; NKJV; NJB). On the one hand there is only a minor semantic distinction between the English words 'justify' and 'vindicate'. Both refer to a sense of being 'proved/shown right' (cf. GNB; NLT) and the only difference is whether the demonstration is forensic (i.e. a juridical verdict) or pragmatic (i.e. an action that proves rightfulness). It is doubtful that such a semantic distinction is present in the word *dikaioo* where both declaring and showing right are implied.<sup>64</sup> William Mounce contends that, 'Since the line most probably refers to the resurrection and what it effected, the translation "justified" can be placed aside.'<sup>65</sup> This however is problematic because, firstly, the normative lexical meaning of *dikaioo* is forensic, most notable in the Pauline corpus.<sup>66</sup> Hence, Richard Gaffin writes:

Nothing warrants a different sense for the verb than its virtually uniform meaning elsewhere in Paul. Its demonstrative force here is so close to the usual strictly declarative usage that a substantial difference can hardly be insisted upon. The declarative significance of the resurrection in Romans 1:4 (cf. 8:23; Phil 2:9) supports this indirectly. Certainly its use here is no less forensic, so that the translation 'vindicated,' if adopted to eliminate the usual forensic, declarative meaning, is wrong.<sup>67</sup>

Wright is similar, 'It is likely that "he was justified" (*edikaiothe*) is an oblique way of referring to the resurrection: Jesus was "vindicated" by the living God – not least as Messiah – after being condemned and killed.'<sup>68</sup> Mounce supposes that since Paul is not the author of the hymn it does not

<sup>63</sup> William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC; Nashville, TN, 2000), p. 214.

<sup>64</sup> One might say that justification presupposes a vindication, but an act of vindication does necessarily have to be juridical.

<sup>65</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 227.

<sup>66</sup> Rom. 2:13; 3:4, 20, 24, 26, 28, 30; 4:2, 5; 5:1, 9; 8:30, 33; 1 Cor. 4:4; 6:11; Gal. 3:16-17; 3:8, 11, 24; 5:5; Tit. 3:7.

<sup>67</sup> Gaffin, *The Centrality of the Resurrection*, p. 121.

<sup>68</sup> Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, p. 270.

conflict with his normal use of the word.<sup>69</sup> Yet this only serves to push the question back a step further as we must now ask why has a pre-Pauline author used a meaning for *dikaioo* altogether different from its regular usage? Secondly, Mounce also assumes that the resurrection possesses no direct relation to justification. The justification signified here is not in terms of forgiveness of sins but rather in context of the Jewish suffering-vindication motif.<sup>70</sup> The hymn encapsulates a narrative theology of Christ's Incarnation and Glorification that presents Christ entering into the spiritual realm and the subsequent declaration of his exalted status before the world.

We may speculate that the idea of Christ's resurrection comprising his justification appears to be based on Christological reflection of Isaiah 53:11.

After the suffering of his soul  
he will see the light and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge the righteous one, my servant, will justify many,  
and he shall bear their iniquities.

In the climax of Isaiah 52-53 the suffering of the servant is vindicated by seeing 'the light'. In Jewish literature 'light' can refer to the immortality of the soul, but on some occasions it arguably denotes resurrection.<sup>71</sup> In Isaiah the Servant is the representative of Israel and what is played out in the narrative is that through the suffering and the vindication/vivification of the Servant many will be justified, i.e., restored to their position in the covenant. In this sense justification is through representation as it is the Servant who expiates their sins and is justified for God's people. It functions largely as a metaphor for the political renewal of the nation and their reconciliation to God. This is arguably a pattern or typology that lies behind texts such as Romans 4:25b and 1 Timothy 3:16 which suggest that this same motif was merged together in the primitive Christian reflection of Christ's death and resurrection.<sup>72</sup> Just as Christ's resurrection

<sup>69</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 227.

<sup>70</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; Edinburgh, 1999), p. 525; Gaffin, *The Centrality of the Resurrection*, p. 120.

<sup>71</sup> For the idea of resurrection as 'light' see Job 33:28, 30; Ps. 49:19; *1 Enoch* 58:3; 92:3-5; 108:12-13; *Pss. of Sol.* 3:12; cf. John 8:12; 1 Clem. 16:9-10; *Sib. Or.* 1.379.

<sup>72</sup> On the Isaiah 53 background see the discussion in Cranfield, *Romans*, vol. 1, pp. 251-2; Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* (3 vols; EKKNT;



was understood as the first fruits of the general resurrection (*cf.* Rom. 1:3-4; 1 Cor. 15: 20-22; Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5) so too his justification-vindication is the protological enactment of the justification of believers. Consequently, in Jesus' resurrection the eschatological verdict of the final day has dawned. This entails that since Christ's resurrection is his justification, others are justified in so far as Christ's justification is distributed to them. Indeed, this interpretation of Isaiah 53:11 is no novelty but is found in 1 Clem. 16:12 where it says, 'And the Lord desires to take away the torment of his soul, to show him light and to form him with understanding, to justify a Just One who is a good servant to many. And he will bear their sins.' Making a similar point is Richard Gaffin, 'The unexpressed assumption is that Jesus' resurrection is his justification. His resurrection is his justification as the last Adam, the justification of the "first fruits." This and nothing less is the bond between his resurrection and our justification.'<sup>73</sup>

Consequently, union with Christ is union with the justified Messiah and the now Righteous One. Jesus by fact of his resurrection is the locus of righteousness and redemption (*cf.* 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 1:17) and believers are justified only because they have been united with the justified Messiah. Whereas believers formerly shared the verdict of condemnation pronounced on Adam, now they partake of the verdict of justification pronounced on Christ.<sup>74</sup> Believers pass through the eschatological judgement by virtue of their association with Christ in his death and are co-quickened into the eschatological life through his resurrection. The union is symbolised through baptism but the conduit is, as always for Paul, through faith (*cf.* Gal. 3:26-27; Col. 2:12; Eph. 3:17). It is union with Christ in his death *and* resurrection that constitutes the material cause of justification. Hence, we find ourselves in agreement with Calvin when he wrote:

---

Neukirchen/Vluyt, 1978-81), vol. 1, pp. 279-80; Käsemann *Commentary on Romans*, pp. 128-9; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, p. 225; Barth & Fletcher, *Acquittal by Resurrection*, p. 52.

<sup>73</sup> Gaffin, *The Centrality of the Resurrection*, p. 123. Similarly is Markus Barth (*Acquittal by Resurrection*, p. 36) when commenting on 1 Tim. 3:16, 'Jesus Christ was justified by God.' Ulrich Wilckens (*Resurrection* [Atlanta, 1977], p. 129) states, 'For Jesus himself was so essentially, so completely at one with his message that his own justification in heaven was simultaneously the justification of his proclamation.' *Cf.* Seifrid, *Christ, our Righteousness*, p. 91.

<sup>74</sup> Hooker, 'Raised for our Acquittal', p. 326.

## JUSTIFIED BY CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

For though God alone is the fountain of righteousness, and the only way in which we are righteous is by participation in him, yet as by our unhappy revolt we are alienated from his righteousness, it is necessary to descend to this lower remedy, that Christ may justify us by the power of his death and resurrection.<sup>75</sup>

### RESURRECTION AND FUTURE JUDGEMENT

In several places Paul suggests that what guarantees a favourable verdict at the final judgement is the resurrection of Christ (cf. 1 Thes. 1:10; Rom. 5:10; 8:34). The risen Christ is both the present saviour and is the appointed future judge at the last day (cf. Rom. 2:16; 14:9; Acts 17:31; John 5:22-23). At this point we must maintain the eschatological tension of the 'now' and the 'not yet' in Paul's theology. Justification is both a present reality (Rom. 3:24; 5:1, 9, 17, 8:30; 9:30; 1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Cor. 5:21) and yet awaits a future consummation (Rom. 2:12-13; 3:30; 5:19; Gal. 5:5). Just as the initial reception of salvation is through the blood of the cross (cf. Rom. 3:25; Col. 1:20) the final locus of salvation is ultimately 'through him' and specifically relates to 'his life' denoting in particular the resurrection (Rom. 5:9-10; 8:11).<sup>76</sup> In Romans 8:34 the Christ who was raised is continuing his justifying work by 'interceding' to the Father (cf. Eph. 1:18; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1). The exaltation of Christ as God's vice-regent is further proof that the justifying verdict for which he died will be applied to believers at the final judgement.<sup>77</sup> The resurrected and exalted Christ remains the grounds for the continuing favour of God upon all believers. Peter Stuhlmacher writes:

For our justification Christ was raised from the dead, and now he intercedes for us before God. Taken together, Rom 4:25 and 8:34 give a wide eschatological span to Christology: On Good Friday Christ was delivered up to death by God, and since Easter he makes his death effective before God's judgment throne on behalf of all those who confess him as Lord (cf. Rom 10:9-11). If they remain true to him, he remains their advocate until the final judgment so that nothing can separate them from the love of God shown them in Christ Jesus (cf. Rom 8:38-39). Jesus Christ is the living guarantor of believers' justification from Easter until the end of this world.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.xi.8 (italics added).

<sup>76</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 311; N. T. Wright, 'Romans', in *New Interpreter's Bible* (ed. Leander E. Keck; Nashville, 2002), vol. 10, p. 520.

<sup>77</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 542.

<sup>78</sup> Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification*, pp. 58-9.

In the end it is the presence of the risen Jesus in the courtroom of heaven that demonstrates that there is no further basis for condemnation of the believer.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion it is safe to say that, 'Paul decisively grounds the doctrine of justification upon Christ's resurrection'<sup>79</sup> and that 'The importance of the resurrection of Christ for Paul's doctrine of justification cannot be exaggerated.'<sup>80</sup> The purpose of this essay has been to demonstrate just how.

Justification flows not only from the cross but also from its kerygmatic sequel in the resurrection. Jesus' death and resurrection should be regarded as being inseparably part of the one redemptive event. The cross without the resurrection is sheer martyrdom, an act of solidarity with the persecuted nation. Conversely, the resurrection without the cross is a miraculous intrusion into history and a salvation-historical enigma. Together they constitute the fulcrum of God's righteousness in handing over Jesus to the cross and raising him for our justification. This highlights that the justifying death of Christ is not efficacious without the resurrection.

Thus the overall point we are confronted with is that Christ's death and resurrection are both basic to the believer's justification, albeit in different ways. Christ's death constitutes the verdict against sin for justification to proceed whilst resurrection transposes the verdict into vindication both now and in the future. For God's justice to be complete it must exercise its verdict, pronounce its vindication and vivify those dead in sin. It is through the death and resurrection of Christ that God's righteousness transfers believers from the realm of sin and death and into the sphere of righteousness and life. It is exclusively in the death and resurrection of Christ, as appropriated by faith, that God's declarative justice becomes operative *for* the believer and at the final resurrection it is manifested *in* the believer.

There are several pertinent implications that can be drawn out from this study. First, by locating justification as occurring through the death and resurrection of Christ, it posits a tenable connection between the juridical and participationist categories in Paul's thought. For it is quite possible that the juridical and participationist descriptions are themselves

---

<sup>79</sup> L. M. Kreitzer, 'Resurrection', in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, & Daniel G. Reid (eds), *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (Downers Grove, IL, 1993), p. 806.

<sup>80</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, p. 504.

umbilically linked. For union with Christ is itself juridical since believers are justified only in so far they have been united to the justified Messiah.

Second, if the proposed thesis is correct then we must explain why Paul can speak of justification and salvation as occurring through the cross without ever mentioning the resurrection. It must be remembered that the link between the resurrection of Christ and the justification of believers was *already embedded in the pre-Pauline confessions and hymns*. The earliest kerygma saw the resurrection of Christ as the climactic moment of Israel's history which was now embracing the whole world.<sup>81</sup> In this sense by paying so much attention to the cross Paul has 'staurocised' the gospel – though not in a negative way or so to diminish the significance of the resurrection. Perhaps the reason for his emphasis on the cross emerged from pastoral concerns; for a theology of the cross would be a graphic symbol of the price of Christian liberty in the face of Torah-centred Jewish Christians (Galatians), comprise an apt and penetrating way of refuting a naïve spiritual triumphalism that the resurrection could imply (1 Corinthians), or else provide a rallying point for a potentially fractious cosmopolitan community (Romans). Thus Paul retains the essential connection between the death and resurrection of Christ as the salvation event, but he is prepared on occasions to use 'cross-talk' to facilitate his pastoral and theological purposes.

Third, justification is supremely christological. Christ is not purely passive in the event of justification by being only a sin-bearer and the object of justifying faith. It is Christ's active obedience and faith to the point of death upon a cross (*cf.* Phil. 2:5-11) that constitute the basis of his justification and, by consequence, the basis of the justification of others. Thus, although justification can be conceived as the imputation of an alien righteousness it must also be understood via a representative Christology.

Fourth, an impact may be seen in how one preaches justification. To a Christian culture that is becoming increasingly biblically illiterate the very notion of 'being justified' is virtually foreign. To a dot-com generation, their idea of 'justify' is more likely to relate to what a computer does to a paragraph than to a manifestation of divine justice. Even so, when justification by faith is preached and that preaching is faithful to Paul's own view, it should be remembered that justification is anchored in both the death *and* resurrection of Christ. It is God who justifies men and women through the crucified and risen Christ and it is the risen Christ who is the object of justifying faith (*cf.* Rom. 4:24; 8:34; 10:9-10).

---

<sup>81</sup> *Cf.* Rom. 1:3-4; 4:25; 10:9-10; Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Tim. 3:16; 2 Tim. 2:8-13; Acts 2:22-36; 3:15, 26; 4:10; 5:30-32; 10:39-40; 13:26-37.