

Resurrection focuses on the principle of life out of death, and this implicates first and foremost the incarnation of Jesus Christ. But given that death is enslavement, life out of death means redemption. There is no life for the “dead” creation without it being liberated from the bondage of its estrangement. And so, even as resurrection implies *incarnation* and *redemption*, it also implies *reconciliation* and its prerequisite counterpart *justification*.

#### 4. Resurrection as Justification

Resurrection implies *justification*, but not primarily in the sense many think. Most often the relationship between resurrection and justification is conceived in terms of a proof; that is to say, Jesus’ resurrection is viewed as proving that sin has been atoned for and divine justice satisfied. But a different focal point emerges when resurrection is treated as the principle of “life out of death” which has its substance, not in the Jesus’ bodily resurrection, but in His incarnation. *From this vantage point, resurrection and justification find their fundamental relationship in the hypostatic union.*

In the person of Jesus Christ, God and man are forever brought together in perfect union and communion, and in this union both God and man are fully “justified.” This doesn’t deny a relation between justification and Jesus’ resurrection (cf. Romans 4:25); rather, it recognizes that justification – with respect to God as well as men – is, like resurrection, seated in the incarnation. This truth becomes evident once the concept of justification is understood in terms of *righteousness* or “rightness” (conformity to that which is true, right and proper).

- a. God is justified in the hypostatic union in that it has brought into being His eternal purpose for His relationship with His image-bearer (and so the whole creation). Contrary to the belief of some, that purpose wasn’t realized in Adam, but only initiated. Jesus Christ isn’t the return to unfallen Adamic man; He is the realization of the humanness which Adam only prefigured and for which he laid the foundation – the ultimate and consummate humanness God intended from the beginning. Stated differently, *man has his premise as well as his destiny in Jesus Christ*: In Him, and by His incarnation, the perfect relationship of intimacy between image-son and divine Father, Son, and Spirit has at last been obtained, never again to be compromised or forfeited. In Jesus Christ, man has at last become truly man.

Thus God is justified in the incarnation (hypostatic union) in that, by it, His good and perfect purpose was realized in its essential substance. In turn, the incarnation has born its testimony and accomplished its end in the life, death, resurrection and enthronement of Jesus as royal image-Son and the outpouring of His Spirit by which His life – the life of “new creation” – flows out to mankind and the rest of the created order.

In the person and work of Jesus, God has manifested and vindicated His righteousness. That is, He has thereby attested and exalted the “rightness” of His perfect will for His creation, His enduring commitment to it and His accomplishment of it. This is precisely what Paul meant when he declared that the righteousness of God is revealed (made manifest) in the gospel (Romans 1:16-17; cf. also 3:1-5 with 3:21-26 and 10:1-4).

*In His Son, God has satisfied His righteousness, not as the execution of a legal obligation, but by accomplishing and attesting in and to His creation His eternal intention and good pleasure to establish its everlasting perfection and glory in His Servant (Isaiah 53:10-11).*

- b. The incarnation – the hypostatic union – vindicated God’s righteousness respecting Himself, man, and the rest of His creation, but the obverse is equally true: In Jesus Christ, *man’s* righteousness is also fully vindicated. The incarnation testifies that Jesus is God’s righteousness toward man, but also that He is man’s righteousness toward God.
- 1) Jesus is True Man, and this means that He is first of all man’s “amen” to God’s design for His image-son. Jesus is *in Himself* human righteousness because He is what man was created to be.
  - 2) But He is also man’s “amen” to God by embracing, as man, God’s true and righteous assessment and condemnation of man. Jesus, the faithful and true Son of Man, agreed with His Father against man – against *Himself* as man – and yielded with loving faithfulness to His Father’s just punishing hand.
  - 3) Finally, Jesus is man’s “amen” to God by His resurrection and exaltation. He has realized in Himself man’s consummate destiny and, as first-fruits, has become the fountainhead of that true humanity His Father eternally purposed. Thus Paul’s summary introduction of his gospel to the saints at Rome: Jesus’ designation as Son of God – man as royal *son* – is attested by His resurrection (Romans 1:1-4; cf. Acts 13:32-33). He is the Last Adam, so that His life as True Man means life for Adam’s race (1 Corinthians 15, esp. vv. 20-49).

***In the incarnation (and all that flowed from it, including the resurrection) God and man are both fully justified – attested as perfectly in agreement with what is right – precisely because Jesus Christ is God’s “amen” to man and man’s “amen” to God.***

- c. The previous two considerations shed light on how God’s righteousness should be understood in relation to divine *judgment* and *wrath* – first at Calvary and then in the last day. Stated simply, the negative expression of divine righteousness is merely God’s “right” response to men’s repudiation and refusal of His righteousness: that which God has fulfilled and accomplished as Father, Son and Spirit.

Because righteousness speaks to “rightness” it does have an inherent forensic quality. Moreover, the fact that righteousness is relational (because God is a *personal* being) doesn’t argue against this truth. In the Old Testament – and particularly in Paul’s writings in the New Testament – the language of righteousness is often the language of the courtroom, specifically as implicating a dispute between contending parties. In such instances righteousness takes on the connotation of *justice*. Here the issue of righteousness is the legal vindication of what is right, but that rightness is still relational in that it involves claims of *persons* against one another – claims that therefore pertain to relational obligations, whether personal, contractual, familial, societal, or otherwise (cf. Exodus 23:1-9; Deuteronomy 10:11-18, 16:18-20, 25:1-3; also 1 Kings 3:5-28; etc.).

This judicial notion of righteousness obviously has its preeminent expression in God's dealings with men. He is the just Judge who always judges in righteousness, finding in favor of the innocent, exploited and oppressed (cf. Job 34:1-29, 36:1-7; Psalm 82; etc.). God always "does justice," the focus of which is His fulfillment of His "right" purposes for the creation (cf. Deuteronomy 32:35-43 and Jeremiah 23:1-6 with Romans 3:21-26) and His justice in holding the creation accountable to what He has done; what it is rightly obliged to acknowledge and embrace (cf. John 3:17-21, 5:22-47 with Matthew 25:31-46).

Thus Calvary was God's judgment – the vindication of His righteousness – in two respects. First, it was a crucial feature of His fulfillment of His word of promise to restore His creation to Himself. But for that very reason it was also His condemnation of the perversion and enmity that was the creation's estrangement from Him. Jesus Christ – in His person and work – both condemned and ended the Creator-creature alienation.

But for that very reason the whole creation – including the entire human race – has a righteous obligation to recognize and embrace what the Creator has done. For men to continue to live in their estrangement from God is to live a lie; it is to repudiate (or deny altogether) their identity and calling as sons as now revealed and secured for them in the singular Son. This is why Paul insisted that his ministration of the gospel was a ministry of reconciliation – a plea to men to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

## 5. Resurrection as Reconciliation

And so finally, as resurrection implies justification, it implies *reconciliation* and the relationship which flows from it. This is clearly evident in all of the previous considerations.

- a. Resurrection speaks fundamentally of life out of death, and death is man's existence in the context of estrangement from God. Thus resurrection implies the end of divine-human alienation, and this, in turn, implies reconciliation. Resurrection means *life* – not unending, sinless and blissful existence as such, but the realization of authentic humanness centered in perfect intimacy with the triune God.
- b. Second, it's been seen that resurrection has its substance in the incarnation. It was there that life first penetrated the deadness of the cursed creation, but it did so by means of a Creator-creature conjunction in the hypostatic union: *Life as present in the incarnate Logos didn't reside above or outside the dead creation, but rather joined itself to it in the person of the Son of Man.*

Jesus' conception within Mary's womb involved Him taking to Himself Adam's humanity – the humanity that writhed in death under the curse of estrangement, and He entered man's fallen condition in order to judge and destroy it by living as authentic Man in contradiction to it. Long before the work of completion at Calvary, the Son of Man had already condemned sinful flesh *in the flesh* (that is, by taking our fallen, corrupted flesh to Himself) – in the first instance and substantially by His incarnation, then through His faithful life as a true son of God.

Death was judged and overcome by life in the very moment of Jesus' conception, but this initial resurrection occurred in the context of divine-human reconciliation: It was precisely in the hypostatic union – the full and forever union of God and man in Christ – that life triumphed over death. Because death is estrangement, life out of death is reconciliation. And just as alienation began with God and His image-son and then flowed out to the whole of creation, so it is with the undoing of alienation in reconciliation. It has its marrow in a divine-human event – not in the first instance at Calvary, but in the *person* of Jesus Christ. In and through Him, the Father's work of reconciliation extended to Adam's sons and the rest of the created order (Colossians 1:15-20).

- c. So also redemption implies reconciliation. God first made this connection explicit in His dealings with Abraham's covenant offspring. When He redeemed Israel from its bondage in Egypt He brought the nation *to Himself* (cf. Exodus 3:1-12, 19:1-4). Yahweh liberated Israel in order to grant to it its covenant inheritance – the inheritance of sons who dwell with their Father in the place of His habitation (cf. Genesis 17:1-8 with Exodus 15:17, 25:1-8). Reconciliation unto sonship is the goal of redemption, not mere liberation.

This truth, first articulated in the Exodus, was later held out in the promise of a second liberation from captivity. In that day Yahweh would put to death forever the bondage of alienation; He would set the captives free, not only the sons of Israel, but all the earth's peoples (Isaiah 49:1-26, 61:1-3). And He would liberate them, not to gather them once more to the land of Israel, but to the sanctuary that is His Son, the “resurrection and life” (cf. Isaiah 2:1-4, 11:1-12; John 1:14, 2:18-21, 4:1-26, 12:31-32).

- d. Finally, resurrection as reconciliation is implied in the fact that resurrection is justification. Again, the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus testified to the justification of God and man. Jesus realized the “rightness” of God toward man and man toward God, *but this rightness involved the realization of the eternally ordained mutual-indwelling and delightful communion of divine Father and image-son.*
- The “righteousness” of divine-human communion was the epicenter of the exceeding goodness of God's first creation (Genesis 1:26-31), and so also of the cosmic calamity that was the Fall and the undoing of creation (Genesis 3:1-24).
  - For all that was lacking in God's first articulation of His restoring intention, one thing was clear: *The recovery of creation would involve – indeed, it necessitated – the reconciliation of the Creator-Father and His image-son.*

Every facet and implication of resurrection highlights and has its terminus in reconciliation. Creational restoration means resurrection, and resurrection means reconciliation. This is the constant drumbeat of the Old Testament salvation history, both as historical outworking and as prophetic promise. The trajectory of biblical revelation is directed toward Creator-creature reconciliation centered in man himself, and this trajectory terminates on the man Christ Jesus and His restorative work. This truth embodies the substance of Jesus' assertion that all the Scripture testifies of Him. The Creator promised reconciliation, and this has come in the person of Jesus Christ in the hypostatic union and attained its ultimacy in His resurrection and outpoured Spirit.

The abiding promise of creational deliverance and restoration has been realized in the Son of God, but as this Son is True Man as well as True God (cf. Luke 3:21-38 with Romans 5:1-19 and 1 Corinthians 15:35-49; also John 12:23-34). *This truth highlights the fact that the focal point of reconciliation is the production of sons in the Son.* So the New Testament everywhere exalts sonship as the divine goal; whether atonement, justification, redemption or resurrection, they all serve the cause of the manifest glory of the sons of God (cf. John 1:1-13, 8:31-42 with Romans 8:1-23; Galatians 3:22-4:7; esp. Ephesians 1:3-6).

Moreover, reconciliation as *sonship* shows that the issue in Christ's reconciling work isn't merely appeasement – God's satiation of His just indignation against human disobedience. At least two fatal flaws result from this way of viewing the "Christ event":

- 1) First, while it addresses the problem of legal guilt, it leaves untouched the true problem that is creational estrangement. Treating the atonement in primarily (or entirely) forensic terms tends to focus attention on symptoms rather than the underlying problem. Men can have their guilt satisfied through the vicarious payment of their "debt," but that transaction only touches whatever *legal* relationship exists between God and men. *Human beings need more than the clearing of their guilt; they need to attain to the humanity for which they were created; they need to become bona fide sons of God.*
- 2) Secondly, reducing the "Christ event" to legal substitutionary atonement constricts the meaning and importance of Jesus' resurrection. In this conception, the cross is of primary concern because that's where atonement was made; the resurrection merely affirmed that atonement had indeed been accomplished and received by His Father. *The result is that the hope attached to Jesus' resurrection tends to focus on the issue of personal salvation.* That is to say, the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead means that we can have confidence that our sins will be forgiven if we embrace Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

There is a legal aspect to Christ's work, but any real consideration of the incarnation alone shows that God had more in mind than self-appeasement through the satisfaction of legal justice; it testifies that His goal was perfect, everlasting union and intimacy between Himself and man. That fact, in turn, gives light and meaning to all of the various aspects and components of the Christ event and shows that atonement and forgiveness were simply necessary means to an end.

**Life out of death, originating and having its substance in the incarnation and brought to completion in Calvary's redemption, has burst upon the world in Jesus Christ. In Him, death has been destroyed and life is again at last and forever the defining principle of God's creation; all that remains is waiting for the appointed day when the perishable will have put on imperishability. For a groaning and longing creation, present life is the surety of consummate life; the gospel of the kingdom is the hope bound up in resurrection.**

*"Martha therefore said to Jesus, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother shall rise again.' Martha said to Him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.'"*