

The Resurrection and Post-Resurrection Narratives

Chapter 5: Excursus on the Theological Implications and Aspects of the Resurrection

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In order to better understand Christ and the doctrine of salvation we need to consider the theological aspects of the resurrection or the significance of the resurrection in New Testament theology. We have already studied to some degree the empty tomb and the appearances which prove the historicity of the resurrection. The resurrection was a literal, historical, objective event that is a crucial part of the redemption achieved by the Savior. Now let us turn our attention to the resurrection as it fits into the work of Christ overall. There are a number of important teachings related to the resurrection of Christ.

Christ's Own Power

The Bible teaches that the Mediator's resurrection occurred as a result of His own power no less than that of the Father. This point is crucial because it demonstrates the importance and necessity of Jesus' true divine nature for the achieving of redemption. Our Lord's divinity is necessary for rendering a sacrifice of infinite value and for raising His own dead body out of the grave. The Mediator Himself achieved a victory over death, decay and hell. By raising Himself out of the jaws of death the Savior became an active victor, the very fountain and author of life.

That Christ was made alive by His own power is evident from the following passages. "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up'" (Jn. 2:19). "For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will" (Jn. 5:21). Our Lord has the identical power and ability of God the Father. His power resides in His own divine nature and is not dependent upon anything outside of Himself. "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (Jn. 10:17-18). Beasley-Murray writes, "Here two thoughts coalesce: the unity of the death and resurrection of the Son for the salvation of the world, and the attribution of the resurrection to the Son...in the Fourth Gospel the Resurrection is the completion of the works given by the Father to the Son to do; but like the rest of those works it is ultimately the work of the Father through the Son (the principle is applied in 5:19-30 to the resurrection and judgment of the world.)"¹

"Jesus said to her [Martha], 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live'" (Jn. 11:25). Christ is not merely a conduit of salvation, but the very foundation of salvation and resurrection life. "[I]t was necessary that He would resurrect Himself, for the Surety who took this suffering upon Himself would also have to triumph over it. If someone else had resurrected Him, He would neither have triumphed over death, nor delivered Himself, and consequently would also not be able to deliver others."² "Jesus is the resurrection

¹ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 172.

² Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 1:629.

and the life in person...the full, blessed life of God, all his glorious attributes: omniscience, wisdom, omnipotence, love, holiness, etc. As such he is also the cause, source, or fountain of the believer's glorious resurrection and of their everlasting life."³

Since the Bible emphasizes that our Lord arose through His own power, why then is the resurrection also frequently ascribed to the power of God (Ac. 2:24, 32; 3:26; 5:30; 1 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 1:20) or the Father (Rom. 6:4; Gal. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:3)? The answer is found in the biblical teaching regarding the trinity that whatever the Father does, the Son in like manner does (Jn. 5:19). The Father, Son and Spirit are one and the same God. Each person of the godhead is operative in the works of the other. Another reason why it is ascribed to the Father is the fact that since God the Father (acting as a divine judge against the elect's sin imputed to the Savior) poured out His wrath upon Jesus; He also raised up the Mediator as a public testimony that His Son rendered a full satisfaction for sin.

The Ultimate Sign

The resurrection was the ultimate sign from God. When the Jews asked Jesus for a sign to demonstrate His authority, He answered, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn. 2:19). In fact, on a number of occasions our Lord pointed to His resurrection as the validation of His ministry and proof of who He was (cf. Lk. 11:29; 12:39-42; 16:4). The miracles that Christ did are all lesser signs which point to the ultimate sign—the resurrection. "All the signs in the Gospel are related to the supreme sign, above all as revelations of the divine sovereignty which comes through Christ in his total ministry, culminating in his lifting up on the cross and to heaven. Precisely because it is the final and all-inclusive sign, it transcends all others. The preliminary signs had only temporary effects, and that within a limited area; the wine that was so lavishly provided at the wedding feast finally ran out, the multitude which ate the loaves in the wilderness grew hungry again, and Lazarus was raised, but to die once more."⁴ But with the resurrection Christ is risen to live forever in exaltation. History is changed forever as the Savior rules from the right hand of God over the kingdom of His grace. The cross leads to the empty tomb and to the throne of God. Although, with the close of the canon and the death of the apostles, the validating sign gifts have ceased, preachers of the gospel still focus upon the resurrection and the living, ruling Savior as the ultimate sign from God.

Justification

The word of God connects the resurrection of Jesus to our justification. "It [the righteousness of Christ] shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Rom. 4:24-25). It is important to understand what Paul means in this passage for the New Testament virtually always relates justification directly to Christ's death, blood, suffering or atonement (cf. Rom. 3:24; 5:9; 6:7; 8:33, 34; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:7; 2:13; Col. 2:14; Heb. 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10, 12, 14; etc). The blood of the Savior washes away our sins and the resurrection strictly speaking is not in any way expiation for sin.

³ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John*, 2:150.

⁴ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 361.

Paul connects the resurrection with justification because the resurrection is a vindication of the person and work of Christ. “The resurrection expresses God’s satisfaction with what Christ has done. The exaltation of the person is the vindication of his mission. If Christ had not been raised there would have been no certainty that his death affected anything. Man would, as Paul says, still be in his sins.”⁵ Thus, we understand why the resurrection is so important to our faith and the preaching of the gospel. The fact that the Redeemer is living and exalted points to the efficacy of the Mediator’s death. It demonstrates that the price has been paid in full; that the judgment of Golgotha has led to glorification, eternal life and adoption into God’s own family. The cross leads to the empty tomb and the empty tomb proves the power, efficacy and acceptance of the cross. “As the death of Christ, according to the determinate counsel of a holy and righteous God, was a demonstration of the guilt of His people, so His resurrection was their acquittal from every charge.”⁶ “Our sin had killed Him; our justification raised Him again.... His resurrection was the *proof* of our justification only because it was the necessary *effect* of it.”⁷ Obviously, we could not place our faith in Jesus and His sacrificial death if Christ was still under the power of death, rotting in the tomb. The fact that the Mediator is risen from the dead means that God is smiling upon Him and His work and through Him smiles upon all those who believe.

John Murray gives five reasons why the apostle connects the resurrection with the justification of sinners:

(1) We are justified by faith, and this faith must be directed to Jesus (3:22, 26). But only as the living Lord can he be the object of faith. (2) It is in union with Christ that we are justified (cf. 8:1; II Cor. 5:21). Only as active through the resurrection can any virtue proceed from Christ to us and only with a living Christ can union have efficacy. (3) The righteousness of Christ by which we are justified (5:17, 18, 19) has its embodiment in Christ; it can never be thought of in abstraction from him as a reservoir of merit stored up. Only as the living one can Christ be the embodiment of righteousness and be made to us righteousness from God (I Cor. 1:30). (4) The death and resurrection of Christ are inseparable. Hence even the death or blood of Christ as related to our justification (3:24, 25; 5:9; 8:33, 34) could have no efficacy to that end in isolation from the resurrection. (5) It is through the mediation of Christ that we come to stand in the grace of justification (5:2). But the mediation of Christ could not be operative if he were still under the power of death.⁸

⁵ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 390-391.

⁶ Robert Haldane, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1874] 1958), 183. Calvin writes, “But the meaning is, that when we possess the benefit of Christ’s death and resurrection, there is nothing wanting to the completion of perfect righteousness. By separating his death from his resurrection, he no doubt accommodates what he says to our ignorance; for it is also true that righteousness has been obtained for us by that obedience of Christ, which he exhibited in his death, as the Apostle himself teaches us in the following chapter. But as Christ, by rising from the dead, made known how much he had effected by his death, this distinction is calculated to teach us that our salvation was begun by the sacrifice, by which our sins were expiated, and was at length completed by his resurrection: for the beginning of righteousness is to be reconciled to God, and its completion is to attain life by having death abolished.... As it would not have been enough for Christ to undergo the wrath and judgment of God, and to endure the curse due to our sins, without his coming forth a conqueror, and without being received into celestial glory, that by his intercession he might reconcile God to us, the efficacy of justification is ascribed to his resurrection, by which death was overcome; not that the sacrifice of the cross, by which we are reconciled to God, contributes nothing towards our justification, but the completeness of his favor appears more clear by his coming to life again” (*Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980], 185-186).

⁷ Fredric Louis Godet, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel [1883] 1977), 184, 185.

⁸ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968 [1959, 1965]), 1:156-157. Charles Hodge gives two primary reasons: “His resurrection was no less necessary, first, as a proof that his death had been accepted

Exaltation

The Resurrection begins the exaltation of Christ. The divine-human Mediator's ministry can be divided into two phases: humiliation and then exaltation. The humiliation encompassed the Redeemer's whole life, but was greatly intensified in His suffering and death on the cross. His exaltation began at the resurrection and lasts for eternity. Regarding the exaltation, Berkhof writes,

Reformed theology...regards the person of the Mediator, that is, the God-man, as the subject of the exaltation, but stresses the fact that it was, of course, the human nature in which the exaltation took place. The divine nature is not capable of humiliation or exaltation. In the exaltation the God-man, Jesus Christ, (a) passed from under the law in its federal and penal aspects, and consequently from under the burden of the law as the condition of the covenant of works, and from under the curse of the law; (b) exchanged the penal for the righteous relation to the law, and as Mediator entered in to possession of the blessings of salvation which He merited for sinners; and (c) was crowned with a corresponding honor and glory. It had to appear also in His condition that the curse of sin was lifted. His exaltation was also His glorification.⁹

While it is true that our Lord's foundational redemptive work is completed (i.e. His perfect, sinless life and sacrificial death), Jesus in His exalted state as prophet, priest and king is very active at the right hand of God in applying redemption to His people. He pours out His Spirit in regenerating hearts. He continually intercedes for His people; and, He judges His enemies in history and at the end of history. There are a number of areas regarding our Lord's exaltation that need to be considered.

First, note that Christ was well aware of his coming exaltation before the crucifixion. Indeed, He emphasized it to a degree in His teaching ministry. When many disciples had a difficult time with Jesus' doctrine and were even complaining about His teaching our Lord mentioned the ascension (Jn. 17:5). Our Lord often directed the disciples' attention to His exaltation when He discussed the coming judgment. "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mk 8:38). Jesus told the high priest at His trial, "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mk. 14:62). Christ made it very clear that as the exalted king He

as expiation for our sins. Had he not risen, it would have been evident that he was not what he claimed to be. We should be yet in our sins, 1 Cor. xv. 17, and therefore still under condemnation. Our ransom, in that case, instead of being publicly accepted, had been rejected. And secondly, in order to secure the continued application of the merits of his sacrifice, he rose from the dead, and ascended on high, there to appear before God for us. He stands at the right hand of God, ever to make intercession for his people, thereby securing for them the benefits of his redemption. With a dead Saviour, a Saviour over whom death had triumphed and held captive, our justification had been for ever impossible. As it was necessary that the high priest, under the old economy, should not only slay the victim at the altar, but carry the blood into the most holy place, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat; so it was necessary not only that our great High Priest should suffer in the outer court, but that he should pass into heaven, to present his righteousness before God for our justification. Both, therefore, as the evidence of the acceptance of his satisfaction on our behalf, and as a necessary step to secure the application of the merits of his sacrifice, the resurrection of Christ was absolutely essential, even for justification" (*Romans* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, (1835) 1972], 129).

⁹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1958), 344.

would return in judgment to destroy the nation that rejected Him and persecuted His church. “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Mt. 24:30). Jesus often also discussed His central role as Judge in the final judgment (Mt. 7:22-23; 25:31; Lk. 13:27 ff.; Jn. 5:25-29). God “has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man” (Jn. 5:27). He will sit as the exalted king “on the throne of His glory” (Mt. 25:30) and judge all nations. God has taken the Messiah who was despised and rejected of man (Isa. 53:3) who was unjustly prosecuted and murdered by evil men (Jn. 18:23) and made Him the king and judge. The defendant has become king, judge and executioner. The tables have been turned.

Second, the exaltation of Christ is emphasized in apostolic preaching. When Peter preached to the Jews on the day of Pentecost he connected Jesus’ resurrection to His exaltation and heavenly rule (Ac. 2:32-33). Then after quoting Psalm 110:1 which speaks of the enthronement of the Messiah (Ac. 2:34-35) he said, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Ac. 2:36). Peter in essence is saying, “The very One you humiliated, rejected and murdered, God has exalted and made Lord over all.” The “you killed Him, but God raised Him up” theme is prominent in the book of Acts. Note Peter’s second sermon: “But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses” (Ac. 3:14-15). When Peter and the other apostles were commanded by the Jewish counsel not to teach the gospel, they responded by saying, “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins” (Ac. 5:30-31). After severely rebuking the Jews as “betrayers and murderers” of Christ, Stephen said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” (Ac. 7:56). That our Lord is at God’s right hand refers to the fact that Jesus has been given the preeminent place of honor and power in the universe. The Jews emphatically said “no,” but God says to the Savior—“yes and amen!” Peter continued this theme when he introduced the gospel to the Gentiles: Jesus, “whom they [the Jews] killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly...it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead” (Ac. 10:39-40, 42). Years later Paul preached the identical message in Athens, “He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Ac. 17:31). For Paul, the first act of exaltation—the resurrection—is proof positive that Jesus will judge the world (the historical climax of Christ’s exaltation).

Christianity is truly unique in that the gospel is not just the acceptance of certain doctrines, but also involves belief in and submission unto the living, exalted Redeemer. Because Jesus lives, God commands “all men everywhere to repent” (Ac. 17:30). Believers are to submit to the heavenly King. They are to pray to God only through a living Mediator. They commune with the living Savior (especially during the Lord’s supper). Christians are protected by an all-powerful King. As we consider the coming judgment, we know that we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. And we live with hope and confidence that the Savior is the white horse rider who is progressively conquering the world through His holy Word (Rev. 19:11 ff.). The exaltation permeates the whole life of the church because the Redeemer’s presence and ministry as “Prince” continues.

Third, the exaltation of Jesus is an essential aspect of New Testament theology. In Romans 1:4 Paul says that Christ was “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” The word translated “declared” (*horisthentos*) is better translated as “appointed” or “constituted” or “designated.” The apostle says that, at the resurrection, the incarnate Son (the theanthropic Messiah) is appointed the Son of God with power. In other words, our Lord enters a new phase of His ministry. He has gone from the suffering servant to a position of supreme power and exaltation. This teaching reflects the statement of Jesus that, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Mt. 28:18). Paul says that the exaltation of Christ is the reward for His redemptive obedience. Jesus “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:7-11). In the incarnation our Lord (figuratively speaking) descended a staircase of degradation and progressive humiliation and suffering which culminated in the cross. In the resurrection (whereby Jesus achieved a definitive victory), one discovers the starting point or beginning of an ever-present exaltation. “He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church” (Eph. 1:20-22). “Such language not only witnesses to a defendant whose cause has been vindicated; it is the language of enthronement, drawing especially from such royal psalms as Psalms 2 and 110. Jesus is the messianic king. (Eph. 1:22 links Ps. 110 with Ps. 8:6) More than that, he is Lord of all, the Son of God in power, now and forever ‘at the right hand of God.’”¹⁰

The exaltation theme is not limited to Paul. Peter urges Christians to be holy because: God is holy (1 Pet. 1:16); Jesus redeemed the church with His own precious blood (1 Pet. 1:18-20); and God “raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” (1 Pet. 1:21). The author of Hebrews says, “when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (1:3; cf. 10:12). The book of Hebrews emphasized Christ’s role as a high priest at God’s right hand who intercedes for the church in the heavenly sanctuary (cf. Heb. 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:3, 17, 21; especially 8:1-2). Jesus’ exaltation is paramount in the book of Revelation where our Lord Himself declares, “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forever more” (1:18). As the message or prophecy of the ascended Lord unfolds, the fact that only Jesus is worthy to open the seven-sealed scroll is noted. No one in heaven or on earth or under the earth is worthy or able to unfold its contents (5:3-4) except “a Lamb as though it had been slain” (5:6). The Man who was rejected, tortured and murdered is now “the white horse rider” (6:2; 19:11) the victor (19:21) and judge (20:11ff.), who will crush all opposition to Him and His people. He will rule until “He has put all enemies under His feet” (1 Cor. 15:25).

Fourth, the exaltation of Christ is necessary in order to vindicate His person and ministry against the charges and accusations of His enemies, chiefly the leaders of the Jews. Jesus was convicted in an ecclesiastical court of being an imposter and committing blasphemy. His

¹⁰ John Frederick Janson, *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ in New Testament Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), 50.

miracles were said to have been committed by the power of Satan (Mt. 12:24) and that He was nothing more than a sorcerer. The Jews with their carnal, worldly concept of the Messianic kingdom did not believe that a man from Nazareth of such humble appearance and behavior could be their King; their great deliverer from the bondage of Rome. Further, the fact that God had allowed Jesus to be delivered up to the Romans to be tortured and crucified confirmed the Jews' unbelieving, perverted thinking about Christ. Surely, they reasoned, "God would not allow the Messiah, the Son of God to suffer such indignities at the hands of the heathen if he was the Messiah. Therefore, he must be a wicked imposter and not our King."

Our Lord's resurrection from the dead by the power of God demonstrated that the Father openly acknowledged Jesus to be His Son and His servant. God had allowed the Savior's life to be taken away as a sacrifice for the sins of His people. The resurrection showed that the demands of divine justice were satisfied. It demonstrated that the Jewish leaders were wrong, corrupt, apostate, dishonest and wicked. The Redeemer was innocent. He was righteous and sinless. And, as a result of His redemptive obedience, He has been given all power and authority (Mt. 28:18); He has been "declared to be the Son of God with power" (Rom. 1:4). The "God of peace...brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Heb. 13:20). This vindication extends to the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70 and Christ's role as judge in the final judgment. By the resurrection and exaltation of the Mediator, God acknowledged Him to be His Son, the Messiah and King over all.

Victory

The resurrection of Christ means victory both for Jesus and for his people. Our Lord died as the head and representative of his sheep. When He arose victorious He secured glorified life for the elect. "As He lives, they shall live also. If He remained under the power of death, there is no source of spiritual life to men; for He is the vine, and we are the branches; if the vine be dead the branches must be dead also."¹¹ Although the Savior's victory should be viewed in the widest sense possible, we will focus on three areas that are emphasized in Scripture: His victory over sin, death and Satan. Note the following.

First, the resurrection of Jesus proves that the atoning work of Christ was a complete success; that our Lord's vicarious suffering removed all the guilt and penalty of sin for the elect. The resurrection is the Father's seal of approval on the completed work of Christ. It is God's public declaration of a perfect, complete and satisfactory mission of the Son of God on earth. Paul said, "If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17). In other words, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then His whole ministry, suffering and death accomplished nothing. We saw in our consideration of the resurrection and justification that the efficacy of our Lord's death cannot be separated from His resurrection. When Christ suffered and died on the cross, He said "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30) because the foundation of redemption was complete. The price for sin had been paid in full by the Redeemer's atoning death. That accomplished redemption, however, does not actually save anyone in space and time unless it is applied by the living Christ, our Mediator and high priest. The resurrection and exaltation of Jesus guarantees that redemption will be applied. Not one of our Lord's sheep will be lost. Thus, the resurrection should be viewed as a natural consequence of the victory at Calvary and as

¹¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 2:627.

crucial in achieving salvation itself. As Paul said, “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:10). Hodge writes,

The meaning is obvious: “If while we were enemies, we were restored to the favour of God by the death of his Son, the fact that he lives will certainly secure our final salvation.” 1. His life is a pledge and security for the life of all his people; see John xiv. 19, “Because I live, ye shall live also;” Rom. vii.11; 1 Cor. xv.23. 2. He is able to save to the uttermost, “because he ever lives to make intercession for us,” Heb. vii.25, &c. 3. At his resurrection, all power in heaven and earth was committed to his hands, Matt. xxviii.18; and this power he exercises for the salvation of his people; Eph. i.22, “He is head over all things, for the benefit of his Church;” Rev. 1.18; Heb. ii.10; 1 Cor. xv.25, &c.: see also the passages cited on the last clause of ver. 9. There is, therefore, most abundant ground for confidence for the final blessedness of believers, not only in the amazing love of God, by which, though sinners and enemies, they have been justified and reconciled by the death of his Son, but also in the consideration that this same Saviour that died for them still lives, and ever lives to sanctify, protect, and save them.¹²

Thus, when we examine the biblical definition of the victory of the cross and resurrection we immediately note that modern evangelicalism (which for the most part is Arminian in doctrine¹³) does not really accept or teach the biblical definition of the victory of the resurrection. The resurrection means that the sacrificial death of Christ was accepted by God and was a success *that will be applied by the exalted Savior in history*. Therefore, the Arminian view (that the death of Christ only makes salvation *possible* if men [of their own free will] cooperate with Jesus’ work) is heretical. They accept the resurrection as a historical fact, but ignore its theological significance. They believe that the Redeemer died to eliminate sin and guilt, but deny that He arose to apply that work directly to specific individuals as an all-powerful, exalted Priest-King. Their perversion of the implications of the resurrection is rooted in their defective view of the cross. For the Bible-believing Christian, the resurrection truly means victory, not just the possibility of victory if sinful, autonomous men cooperate with God’s plan.

Second, Christ’s resurrection proves that He conquered death and merited life in its fullest sense. Jesus said, “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the key of Hades and Death” (Rev. 1:18). When our Lord spoke these words to John on Patmos, the Roman Empire claimed authority over life and death of its people. The Savior, however, declares that He—the risen One, not the heathen emperor, or the so-called gods, or the state has command over all things including death and hell. The Redeemer has what no one on the face of this earth has, which is the power to free men from the jaws of death, the grave and hell. Because He shed His blood and triumphed over death and the grave He has the

¹² Charles Hodge, *Romans*, 140.

¹³ “For Arminius, election was subsequent to grace. God decrees to save all who repent, believe and persevere. Election is conditional on man’s response, dependent on God’s foreknowledge of his faith and perseverance. The possibility of a true believer totally or finally falling from grace and perishing is not denied. Consequently, there could be no assurance of ultimate salvation. Moreover, God gives sufficient grace so that man may believe on Christ if he will. His will is free. He can believe or he can resist God’s grace. Redemptive grace is universal not particular, sufficient not irresistible; man’s will is free not bound and cooperates with God’s grace rather than being vivified by it. Effectively, Arminius was saying that God does not choose anyone but instead foresees that some will choose him. This was a position with Pelagian and Gk. patristic roots” (R. W. A. Lethan, “Arminianism” in Sinclair Ferguson, David F. Wright, J. I Packer, eds. *New Dictionary of Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988], 45).

authority or keys to unlock them. “He is the victor who has absolute power.”¹⁴ As Paul says, “For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:21-22). All those who are in Christ shall receive life in the fullest sense of the term. At the second coming of Christ there will be a general resurrection from the dead where believers will be raised to everlasting life and unbelievers to everlasting destruction (2 Th. 1:9). Therefore, Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (Jn. 11:25).

Third, the Mediator’s resurrection proves that He has defeated and subdued Satan. “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that *through death* He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14). “The Son came into the world precisely for the purpose, that through death, his death, he might render ineffective our enemy the *devil* who wields *the power of death*.”¹⁵ Before the death and resurrection of Christ, Satan had full control over men, society, religion and culture throughout the entire earth, except for the tiny nation of Israel. Before the resurrection, our Lord instructed His disciples to limit the gospel message to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt. 10:6). But immediately after the resurrection Satan is bound. “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years...so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished” (Rev. 20:1-3). After the resurrection the disciples are ordered to preach the gospel throughout the entire world (Mk. 16:15; Ac. 1:8), to disciple all nations (Mt. 28:19). Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection Satan (in principle) no longer has dominion over the earth. By His death and resurrection Christ has achieved a definite victory over death, Satan and the forces of evil. Therefore, throughout the history between the first and second coming of Christ there is progressive growth in our Lord’s kingdom (Mt. 13:31-33). The forces of Messiah the Prince will progressively (through the preaching of the gospel and discipling of nations) beat back the forces of evil in the world. As our Lord promised, “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it [i.e. the church]” (Mt. 16:18).

Salvation

There is a direct connection between Christ’s resurrection and salvation in the broad sense of the term. Certain crucial aspects of a believer’s salvation are spoken of in Scripture as flowing from or being fruits of our Lord’s resurrection. That is one reason why Jesus is referred to as the “author,” “captain” or “pioneer” of salvation. There is a vital union that exists between the elect sinner and the Savior during His life, death and resurrection that leads to spiritual life in the believer. Thus, the Mediator is the trunk and we are the branches (Jn. 15:5). He is the fountain of living water (Jn. 4:10), “the resurrection and the life” (Jn. 11:25) and “the beginning, the firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18). From Him and Him alone we derive spiritual life and nourishment. There are at least four important spiritual benefits that flow from Christ’s resurrection.

The first fruit of our Lord’s resurrection toward the elect is regeneration. “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up

¹⁴ Simon J. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapid: Eerdmans, 1993), 550.

¹⁵ Philip Edgcumbe-Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 111.

together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:4-6). “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col. 2:13). In Christ we are “born again” (Jn. 3:3), “regenerated” (Tit. 3:5) or “made alive” (Eph. 2:5). Thus we are called a “new creation” (Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17), a “new man” (Eph. 4:24). Why are some people born again while others are not? The reason some are regenerated while others remain spiritually dead is that only the elect were united with Jesus in His death and resurrection. Hodge writes, “It is in virtue of their union with Christ that believers are partakers of his life and exaltation. They are to reign with him. The blessings, then, of which the apostle speaks, are represented as already conferred for two reasons, -first, because they are in a measure already enjoyed; and, secondly, because the continuance and consummation of these blessings are rendered certain by the nature of the union between Christ and his people. In him they are already raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of God.”¹⁶

The apostle John also teaches that believers are regenerated as a consequence of their union with Christ in His resurrection. The apostle speaks of a first resurrection that occurs long before the final resurrection at the end of human history. “Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be kings and priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:6). The first resurrection refers to the resurrection of Christ of which all believers partake. Consequently they cannot be harmed by the second death. In John’s gospel, Jesus also spoke of two resurrections. The first resurrection refers to regeneration and salvation (Jn. 5:24-25). It occurs when a person hears the word of God; Jesus speaks life to a dead soul; and the person believes in Christ. The second resurrection refers to the bodily, physical resurrection that occurs at the second coming (Jn. 5:28-29). Those who partake of a spiritual resurrection (the first resurrection) are raised to life. Those who do not partake of the first resurrection are raised to condemnation.

Paul says that our Lord became a life-giving Spirit at the resurrection. “The first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45). At His resurrection Christ received a supernatural, spiritual (glorified) body. Thus, the resurrected Messiah (the second or last Adam) is the representative Man; “the firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18); the pioneer or lead climber for the elect in redemptive life; and, He Himself is the source for the new life: both the new life of regeneration and the new life at the bodily resurrection where all believers receive spiritual, glorified bodies. Matthew Poole writes, “The last Adam, by which he meaneth Christ, who in time was after the first Adam, and was born in the last days, and was last common Head; as Adam was the first, with respect of grace and spiritual regeneration, he was made a quickening spirit: he was made so, not when he was conceived and born, for he had a body subject to the same natural infirmities that ours are; but upon his resurrection from the dead, when, though he had the same body, in respect of the substance of it, yet it differed in qualities, and was much more spiritual; with which body he ascended up into spiritual life, so also to quicken our mortal bodies at his second coming, when he shall raise the dead out of their graves.”¹⁷ As the rays of the sun give light, warm and life to plants in the spring,

¹⁶ Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1964 [1856]), 75.

¹⁷ Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1963 [1865]), 3:597. Note that the teaching of Paul in this passage corresponds to the teaching of Jesus in John’s gospel (discussed above; Jn. 5:24-25, 28-29), where our Lord sets regeneration-salvation in parallel with the last bodily resurrection unto life. Christ is the source and fountain of life. We live only because He lives. “For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you” (2 Cor. 13:4).

the resurrected Son imparts spiritual light and life to His own people. “For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself” (Jn. 5:26). “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation” (Gal. 6:15).

The second fruit of Christ's resurrection is sanctification. The most detailed and systematic discussion of sanctification in the New Testament is found in Romans 6:1-7:6. In this section of Scripture, Paul discusses at length the foundation for personal godliness in the Christian life. The apostle teaches that all the imperatives relating to a believer's progressive sanctification are grounded upon a definitive sanctification achieved by Christ Himself. By virtue of the believer's intimate union with our Lord in His death and resurrection, Christians have been delivered from the power of sin. Paul writes, “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.... Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God” (Rom. 6:4-5, 8-10). Jesus' death is the reason that Christians have died to the reigning, enslaving, defiling power of sin. His resurrection is the reason that believers have and live in newness of life. The “Prince of life” (Ac. 3:15) was and is the first and only fully sanctified man. He imparts this sanctification to others first in regeneration (or, as the Puritans often called it, initial sanctification) and then progressively through renewal by the Holy Spirit. The Confession of Faith says, “They who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection” (15:1).

The ethical imperatives in the epistles arise out of and are rooted in the gracious indicatives [i.e. Jesus' past redemptive acts in history] of the gospel. “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God....Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:1-5, 5). “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). “Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God” (1 Jn. 3:9). “He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:15-17). When the apostle says that we no longer know Jesus after the flesh, he is pointing to the historical fact that our Lord has been resurrected and glorified and thus lives in a new, exalted, victorious state. The word “therefore” proceeds from this historical reality. When Paul says that for those in Christ old things have passed away, the verb tense (aorist) points to the moment in time when the Holy Spirit regenerated them. But then when the apostle says, “all things have become new” he changes the verb tense (this time perfect), indicating that old things became and continue to be new. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection Christians are regenerated and progressively sanctified. As there was a radical discontinuity between the state

of humiliation (“Christ according to the flesh”), there is a radical discontinuity from the state of being unregenerate (spiritually dead) and being born again (alive in Christ). The old mode of thinking and living (i.e. world and life view, passions, lusts, affections and actions) has been definitively slain with Christ and in regeneration is replaced with a whole new way of thinking and living. Since we have been raised with Jesus, we must continue to walk consistently with that new and continuous life. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

The third fruit of our Lord's resurrection is glorification. After writing that we [i.e. the apostles] have seen, looked upon and even handled the Word of life (1 Jn. 1:1) John says, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 Jn. 3:2). Paul says that Christ Himself will transform our bodies into glorified bodies. “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Phil. 3:20-21). The foundation of this transformation is the resurrection of Christ. “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming” (1 Cor. 15:20-23). The apostle is not merely discussing the resurrection in general but the resurrection unto life. That is a resurrection that results in immortal glorified bodies. Paul writes,

The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality (1 Cor. 15:47-53).

The salvation that our Lord achieved affects the whole man-body and soul. When Jesus rose in a glorious immortal, spiritual body, He established the redemptive foundation and thus guaranteed every believer's regeneration as well as their future resurrection in a similar glorified body. All believers long for the day when they shall receive such a wonderful body. “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation, which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (2 Cor. 5:1-5). Although we [i.e. true believers] all share in Christ's resurrected life in this life (note the sections above on regeneration, justification and sanctification), the full realization of this new life must await the second coming when our salvation is brought to completion. “The picture conveyed is that of the heavenly body being put on, like an outer vesture, over the earthly body, with which the apostle

is as it were clad, so as not only to cover it but to absorb and transfigure it. In this way ideas both of continuity and of transformation, which are also prominent in the great resurrection chapter of 1 Cor. 15, are effectively communicated.”¹⁸

The fourth fruit of Christ’s resurrection is the restoration of the whole created order. As the fall of the first Adam resulted in a curse upon creation and a derailment of the God-glorifying nature of the dominion mandate, the redemptive work of Jesus is directed to the salvation of the elect, the re-institution and enabling of the original dominion mandate and the salvation of the whole created order. The Son of God, through His redemptive work, makes sure that God’s original purpose for mankind and the creation is not lost. To save a multitude and then leave them forever in a fallen corrupt world would be a contradiction of God’s original purpose for mankind. Therefore, the scope of Christ’s mission is cosmic. He not only makes His people a new creation by His resurrection power, He also makes a “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3:13).

Jesus spoke of a coming restoration of the world in Matthew 19:28. “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” The word translated “regeneration” (NKJV, KJV, ASV, NASB, YLTB), “new world” (RSV) or “renewal of all things” (NIV) is *palingenesia*. It only occurs one other time in the New Testament in Titus 3:5 in reference to a Christian’s new birth. It literally means re-generation, re-birth or re-creation. This passage can be interpreted in two different ways, both of which support the idea that in Jesus’ resurrection there is a restoration of the whole created order. The first interpretation takes the word “regeneration” in a definitive sense. That is, the regeneration of the world in principle is an accomplished fact in the Savior’s resurrection and ascension to the throne of glory. The judging of the twelve tribes by the apostles would then refer to the preaching of the gospel and the establishment of church discipline throughout Israel after the great commission (Mt. 28:19ff.). The second view (which is held by the great majority of commentators) is that it refers to the final day—the Day of Judgment. When Christ returns, the saints will receive their glorified bodies and there will be a glorious restitution of all things. It will be a cosmic regeneration, a new creation, a new Genesis.

This concept of restoration or re-creation is common in the New Testament. Peter spoke of the “restoration of all things” (Ac. 3:21) in his preaching and the creation of a “new heavens and a new earth” in his second epistle (3:13). The apostle John tells us of the re-creation as the climax of human history in the book of Revelation. “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...the former things have passed” (21:1, 4). While describing a new paradise, the Apocalypse clearly points back to the original pre-fall Eden. In the new world there is no more death, tears, suffering or pain (21:4). There is a pure river of water of life that flows from God and the Lamb’s throne (22:1). The “tree of life” is found in abundance (22:2) and there is “no more curse” (22:3) or “night” (22:5). All those who have not been cleansed by Jesus Christ who continue in sin and immorality are cast into the lake of fire (21:8) and excluded from the new creation (22:15). Best of all there is a continuous light (22:5), love and fellowship with God and Christ (22:3-5). The salvation that our Lord achieved gives the church and the creation even greater blessings than the original Eden.

Paul also discusses a comprehensive, cosmic reconciliation. “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by

¹⁸ Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 168-169.

Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (Col. 1:18-20). Jesus is not only the mediator of the original creation (Col. 1:15), but also the mediator and the first born of the second creation. “No domain is left in which the absolute supremacy of Christ and of his work is not fully effective.”¹⁹ “Whatever is needed to save a fallen world, and restore harmony to the universe, is treasured up in Him—is in Him.”²⁰ “By his power and authority, he will correct every aspect of creation. Ultimately he will present this properly arranged universe to God who will be glorified in all.”²¹

In Romans, Paul even personifies the non-rational and inanimate creation to emphasize the future hope of believers in the coming glory: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (8:18-23). The power of Christ’s resurrection will overturn the frustration (*mataiotes*), emptiness or futility of the present world order. The creation which is presently subject to decay (*phthora*), to corruption and the evils of disease, death, predation and pain will be freed by our Lord’s liberation from the tomb.

The resurrection of Christ is at the heart of a vibrant faith. The Bible tells us that our Lord has won the war against sin, Satan and death. This glorious victory extends to the whole man (body and soul) as well as to the whole world. This is the great truth by which the church is to live. There is no excuse to retreat from battle, or to shrink back in fear, or to shudder at the trials and tribulations of life. The victory has already been achieved. Believers are not to be afraid of their persecutors. Our courage, hope, endurance and patience are rooted in the fact that Christ has triumphed over all. “The power of Christ’s resurrection means that a redeeming force and people are now at work in history, bringing all things into captivity to Christ. The scope of the resurrected Christ’s redeeming power is cosmic and eternal.”²² Let us march forth into victory in Christ who has made us “more than conquerors” through the power of his resurrection.

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¹⁹ R. C. H. Lenski, *St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961 [1937, 1946]), 64.

²⁰ John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle to the Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979 [1884]), 69.

²¹ Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 226.

²² Rousas John Rushdoony, *Romans and Galatians* (Vallecito, CA.: Ross House Books, 1997), 139.