

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Nicene Creed		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	37		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Romans 8:34		
Date:	January 19, 2025 (a.m.)		

**AND THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN
ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES (Part II)**

In this magnificent chapter the Apostle Paul lays out the specific doctrinal bearings of the resurrection of Christ. The opening verse of chapter 8 has been a favorite of Christians down through the ages. In fact, the whole chapter has often been declared to be the greatest chapter in the Bible. The noted Swiss commentator of a past generation, F. Godet, called these thirty-nine verses great because they begin with “no condemnation” and end with “no separation,” to which another writer, C. A. Fox, added that in between there is also “no defeat.”¹ James Orr, one of the most accomplished theologians of the 19th century, wrote a magnificent book on The Resurrection, in which he said: “The Resurrection is an evidential fact, and its importance in this relation is not to be minimized. But this, as a little consideration may show, after all, only touches the exterior of the subject. The core of the matter is not reached till it is perceived that the Resurrection of Jesus is not simply an external seal or evidential appendage to the Christian gospel, but enters as a *constitutive element* into the very essence of that Gospel. Its denial or removal would be the mutilation of the Christian doctrine of Redemption, of which it is an integral part. An opposite view is that of Herrmann, who lays the whole stress on the impression produced by Christ’s early life. Such a view has no means of incorporating the Resurrection into itself as a constitutive part of its Christianity. The Resurrection remains at most a deduction of faith without inner relation to salvation? It is apt to be felt, therefore, to be a superfluous appendage. In a full Scriptural presentation, it is not so. It might almost be said to be a test of the adequacy of the view of Christ and His work taken by any school, whether it is able to take in the Resurrection of Christ as a constitutive part of it. In New Testament Scripture, it will not be disputed that these two things are always taken together – the Death and the Resurrection of Christ – the one as essentially connected with, and completed in, the other. *It is Christ Jesus that died*, says St. Paul, *yea, rather, that was raised from the dead. Who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification. Who through Him*, says St. Peter, *are believers in God, which raised Him from the dead, and gave him glory; so that your faith and hope might be in God. The God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep, with the blood of the everlasting covenant*, we read in Hebrews. *I am the Living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore*, says the Lord in the Apocalypse. What is the nature of this connection? The answer to this question turns on the manner in which the death of Christ itself is conceived, and on this point the teaching of the New Testament is again sufficiently explicit. The Cross is the decisive meeting-place between man’s sin and God’s grace. It is the point of reconciliation between man and God. *There* was accomplished – at least consummated – the great work of Atonement for human sin! Christ, as the Epistle to the Hebrews declares, *put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*”² As mentioned earlier in this series, *Poenam Damni* is the theological Latin expression that refers to the loss of God’s favor, presence and glory. The fate of those who are designated in Scripture as *lost* is one of banishment to a place of torment (Matthew 25:41; Luke 16:24-29). Here they experience *poena sensus* – punishment in what is described as everlasting fire (Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:5; Revelation 20:14, 15).³ This is *Damnation*.⁴ Sin must be judged by God. Try as we might to minimize the seriousness of our sin or to try and excuse or rationalize our sin away, we are still left standing before God guilty. Our own conscience reminds us of our guilt, and where there is real guilt, there is

condemnation.⁵ This is deserved because of original sin (Romans 5:18) and our actual sins (Romans 6:23). Our guilt produces fear, and this is founded not as so much popular psychology would have us believe, in a misguided religious upbringing or a culturally conditioned lack of self-esteem, but in the lingering but gripping sense of God's holiness. "It is a natural truth," wrote Thomas Manton, "that sin is displeasing to God, and maketh the sinner hateful and loathsome to Him, and worthy to be cast off and punished by Him. God's holiness is at the bottom of all our fears."⁶

Sin affects all of us in two regards. One has to do with sin's guilt and condemnation. Secondly, it has to do with sin's pollution and defilement. No amount of repentance on our part can remove sin's guilt and stain. No amount of effort on our part to try and earn righteousness can remove sin's guilt and stain. Ezekiel Hopkins long ago penned these words: "Either presumptuous conceits of God's mercy, or proud conceits of their own merits, or some such rotten principle or other: and, because, with these, they have worn out many storms of conscience and many powerful convictions, they will not forsake their hopes, nor let go their vain confidence; but cry out peace, peace to themselves, till they and their hopes perish together."⁷ Only the blood of Christ can cleanse the guilt and stain of sin (1 John 1:7). Paul's language in Romans 8:31-39 speaks to this same effect. Note carefully in 8:34 how the Apostle links the death of Christ with His resurrection.

- I. **PAUL'S CHALLENGE.** The language at the beginning of verse 33 is similar to that in verse 34. "Who will bring any charge against God's elect?" means to bring an accusation that will result in condemnation. Thus it is a *legal* challenge like that brought by a chief prosecutor in a court of law.⁸
 - A. **God's Elect.** The NIV translates 8:33 as "those whom God has chosen." The ESV is better here. The exact language is *God's elect*. Why this emphasis? The Apostle does *not* say "who shall bring any charge against those who believe in Jesus Christ." No, he underscores the fact of God's sovereignty in election. People do not elect themselves because of their belief. Rather, their faith is the result of their election. "If you are one of God's chosen people, then, because God is God, no one can ever rob you of your position."⁹
 - B. **God's Justification.** Justification by faith alone, *Sola Fide*, is one of Paul's major themes, especially in this epistle (1:1-5:11). To attack or accuse the elect is to go up against God. He is the One who justifies. To attack the great Judge is pure folly (cf. Isaiah 50:8, 9).

Note: the language of justification is that of the law courts. Man's relationship to God is always a legal one. Either he stands condemned by the Law of God for having transgressed the Law, or he stands acquitted or declared justified before the Law of God through the merits of Christ. To justify means to pardon, forgive, acquit. It is a judicial declaration, and God *always* justifies in a strict legal manner. He always acts in terms of His Law and justice (cf. Romans 3:24-26). Buchanan, in his classic work on the subject writes: "The Hebrew and Greek verbs which are employed by the sacred writers to denote *justification*, are invariably set over against such as denote *condemnation*. They are applied to the judgments of men, and also to the judgments of God; and the analogy between these two is the ground of its common application to both. With reference to the judgments of men, *justification* is always opposed to *condemnation*. *If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judge may judge them; then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked. He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord. Woe unto them . . . which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him.* In these passages, and many more, two judicial sentences are mentioned which are directly the reverse of each other; and they are so stated, with reference both to the righteous and to the wicked, as to imply that the justification of the one no more signifies the infusion of righteousness, than the condemnation of the other signifies the infusion of wickedness. With reference, again, to the judgments of God, the same terms – *justification* and *condemnation* – are frequently employed to denote judicial sentences which are directly opposite to each other. *It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? By thy words thou shalt be justified, and*

by thy words thou shalt be condemned. The judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. If Justification is thus proved to be the opposite of condemnation, it can only be, like the latter, a forensic and judicial term; and the one can no more signify to sanctify or to make righteous inherently, than the other to deprave or deteriorate the moral character of one who is convicted of crime.”¹⁰ Justification also includes the imputation or reckoning of Christ’s righteousness to the account of those who are forgiven. This is the positive aspect of justification.

II. **PAUL’S PIVOTAL ARGUMENT.** The Apostle moves from the Father’s electing love to the Son’s redeeming work. Four specific points are made to demonstrate the truth that nothing can separate the elect from their security in Christ.

A. **Christ’s Death.** The terseness of Paul’s language here draws attention to the significance of Christ’s death as redemptive. Note the context. Christ’s death removes the possibility of condemnation. Matthew Barrett summarizes Paul’s argument, “If, as we’ve argued, the resurrection is no mere vindication but the prophetic, forensic, and soteriological guarantee of justification and imputation, then we would expect Scripture to ground reconciliation in the resurrection as well. Reconciliation would be the necessary outcome if Christ’s resurrection is forensically effective in establishing the sinner’s right standing with God. That outcome is evidenced immediately after Romans 4:25. Having demonstrated that both the cross and the resurrection are *for our justification*, Paul’s very next sentence, which begins with *therefore*, turns our attention to the reconciliation that follows: *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God*” (5:1-2). That Paul is grounding reconciliation not only in Christ’s atonement but also in his resurrection becomes increasingly apparent in Romans 5:6 and following. Paul first explains the logic of the cross. God’s love comes first; because of our depravity, his love is prevenient: *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. . . . God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (5:6, 8). Having identified the motivating factor (divine love) and the priority it has if redemption is to be *sola gratia*, Paul then draws out the eschatological consequences if Christ’s death has truly effected justification for the ungodly: *Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God* (5:9). The judgment to come, which Paul warned about at the start of his letter, is terrible news to those outside Christ. They may suppress the truth now, indulging in *all manner of unrighteousness* (1:29), but the righteous judgment of the righteous Judge awaits them. *He will render to each one according to his works* (2:6), which cannot be good news for those who have only their works to show for themselves on the last day: *But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed* (2:5).”¹¹

Note: Many Christians believe that Christ died for all (universal) and that the atonement is unlimited in scope and design. However, Paul’s language in Romans 8:31-39 cannot be harmonized with that line of thought. It is the elect *alone* who actually benefit from the saving work of Christ. They and they alone are rescued from wrath.

B. **Christ’s Resurrection.** It is the risen Lord who insures the security of His own. Furthermore, it is only in the light of Christ’s resurrection that we properly see the nature of His redemptive death. Paul’s language in 1 Corinthians 15:17 makes this same point. If Christ is not risen, then “we are still in our sins,” *i.e.*, under condemnation. The resurrection is *proof* to us that we have been justified by Christ’s death (Romans 4:25).

C. **Christ’s Exaltation.** He is exalted to the right hand of God the Father Almighty. This indicates that He is invested with sovereignty and dominion (cf. Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; Acts 2:33;

5:31; 7:55; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3). Since He has all authority in heaven and on earth, He is Lord of all.

- D. **Christ's Intercession.** He ever lives to make intercession for those who come to God through His mediation (cf. Hebrews 7:25). As their great High Priest, He stands also as their advocate (1 John 2:1). Christ's presence at the right hand of God assures His own that Christ, the One who died and rose again on their behalf, has pledged Himself to them forever.

CONCLUSION: God the Father is well-pleased with the work of God the Son. It was a perfect work and complete in every way. This is precisely what the Apostle wanted to convey to his readers in Romans 8:31-39. Thomas Schreiner points out that "The Bible speaks of Jesus Christ being *justified* or *acquitted* at his resurrection (1 Tim. 3:16). The resurrection demonstrated that Jesus wasn't a deluded messianic figure. No one could possibly be the Messiah if his life ended as a crucified criminal, but Jesus' resurrection demonstrates that the verdict *guilty* declared by the world has been overturned by God. The resurrection of Jesus reveals that he has been acquitted by God. At the same time, the resurrection communicates that the last days have arrived, that the eschaton has invaded history (Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:13-14; Dan. 12:1-3). The resurrection of Jesus, therefore, is an eschatological event, demonstrating that the last days have arrived. Death has been defeated, and Jesus' resurrection testifies that he has been vindicated as the Messiah and the Son of God. Believers in Jesus Christ are *not guilty* by virtue of Jesus' death and resurrection (Rom. 4:25). Since they are *in Christ* (Eph. 1:3-14) and united to him by faith, they are no longer in Adam (Rom. 5:12-19); 1 Cor. 15:21-22). Hence, Jesus, vindication at his resurrection is their vindication, his status is their status. Believers, even now, enjoy by faith the status of the resurrected one. In other words, in the resurrection of Jesus the last times have invaded history."¹² "The Father," wrote Lloyd-Jones, "looks upon the Son and He sees us in Him. He sees our needs. The Father looks upon Him as our representative, as the One who has done all this for us, the One who is concerned about us; he gives Him everything, and He gives Him everything *for us*."¹³

ENDNOTES

¹ As cited by J. M. Boice, *Romans: An Expository Commentary* (Baker, 1992), p. 782.

² James Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1980), p. 274.

³ This punishment is also *gradus poenarum infernalium*, that is, according to the quality and measure of sins committed (Revelation 21:12). There are degrees of punishment.

⁴ The curse word *Damn* (commonly heard today) comes from the Latin *damnātre*, "to condemn," and *damnum*, "loss, fine, penalty." *Damnatio* is the theological expression for the consignment to eternal punishment which takes place at the final judgment. People are judged for their sins (unforgiven). All who stand outside of Christ are so judged (2 Thessalonians 1:8, 9; Acts 4:12).

⁵ *Reatus Poenae* refers to the liability to punishment because we have incurred guilt by transgressing the Law of God. We are *culpable* (from the Latin *culpa*, "guilt, fault, crime"). Sinners are subject to both guilt and punishment.

⁶ *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton XII* (rpt. Maranatha, 1973), p. 360.

⁷ *The Works of Ezekiel Hopkins II* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), p. 387.

⁸ The word translated "bring any charge" in both the NIV and ESV Bible is *egkaleo*, and was used in the Greek courts of the day. It is a forensic term (the Latin source for our English word is *forens*, literally "belonging to the forums or courts"). It is used in this exact sense in Acts 19:40; 23:29; 26:2).

⁹ D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 8:17-39* (Zondervan, 1976), p. 405.

¹⁰ James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification* (rpt. Baker Book House, 1977), p. 229.

¹¹ Matthew Barrett, "Raised for Our Justification" in *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls: Justification in Biblical, Theological, Historical and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. M. Barrett (Crossway, 2014), p. 411.

¹² T. Schreiner, *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification – What the Reformers Taught . . . and Why It Still Matters* (Zondervan, 2015), p. 156.

¹³ Lloyd-Jones, p. 438.