

Christ's Resurrection and our Justification (Romans 4:25)

We usually think of Christ's death as the means of our atonement, paying the penalty for our sin. Paul wrote, "He died for all", and that is objectively true. It is true for all persistently wicked people and unbelievers, whether they believe it or not. It is this good news through which the Holy Spirit works faith in spiritually dead hearts.

We usually think of Christ's resurrection as freedom from death, our guarantee of having life together with Christ.

In Romans 4, Paul wrote, "**He was handed over because of our offences, and was raised for the sake of our justification.**" The first part of the statement related Jesus' death for our forgiveness. However, the second part also connects His resurrection with our justification. Forgiveness and justification are really the same thing, from different points of view. If God does not reckon our sins against us, we are forgiven. If he reckons Christ's obedience, or righteousness, to us, we are justified.

Romans 4:25 is a grouping of two things into one statement, with the verb "was handed over" governing the first part and "was raised" governing the second part. Both verbs are passive, with the Father as the unexpressed Agent. God the Father handed Jesus over because of our offences, and God the Father raised Him for the sake of our justification. The verb "was handed over" stresses that the Father was willing to let His Son die, and for His Son to sacrifice Himself.

An interesting feature is that the same preposition in Greek means "because of" in the first part of the parallelism, and "for the sake of" in the second part. One expresses a reason, and the other a purpose. This is only an apparent difficulty. If I say, "He did it for your safety" or "because of your safety", I do not mean that he did it because you are already safe. but in order to make you safe. Here the literal preposition for "because of" expresses purpose.

There are two ages, one sharing in Adam, and the other sharing in Christ. We do not think of these as consecutive, because there were believers in the coming Messiah in the Old Testament period. The two ages include everyone. For example, "As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor 15:22). It is quite scriptural to think of Christ's **death** as the final act of the old age, and His **resurrection** as the introduction into the new age. This double divine act has set us firmly into the new age. Similarly, our baptism is both a dying and a rising. It joins us to Christ's final act in the old age, His death and ushers in our walking in newness of life, joining us to His resurrection (Rm 6:3-4). Some people think that this double statement, "He was handed over because of our offences, and was raised for the sake of our justification", reflects a very early Christian confessional statement, which Paul incorporated into his letter to the Romans.

The stress, in Romans 4:25, however, is on the second half of the parallelism. In the context, Paul has been discussing God's reckoning of righteousness to Abraham through faith in God, who gives life to the dead. Nothing gives more glory to God than simple faith in His promises, even when people's situations seem hopeless. The preceding verse reads, "God is about to **reckon righteousness** to us, who believe in Him who has raised Jesus, our Lord, from the dead." Reckoning righteousness is what justification is. Justification was brought about through the resurrection of Christ. Paul used the same word for "justification" again in Romans 5:18, where its opposite was "condemnation." "Therefore, as through one man's transgression judgment came to all people, resulting in condemnation, so also, through One Man's righteous act, the free gift came to all people, resulting in justification, which brings life" (Rm 5:18). As Romans 4:25 shows,, both Christ's death and His resurrection are closely related. We do not believe in a Christ who remained dead. The Crucified Christ is what He is, our Saviour, because God also raised Him from death. The faith that justifies us is faith in God the Father, who raised Jesus.

The first part of the parallelism goes back to Isaiah 53, "However, He was pierced for our rebellious acts. He was bruised for our wrongdoings" (v.5). Paul apparently wrote, "He was handed over because of our offences" with Isaiah 53:5 in mind. There are also double statements later in Isaiah 53: "My righteous Servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities. Therefore I shall divide Him a portion among great people, and He will divide the plunder with strong people, because He poured out His life to death, and He was numbered with wrongdoers. Nevertheless, He has carried the sin of many people, and He intercedes for the wrongdoers" (v. 11-12).

When Jesus died, His words, "It is finished" were His triumphant declaration that His atonement for the sin of the world was complete. Usually the resurrection of Jesus is presented in the New Testament in terms of Jesus' humanity, that God the Father raised Jesus' dead human body from the grave. Even His ascension is described in a

similar way, as being taken up into heaven. When we compare Jesus' statement, "It is finished" with this one, we see that the Father's raising of Jesus, the Sin-Bearer, from death was His "Amen" to Jesus' statement, "It is finished." Negatively, if what Jesus had done as the Substitute for the sin of the world had been insufficient, God would not have raised Him. He would not have been a sin-bearer. Positively, since He died to sin as a power, death has no more dominion over Him or over those whose place He had taken. The fact that the Father raised Him was the Father's word of absolution for the whole world. He reckoned Jesus' righteousness to all human kind, in a mass. All that is needed is faith in individual sinners to receive this verdict that God makes on the basis of Christ's completed redemptive work and His resurrection.

So close has salvation been brought to every sinner! Imagine a group of political prisoners. The government declares an amnesty, and the doors of the prison are thrown open, and all prisoners are free to leave. However, one of them thinks it is a trick, and decides that it is better for him to stay where he is. In spite of the amnesty, he is still no better than a prisoner. The open doors have made no difference to him. That shows how very foolish unbelief is in relation to God's word of absolution on the basis of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Sin-bearer.

This statement of Paul, "He was raised for the sake of our justification" fits closely the context of Romans 4, where Paul speaks of God as the one who brings what does not exist into existence and brings life from the dead. Just as He gave the son whom he promised to Abraham and Sarah when they were well past the age when people can have children, God brought life to Jesus, His Son, when all his disciples and family-members saw His cause as lost, and His life as gone permanently. However, God raised Him from the dead, for the sake of our justification. Our faith rests on Jesus' death and resurrection. and God reckons this faith to us for the forgiveness of our offences and for our justification, without works. As God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, God has brought life from death in us also by awakening faith in us, through baptism and the Word of the Gospel.