

"THE POWER OF GOD FOR SALVATION"

**I. Introduction**

- A. In 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul famously declares that "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." (v. 17)
1. This makes it abundantly clear that Christ's resurrection is essential to our redemption.
  2. But the reason why this is so is not as self-evident as the reason why Christ's death is essential to our redemption.
  3. Christ's death was obviously necessary, because he offered himself up as a sacrifice of atonement in our place.
  4. By his death, he paid the debt that we owed for our transgressions.
  5. In light of the clear connection between Christ's death and our salvation, his resurrection can sometimes recede into the shadow of the cross.
- B. We should not let that happen.
1. As we have noted, Paul explicitly says that without Christ's *resurrection*, we would still be in our sins.
  2. In this evening's sermon, we will focus upon why this is the case.
  3. We will first look at the verses that we have just read from Romans 1 and consider what Paul means when he says that at Christ's resurrection he was declared to be "the Son of God in power."
  4. Then, drawing upon an Easter sermon preached by Geerhardus Vos, we will look at a number of other texts to explain how Christ's resurrection is the power behind our justification, our regeneration,

and our glorification.

## II. The Son of God in Power

- A. In Romans 1, as Paul introduces himself to the church in Rome, he says that the gospel he preaches is “concerning [God’s] Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.”
1. Notice the contrast between flesh and Spirit in these verses.
  2. Jesus was descended from David *according to the flesh*, and he was declared to be the Son of God in power *according to the Spirit*.
  3. When Paul contrasts flesh and Spirit, he uses these terms to represent the two major epochs in redemptive history.
  4. The age of the flesh is the fallen era of Adam.
  5. The age of the Spirit is the eschatological era of God’s new creation in Jesus Christ.
  6. In this context, the term “flesh” points to the fact that Jesus entered the world as a member of Adam’s fallen race.
  7. Though Jesus himself had no sin, he was incarnate in the epoch of man’s fleshly fallenness.
- B. Jesus was descended from the line of David, to whom God had promised an eternal kingdom.
1. His Davidic descent according to the flesh is therefore intimately connected to what he was eventually determined to be according to the Spirit.

2. By his resurrection, Jesus was appointed as the eschatological King who would reign forever on David's throne.
3. This is why Jesus told his disciples after his resurrection that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to him.
4. This marked the fulfillment of what God decreed of his anointed in Psalm 2, saying, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." (v. 7)
5. Neither that Psalm nor Paul's words in Romans 1 is saying that Jesus became the Son of God at the time of his resurrection.
6. After all, it is God the Son who is declared to be the Son of God in power.
7. This is not about a change in his essence.
8. Rather, because of his faithfulness, he is assigned a new status in relation to the world in his messianic office.
9. As a result of his resurrection, he has all power over the world as the last Adam and the life-giving Son of God.

### III. Christ's Resurrection Powers Our Justification

- A. We turn now to consider how Christ's resurrection powers our justification.
  1. The bond between resurrection and justification becomes more clear when we remember that death is the wages of sin.
  2. Death is God's sentence against lawbreakers.
  3. That being the case, the overturning of death means the overturning of that sentence.

4. This is precisely what happened when Jesus was raised.
  5. When he bore our transgressions on the cross, the death sentence that was against us was transferred to him.
  6. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin."
  7. In his crucifixion, Jesus was condemned.
  8. But in his resurrection, he was justified.
  9. The resurrection of Jesus is not merely a historical event.
  10. It also has forensic significance, both for him and for us.
  11. At his resurrection, Jesus was declared to be righteous.
- B. This is explicitly stated in 1 Timothy 3:16, where Paul says that after Jesus was "manifested in the flesh" he was "vindicated by the Spirit."
1. There is a footnote to this verse in the ESV, noting that the term translated as "vindicated" is the same term that is translated elsewhere as "justified."
  2. There is no good reason not to translate it as "justified" in 1 Timothy 3:16.
  3. Jesus's resurrection was his justification.
  4. In his death, he was numbered with the transgressors.
  5. If he had remained dead, it would have meant that death had a valid claim on him as a transgressor.

6. But by raising him from the dead, God declared that Jesus is righteous.
- C. In his mediatorial office as the last Adam, by his perfectly upright life and substitutionary death, Jesus merited the verdict of 'just.'
1. He did this both for himself and for all whom he was given to save.
  2. Without the resurrection, his crucifixion would have been legitimate as the wages of sin.
  3. As long as he remained under the power of death, there would be no assurance that satisfaction had been rendered.
  4. As Geerhardus Vos explains, "As the curse laid upon him had assumed the visible separation between body and soul, it was necessary that in the same physical sphere, in the same palpable form, the divine absolution should be solemnly pronounced and placed on record. By raising Christ from death, God as the supreme Judge set his seal to the absolute perfection and completeness of his atoning work. The resurrection is a public announcement to the world that the penalty of death has been borne by Christ to its bitter end and that in consequence the dominion of guilt has been broken, the curse annihilated for evermore." [*Grace and Glory*, 171]
- D. In light of this, the resurrection of Jesus gives us assurance that our sins have been pardoned in full.
1. This is why Paul says in Romans 4:25 that Christ was not only "delivered up for our trespasses" but was also "raised for our justification."
  2. As Paul points out in Romans 8, the reason why no charge can be brought against us is because Christ died *and was raised*. (vv. 33-34)

3. Vos aptly sums up the Bible's teaching on this when he writes, "When Christ rose on Easter morning he left behind him in the depths of the grave every one of our sins; there they remain buried in the sight of God so completely that even in the day of judgment they will not be able to rise up against us any more." [172]
4. The fact that our risen Savior lives forevermore testifies that our sins have been dealt with, once and for all.

#### IV. Christ's Resurrection Powers Our Regeneration

- A. In addition to being the power behind our justification, Christ's resurrection is the power source for our regeneration.
  1. As we saw in our earlier consideration of Romans 1:4, at his resurrection, Christ was declared to be the Son of God in power *according to the Spirit of holiness*.
  2. Notice the similarity between that and Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 15, where he says that the risen Jesus "became a life-giving Spirit." (v. 45)
  3. This tells us that the risen Jesus is the source from whom supernatural power is conveyed to believers.
  4. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."
  5. Jesus is the fountain from which flows all renewing and quickening influences.
  6. His resurrection resulted in his coming into full and perfect possession of the Spirit-empowered life of the age to come.

7. He is able to send the Spirit to apply his saving work in the lives of his people, so that we might come to share in the gift of eternal life.

B. Regeneration is a supernatural work.

1. It is about those who were spiritually dead being made spiritually alive.
2. That being the case, regeneration has an ongoing effect in the lives of those who have been reborn.
3. It results in our progressive transformation as we are conformed more and more to the likeness of Christ.
4. This transformative work that takes place in our lives is connected to the supernatural event that took place when Christ rose from the grave.
5. This is why Paul says in Ephesians 2 that believers were made “alive together with Christ.” (vv. 5-6)
6. Jesus’s resurrection is the source of the new creation that is needed to revive this dead world and all who belong to it.
7. Mankind is not naturally progressing or evolving towards perfection.
8. It is only those who are united to the risen Christ who are made into a new creation.

**V. Christ’s Resurrection Powers Our Glorification**

A. We turn now to consider how Christ’s resurrection powers our glorification.

1. Glorification has to do with the world to come

2. It is a doctrine that sets Christianity at odds with the mindset of this world, which is only focused on this life.
  3. As Geerhardus Vos explains, "Ours is a religion whose center of gravity lies beyond the grave in the world to come." [175]
  4. At his resurrection, Jesus entered into a whole new mode of human existence.
  5. His human nature was transformed in such a manner that it was made fit for heavenly conditions.
  6. And this was not merely true of his body, but of all his faculties as a human being.
- B. Jesus's resurrection is the source of the resurrection mode of human existence.
1. Those who are united to him will one day be conformed perfectly to his likeness.
  2. This is why Paul says in Philippians 3:21 that when our Savior returns he will "transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body."
  3. The apostle John puts it this way: "we know that when [Jesus] appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." (1 Jn. 3:2)
  4. When we are in the glorified state, we will not be in any way subject to the human race's present, sin-cursed existence.
  5. Jesus's resurrection assures us that, when we are raised on the last day, we will be made fit for heavenly existence.
  6. In our resurrected bodies, we will be able to dwell in perfect accord with our heavenly environment and live the life that knows no end



in its consummate form. [see Vos, 177]

## VI. Conclusion

- A. Christian hope is bound up with our bodily resurrection on the last day.
- B. And there is a vital connection between our resurrection hope and Christ's resurrection on the first Easter Sunday.
- C. Jesus is the firstfruits of the one great resurrection harvest, the harvest that will be completed when we are raised at the end of the age.
- D. As we await the dawning of that great day, we do well to ponder the connection between Christ's resurrection and the various components of our salvation.
- E. Because Christ's resurrection was his justification, it is the source of our peace of conscience.
- F. Because Christ's resurrection was his being made alive, it is the source of our renewed lives.
- G. And because Christ's resurrection was his entrance into the state of glory, it is the source of our assurance of heavenly glory.