

**Justified in the Spirit:
A Pentecostal Reflection**

Frank Macchia

Vanguard University, USA

Bangor University, Wales

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ABSTRACT

Romans 4:25 states that Christ was “delivered over to death for our transgressions but raised for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). Christ was raised to life for our justification? Earlier in Romans 1:4, Christ is said to have been appointed the Son of God at his resurrection “through the Spirit.” Christ’s resurrection occurs in the Spirit at which point he is appointed the favored Son (1 Timothy 3:16). James Dunn maintains that this cluster of texts (along with Acts 13:32-33) formed an early polemic based in part on Psalm 2:7 for the resurrection of Christ in the Spirit as the key event for his installation as the eschatological Son and Messiah for all time. Christ bears our sin and death in crucifixion to rise triumphantly over them in the victory of righteousness for all flesh. He rises in the Spirit as the righteous Son and Messiah within the favor of the Father (as the Father said to him at the Jordan during the foreshadow of his Messianic installment in resurrection: “You are my Son, whom I love and with whom I am well pleased,” Luke 3:22; cf. Isa. 42:1). As Christ was “justified in the Spirit” as the Son of God at the resurrection (1 Tim. 3:16), so are we (Rom. 8:23). Already united with Christ in the Spirit by faith, we embrace the word of justification in advance of our resurrection. We are embraced in the victory of the righteous Son in the Spirit over sin and death and share in his favor with the Father. In the communion of saints we share together our loving acceptance and sharing of life in God. Justification is thus in Christ *and* in the Spirit. Those who are justified are therefore also regenerated receiving by grace through faith “justification unto life” (Rom. 5:18) in anticipation of the coming resurrection. Indeed, “He through faith is righteous shall live” (Rom. 1:17, RSV)!

Decades ago, during my first reading of Seymour's *Apostolic Faith* papers, I was struck by how hesitant most of the entries were to explicitly mention the Holy Spirit when speaking of soteriology. I read of the "finished work" of the atonement, or of regeneration as a blessing or work of grace, perhaps even as the entry of "eternal life" into the soul. But only rarely was the Spirit mentioned when discussing anything soteriological. Where was the Spirit of creation, or of Christology (of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, the Spirit in the atonement)? Rarely was the Spirit mentioned for justification, regeneration, or sanctification. There were occasional hints that the Spirit was influencing these latter two soteriological elements of the Christian life from a distance, but such was rarely thought worth mentioning. Not until Spirit baptism as empowerment for service was the Spirit explicitly mentioned in abundance as directly involved within the life of the believer as an indwelling presence. Speaking in tongues, healing, and other miraculous gifts of the Spirit were also occasions where the Spirit was thought to be directly involved. Spirit empowerment and miraculous gifts of the Spirit, however, do not form an adequate pneumatology. For all our early talk about the Spirit and focus on Pentecost, Pentecostalism began with a serious pneumatological deficit. Christ as the one who imparts the Spirit within was not for them foundationally determinative for the Christian life.

Pentecostals did later begin to speak of the indwelling Spirit as involved from the beginning in salvation. The problem here was that the evangelical environment closest to them during most of the twentieth century and was exercising the greatest influence on them had a pneumatological deficit of its own. Not much was offered among them about the Spirit of creation or a Spirit Christology, and descriptions of our entry into the Christian life were dominated by forensic and covenantal categories, inadequate to take us where we needed to go pneumatologically. Justification was thought to rest on the cross alone, where divine wrath was

appeased and Christ fulfilled righteousness for us by fulfilling the law. The resurrection served an apologetic function by declaring or vindicating the justice won at the cross. But the resurrection was not viewed adequately a redemptive event in its own right. They neglected that Christ was appointed the Son of God and Messiah in power through the Spirit in resurrection in Romans 1:4 (RSV) is key to his rising for our justification in 4:25 and his being justified in the Spirit in resurrection in 1 Timothy 3:16. Christ overcomes wrath in love at the cross, which is the only justice the Father desires, a justice fulfilled in mercy. Christ bears sin and death at the cross as the culmination of a lifetime dedicated to self-giving love and rises triumphantly over them in the Spirit at the resurrection. It is at resurrection that he conquers sin and death out of love and wins the Father's favor for us. It is there that he is justified of the Father "in the Spirit." Yes, the resurrection vindicates and declares this justice but it does so of a justice fulfilled right there at the resurrection itself!

Fortunately, a prominent feature of the onset of constructive Pentecostal theology at the end of the twentieth and first decade of the twenty-first century was its decisive and significant turn toward a richly pneumatological soteriology that involved pneumatological understandings of Christology, Christ's incarnation, life, death and resurrection including a fully pneumatological understanding of resurrection as well as its implications for justification by grace through faith. Ecumenical partners like James Dunn, Jürgen Moltmann, D. Lyle Dabney, and Clark Pinnock were a great source of inspiration for us in those early days. Among early Pentecostal theologians, one finds an early turn towards a pneumatological soteriology in the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century, for example, in Steven Land's *Pentecostal Spirituality*, Amos Yong's *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's early essays on justification and ecclesiology, including his book on justification through participation

by the Spirit in Christ as the righteousness of God (2004), and my early thoughts on justification in the Spirit published in 2001, my early books, *Baptized in the Spirit and Justified in the Spirit*, and, somewhat later, *Jesus the Spirit Baptizer*.¹ My thought throughout this work, especially *Justified in the Spirit*, was that if we could construct a richly pneumatological understanding of justification in the light of a Spirit Christology, we would be well on our way toward overcoming the pneumatological limitations of our tradition that we developed under the influence of both the Holiness and Reformed evangelical traditions. This paper will summarize my current thinking as a Pentecostal theologian about the involvement of the Spirit in justification by faith. My work in this area has always been ecumenical in outlook. My evangelical friends might be surprised by the extent to which I use both Luther and Calvin in this paper!

Justified in the Spirit:

There is an interesting text, 1 Timothy 3:16, that appears late in the Pauline corpus, which contains a phrase that should grab our attention.² Referring to the resurrection of Jesus, 1 Timothy 3:16 states that Christ was “justified in the Spirit.” Adequately understood, this text is revolutionary. The larger verse has to do with a confession of the mystery of Christ’s redemptive work at the base of our salvation. The entire verse reads: “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, *justified in the Spirit*, seen of angels,

¹ Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (CPT, 2010); Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh* (Baker Academic, 2006); Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Liturgical, 2004); Frank D. Macchia,; Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Zondervan, 2006); *Justified in the Spirit: Creation, Salvation, and the Triune God* (Eerdmans, 2010); and *Jesus the Spirit Baptizer: Christology in Light of Pentecost* (Eerdmans, 2018).

² I am using “Pauline corpus” in the broad sense of the word without making a judgment about whether or not (or the degree to which) the pastorals are authored by Paul.

preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (KJV).³ This text is not a chronology of the events of Christ’s redemptive work; it reads more like a loosely arranged list of poetic statements that one might pull from an ancient Christ hymn, which was most likely our text’s origin. The second phrase of the verse “justified in the Spirit” is our focus here. That Christ was “justified in the Spirit,” in resurrection, though arguably implied in various places in the New Testament, is only here stated explicitly, making it revolutionary in nature, even jarring. One cannot have a Spiritless Christology, theory of atonement, or understanding of justification in the light of this verse!

The term “justified” literally means to be “righteoused” (E. P. Sanders)⁴ or to be regarded by God as “righteous” from a righteousness that is not our own but Christ’s. Since we are justified by Christ’s righteousness, justification is to be viewed as relational; only by faith in *him* do we have it. The New Testament tells us that we are united to Christ by faith only in the Spirit (Rom. 8:9). It also tells us that Christ won righteousness for us under the favor of his Father. So, it seems that in the Spirit (in union with Christ) we are justified by the righteousness of Christ which has the Father’s favor. At this point we begin to see that justification is relational (a right relation with God) in a complex way that is centered on Christ but is also more broadly trinitarian. In the light of 1 Timothy 3:16, we see that Christ won righteousness for us “in the Spirit.” In fact, he was himself “justified” in the Spirit at the culminating event of his resurrection. Behind the resurrection is the cross where Christ as the faithful Son and the man of the Spirit fulfilled the Father’s will by overcoming sin and death on our behalf. The Father then raised Christ “in the Spirit” as the favored Son for all time. Behind the cross is a lifetime of

³ I quote from the KJV here because it is one of only two translations I could find that uses the term “justified” in this verse. I will discuss this issue in that which follows. The reader should know though that, unless otherwise noted, I will use the NIV in my scriptural quotes.

⁴ E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Fortress, 1983), 6.

Christ's faithful self-giving in the power of the Spirit to fulfill all righteousness for us. The cross and the resurrection fulfill the victory of that righteousness over sin and death. If we want help understanding all of this, we should go back to the Virgin's womb where Christ was conceived in the power of the hovering Spirit as the holy Son of God (Luke 1:35), which harks back to the Spirit of creation, except the conception of Christ's flesh anticipates the new creation. It seems that the incarnation already earmarks Christ for resurrection! But our sights should especially be fixed on Christ's baptism at the Jordan River, where the faithful Son joined the sinners in the baptismal water with the goal of following the Father's will that he "fulfill all righteousness" on their behalf (Matt. 3:15). Towards that end, he rises from the water under the hovering Spirit by which he was conceived. In that moment, Jesus sees the heavens open and hears the Father say to him: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). One recalls Isaiah 42:1: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations." One hears also the words of Psalm 2:7: "You are my Son, today I have become your father." These are Messianic texts meant to direct our attention to the installation of the coming Messiah as the Son of God and man of the Spirit. He will fulfill righteousness and bring salvation in the era of the Spirit not only for Israel but also for the nations. Jesus spends his entire life under the anointing of the Spirit liberating people from the hold of darkness (Luke 4:18). At the cross and the resurrection, the fulfillment is achieved. At the cross, he offers himself "by the eternal Spirit" for our sins and to liberate us from the condemnation of death. He rises from death "justified in the Spirit" under the favor of his Father, appointed the favored Son and Messiah for all time. The Messianic texts that foretold his installation come to their final fulfillment, not at the Jordan, but at the resurrection, where he is appointed the Son of God in power "according to the Spirit of holiness" (Rom. 1:4). Acts

13:32-33 says the same thing, even citing Psalm 2:7 as its fulfillment. The Jordan experience anticipates that day. At the Jordan, Christ rose from the water in the Spirit and with the Father's favor to fulfill righteousness for sinners, but at his resurrection he rises from death "justified in the Spirit" or having the Father's favor as the *fulfillment* of righteousness for all flesh. He will then pour forth the Spirit onto others so that they may be united to him by faith and, in him, be justified in his righteousness, knowing his Father's favor.

It is within this framework that we can understand what it means to say that Christ is "justified in the Spirit" in resurrection. 1 Timothy 3:16 seems revolutionary at first glance, but, set within the larger framework described above, it fits right in. That Christ is "justified in the Spirit" in resurrection means that he rises in victory over sin and death in the Spirit as the fulfillment of all righteousness under the Father's favor. That's a mouthful, I know! That terse phrase from 1 Timothy 3:16, "justified in the Spirit," is dense with meaning! We are at Christ's resurrection at the point of Christ's installation as Son of God and Messiah in the Spirit to fulfill all righteousness for the nations. This is basis of justification by grace through faith and it is richly pneumatological from start to finish. All that's left is Pentecost. From his fullness, he will pour forth the Spirit that he bears as the man of righteousness upon us so that, united to him by faith, we may have the Father's favor too, even though we don't deserve it.

Back to 1 Timothy 3:16! Again, the unusual phrase, "justified in the Spirit" refers in 1 Timothy 3:16 to Christ's resurrection. It is placed in contrast to the preceding phrase, "manifest in the flesh." The Christ manifested in the flesh is raised and "justified" *in the Spirit*. Notice the flesh/Spirit contrast. As Calvin wrote of Christ in his commentary on the line "justified in the Spirit" in 1 Timothy 3:16, "...he who appeared clothed with human flesh was, at the same time, declared to be the Son of God, so that the weakness of the flesh made no diminution of his

glory.” Interestingly, Calvin added “declared to be Son of God” in his commentary on 1 Timothy 3:16, even though this phrase is not found in that text. Calvin’s addition implies his dependence on a related text found in Romans 1:3-4, where Christ born as lowly flesh from the seed of David is said to be “declared the Son of God” in power in resurrection “according to the Spirit” (“who was declared the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,” 1:4, NASB). In drawing from Romans 1:4 to interpret 1 Timothy 3:16, Calvin translates 1:4 to say that Christ was “declared” the Son according to the Spirit in resurrection (as many have translated it). I will propose “appointed” instead, but more on that later. Calvin astutely viewed Romans 1:3-4 as foundational for Christ’s justification in the Spirit mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:16. Romans 1:3-4 also helps us understand Paul’s statement later in the book in Romans 4:25 that Christ was “raised for our justification.” The message of Romans is clear: The one appointed the favored Son in the Spirit at his resurrection (Rom. 1:4) is indeed the one who extends that favored Sonship to us by justifying us in the Spirit as adopted sons and daughters (Rom. 4:25; 8:15).

This contrast between “in the flesh” through incarnation and “in the Spirit” through resurrection is typical of early confessions concerning Christology in the New Testament. Though in the flesh, Christ is regarded the Son of God in resurrection “according to the Spirit.” That 1 Timothy 3:16 defines Christ in resurrection as being “justified in the Spirit” implies that the Spirit played a decisive role in Christ’s attainment *in his flesh* (or as human) of righteousness unto life under the Father’s favor. According to James Dunn, the cluster of texts that I cited that speak of Christ’s installation as Son of God and Messiah at his resurrection in the light of the Jordan experience (Rom. 1:4; Acts 13:31-32; 1 Tim. 3:16) are all part of an early polemic for Christ’s resurrection as determinative for his identity as Son of God and Messiah that was based

in large part on Psalm 2:7.⁵ 1 Timothy 3:16 brings clarity to that connected cluster of Christological texts. This text is unique among this web of ancient Christological formulas in adding the term “justified” to the Son “in the Spirit” at his resurrection. The Jordan experience implies the addition of the term “justified,” since Christ is addressed there as the favored Son by the Father, “with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22), “my chosen one in whom I delight” (Isa. 42:1). Though the reference of 1 Timothy 3:16 to Christ as “justified in the Spirit” is unique, it fits well with the overall meaning of the web of verses to which I have referred, all of which refer back to the earliest Christological confessions of the New Testament. Ancient Christology viewed the Christ as the one who bore lowly flesh but also the Spirit to fulfill all righteousness in the era of the Spirit. He not only was to bear the Spirit but also the fire of our judgment (Luke 12:49-50) so as to conquer it on our behalf. He was condemned (bore our sins) at the cross but was raised in the Spirit and appointed in glory and power the favored Son of God and Messiah for all time and all flesh.

Justified in the Spirit in resurrection, Christ becomes the objective eschatological victory of divine righteousness and life over sin and death for humanity, for their justification or acceptance into God’s favor unto the renewal of life. This ancient tradition is not adoptionist, since Christ’s deity is not denied. In fact, Romans 8:3, Galatians 4:4, and 1 Timothy 3:16 all imply an incarnation of the Son of God in flesh, the Son and Messiah who Paul calls in Romans 9:5 “God over all.” The divine Christ is elevated and appointed in the resurrection and in the Spirit the righteous and favored Son of God *in his flesh* for all flesh. In his faithful and elevated humanity at resurrection, Christ rises from his Spirit-anointed and obedient life as the eschatological victory of divine righteousness over sin and death for all time, becoming the last

⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Eerdmans, 1989), 33-36.

Adam who redefines the human race in glory and power as people of the Spirit in union with him.

Condemned in Adam to death, we are offered justification unto life in the Spirit through Christ's resurrection. Note Romans 5:18, where Christ is said to grant us "justification and life," or, better, "justification unto life" meaning "that includes life or that leads to life,"⁶ which is obtained by him in his resurrection "according to the Spirit" (Rom. 1:4) and "in the Spirit" (1 Tim. 3:16). Christ opens up entry into his justified (favored) life by grace in imparting the Spirit to us! As D. Lyle Dabney noted, however, part of the problem in recognizing the full theological significance of the phrase "justified in the Spirit" in 1 Timothy 3:16 is that this phrase is typically translated "vindicated in the Spirit."⁷ In fact, in my effort to cite a major English translation for 1 Timothy 3:16 that uses the term "justified" of Christ, I was forced to quote the King James Version (though I love the beauty of that version, I don't often use it). Major translations like the RSV, NASB, NIV, and ESV use "vindicated." These translations typically put "justified" in a footnote as an alternative reading, since the choice of "vindicated" over "justified" is not linguistic, but rather a word choice based on theological judgments that in my view are not adequately thought through theologically. On one level, I sympathize with the choice of the term "vindicated." Christ was not justified as we are (sinners justified from a righteousness not our own). But bear in mind that neither is Christ the favored Son as we are favored sons and daughters (adopted in the Spirit in a divine favor we have not attained). But this should not prevent us from using the term sonship in relation to Christ. Neither should the fact that Christ is justified uniquely, in a way that is determinative for all others, prohibit us from

⁶ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, Anchor Bible Commentary (Doubleday, 1992), 491.

⁷ D. Lyle Dabney, "The Justification by the Spirit: Soteriological Reflections on the Resurrection," *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 3 no. 1 (2001): 47 (46-68).

using this term of him. Also, I recognize that “vindicated” and “justified” are overlapping concepts. To be justified, even in the rich Pauline sense of the term, does contain the element of vindication. But justification applied to Christ’s resurrection in 1 Timothy 1:6 is a richer term theologically than vindication, capturing more deeply the redemptive significance of Christ’s resurrection in its own right and in a way that is *unprecedented*. Christ is indeed vindicated in resurrection, but it is not just the cross that is vindicated but the resurrection itself; the resurrection vindicates its own significance as a justifying event. Inadequate in this light is George W. Knight III’s judgment in his *New International Greek New Testament Commentary* on the Pastoral Epistles that “vindication” “in the general sense of the word” is in view in 1 Timothy 3:16.⁸ There is nothing “general” about the confession of 1 Timothy 3:16 that Christ is “justified” in the Spirit in resurrection, especially in the light of early Christian polemics about the eschatological significance of Christ’s resurrection as Son of God and Messiah. The use of justification through resurrection in 1 Timothy 3:16 is arguably quite unique. Paul assumes elsewhere that something more deeply redemptive is at work in the resurrection than mere vindication of some prior event by noting that if Christ had not been raised we would still be in our sin (1 Cor. 15:17). For Paul, atonement is not based on the cross alone. Paul’s description of his Gospel in Romans 1:4 focuses on the resurrection as the event of Christ’s appointment to favored sonship on our behalf. He is not only “vindicated” as Son in resurrection; he is installed and appointed Messiah and Son in the Spirit in resurrection for all time. He is “justified in the Spirit” in resurrection in a way that is unique and determinative for God’s eschatological victory in righteousness over sin and death.

⁸ George W. Knight III, *Pastoral Epistles*, NIGTC, Eds. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Eerdmans, 1992), 180.

“Justification” in the Spirit at the resurrection carries more explicitly the sense that the resurrection of Jesus is the divine act of justification for all flesh in a way that has far-reaching eschatological significance. Christ’s resurrection is not just the vindication of what was fulfilled at the cross. The Son of God in Romans 1:4 is “appointed” (as the NIV rightly notes) and not merely “declared” the favored Son in power and glory according to the Spirit in resurrection, which is not just the declaration or vindication of something already assumed to be the case at the cross. Resurrection is a vindication and declaration but of that which is fulfilled at the resurrection itself! Thus, “vindication” or “declaration” does not capture the full meaning of the Resurrection. Appointed the Son in resurrection is still something unprecedented and new, accomplished eschatologically for all time at this event. The cross alone is unfulfilled without it. And it is not Jesus’ declaration as the favored Son in the Spirit at the Jordan (Luke 3:20-21) that is merely vindicated at Christ’s resurrection; rather, the Jordan experience anticipated the resurrection and was fulfilled eschatologically *only there*. One could say the same of Christ’s incarnation in power under the Spirit in Mary’s womb (Luke 1:35). At the incarnation, the Son is already earmarked for resurrection! The appointment of Christ as the Son in power in resurrection according to the Spirit in Romans 1:4 fulfills it. Even the incarnation receives its meaning in the light of Christ’s future resurrection. In fact, even Christ’s sonship from eternity past takes on new eschatological significance at Christ’s resurrection as the eschatological victory of righteousness unto life in Christ’s flesh, for all flesh. Christ shared the glory of sonship with the Father before time itself, but that glory was to be restored to him in power *in his flesh* in a new way (John 17:5). In this light, “vindication” is weak theologically, subject to being interpreted as merely a declaration or revelation of something that is past, or as a generalized notion inadequate to capture the determinative role of Christ’s resurrection in the eschatological

redemption of human flesh in glory. Even the event of the cross requires the resurrection for this! The cross bears our sin and death in victorious love but that is fulfilled as an eschatological victory in resurrection. The outpouring of the Spirit from Christ's fullness makes this victory available to us in faith (Acts 2:33-35). The cross does indeed form the genesis of the victory fulfilled at the resurrection and grants Christ's appointment as the righteous Son in resurrection a cruciform direction, making the justified life the life taken up in, and oriented to, the self-giving love of God. But the resurrection is the point of victory for our attainment by grace through faith of God's love and righteous favor. Again, bear in mind Paul's point that without the resurrection our faith would be in vain, and we would still be in our sin (1 Cor. 15:17). For Paul, there is no atonement for sin without resurrection, which is why Paul notes that Christ was "appointed" the Son in "power" or glory in the Spirit at his resurrection (Rom. 1:4) and was "raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25).

Raised for our Justification:

Since Christ was "justified in the Spirit" at his resurrection, we are not surprised to find in Romans 4:25 that Christ was "raised for *our* justification" as people who are united to him in the Spirit and by faith. This text might seem as surprising as 1 Timothy 3:16 given our inherited evangelical theological assumptions about the forensic nature of justification as a legal acquittal allegedly won at the cross through Christ's bearing of our just punishment for sin (appeasing divine wrath) and his righteous obedience imputed to us in its place. The confession that Christ is *raised* for our *justification* reveals that the legal view of justification thought to be fulfilled at the cross is truncated and lacks a pneumatology! As we will note more extensively later, justice is fulfilled for us not only through Christ's obedient going to the cross to bear our sin and death,

and he bears our judgment not to appease wrath but more substantially theologically to overcome it out of divine love so as to extend grace to sinners. God loves his enemies, just like Jesus told us to (Matt. 5:43-44)! The idea that Christ's righteousness is fulfilled at the cross is thus inadequate. Divine justice is a richer concept than that theologically. What he does at the cross to bear our sin and death is fulfilled in God's triumph over sin and death on our behalf through the raising of the Son in the Spirit as the victory of the Father's righteous favor for all time. Justification cannot rest on the cross alone. It is more than a mere legal acquittal. More on this later.

Back to Romans 4:25: Despite the fact that the wording of this text on its face describes the purpose of Christ's resurrection to be justification, some seek a way of sidestepping that conclusion. Charles Hodge, for example, regards the reference of Romans 4:25 to the resurrection as the mere "evidence" that justification through the satisfaction of the cross has been accomplished, although this is not what the text says.⁹ In what almost seems to be a protest against this text, Everett Harrison in his commentary on Romans states, "It may be helpful to recognize that justification, considered objectively from the standpoint of God's provision, was indeed accomplished in the death of Christ and therefore did not require the resurrection to complete it."¹⁰ The resurrection is not for Harrison objectively "God's provision" for our justification? If the cross were sufficient to justify us without the resurrection, why did Paul say that if Christ had not been raised, we would still be in our sin (1 Cor. 15:17)? Why did he say Christ was raised for our justification? Clark Pinnock addresses the problem we face when ignoring the plain wording of Romans 4:25:

We have placed such emphasis on the legal dimension of atonement that the resurrection, which does not address that issue as framed, drops away as a saving event. The error of

⁹ Charles Hodge, *Epistle to the Romans*, 9th ed. (Eerdmans, 1958), 129.

¹⁰ Everett Harrison, *Romans*, vol. 10, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1976), 54.

this is plain from the New Testament, which makes resurrection central and ties the cross to it. We say that Christ's work was "finished" on the cross, but it was not. Had Christ not been raised, we would be still in our sins and subject to death (1 Cor 15:17). It is incredible how in systematic theologies dozens of pages are given to theories of atonement (meaning the death of Christ) and hardly any to the soteriological significance of resurrection. The fact is that in certain juridical models of the atonement, resurrection has no significance for salvation. Its significance is apologetic, not soteric. It is not a saving event, only the vindication of Jesus' pre-Easter claims, in which case we cannot speak of being saved *by his life*.¹¹

The juridical models of atonement and justification not only fail to adequately grasp the full redemptive significance of the resurrection but also the essential role of the Spirit by whom Christ offered himself on the cross (Heb. 9:14) and in whom Christ was justified, appointed the favored Son of God for all time, in resurrection (Rom. 1:4).

There is no need to seek to avoid the conclusion that Christ was raised for our justification (4:25). What both Hodge and Harrison missed is how Paul sets up the assumption that the resurrection of Christ *in the Spirit* is vital to our justification earlier in chapter 4 by saying that Abraham himself was justified through a faith that believed in a God "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (4:17). Abraham's justifying faith in the God of the *resurrection* gains its importance from the fact that Christ fulfills God's justifying act in *his* resurrection from the dead eight verses later in Romans 4:25. Paul also sets up Romans 4:25 in his description of his Gospel in Romans 1:4, where the resurrection "according to the Spirit" (Rom. 1:4) is programmatic for the entire epistle: "It may justly be said that in Romans 1:4 we have the whole message of the epistle in it nutshell."¹² Christ is "justified in the Spirit" in resurrection so that we may be justified in the Spirit through faith in him (1 Tim. 3:16).

¹¹ Clark Pinnoch, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (IVP Academic, 2022), 111.

¹² Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Fortress, 1949), 51.

The essential role of the resurrection of Christ in the Spirit in our justification is also supported in the integral link assumed between justification and the Spirit of life throughout Romans leading up to and going beyond Romans 4:25. The Lutheran theologian Anders Nygren convincingly develops this point in his theologically-rich commentary on Romans, where he makes the case that justification is not only based on Christ's vicarious bearing of our sin and condemnation on the cross but also the victory of Christ's righteousness and life in the resurrection. At every step, he shows that Paul views justification as tied integrally to the gift of new life in the Spirit. Not only does Romans 1:4 maintain that Christ is appointed the favored Son in power at his resurrection "according to the Spirit," he then states in 1:17 that "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Rather than translate this line as "The righteous shall live by faith," Nygren follows the RSV in translating this as "He who through faith is righteous shall *live*."¹³ Both translations are legitimated by the Greek text, but Nygren and the RSV have context on their side. Bear in mind that their translation has the programmatic Romans 1:4 on their side, where Paul defines his Gospel as focused on Christ's appointment as the favored Son in the Spirit at his resurrection for all time (see again Acts 13:32-33 in the light of Ps. 2:7, which Rom. 1:4 also assumes, as well as 1 Tim. 3:16).

We can follow through from Romans 1 by taking note of Romans 5:18 which contrasts Adam's trespass that resulted in condemnation unto death and Christ's righteous act (his obedient death) that resulted through resurrection in justification "unto life." Verse 21 states: "as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." To make the Pauline parallel between Adam and Christ clearer we can say this: As condemnation reigned through Adam in sin unto death, grace reigned through Christ in

¹³ Ibid, 84.

righteousness (justification) unto life. *Christ's justification in the Spirit at his resurrection theologically explains the integration of justification and life for all flesh that is assumed from Romans 1 to 5.* Adam was condemned in death for his sin; Christ was justified in the Spirit in resurrection because of righteousness. His righteousness in the Spirit triumphed at his resurrection; at Pentecost that righteousness justifies us in the Spirit given to us by faith. Nygren's conclusion concerning Romans 5 is helpful: "As sin came into the world through one man, Adam, and death through sin, so also through one man, Christ, the righteousness of God came into the world, and through righteousness life."¹⁴ James Dunn's conclusion from Romans 4:25 and Romans 5 is noteworthy: "The justifying grace of God is all of a piece with his creative, life-giving power. God's acceptance of us has 'eschatological power' that will take us from our regeneration in the Spirit all the way to our resurrection from the dead."¹⁵

The Justice of the Cross:

We need to focus more on the cross. Paul tells us that "God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith." He writes further, "he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:25-26). As noted above, to explain how the cross demonstrates justice, many evangelicals appeal to the appeasement of divine wrath at the cross to explain it. Since God's just wrath against sin is appeased in being borne by Christ, God can show mercy to sinners without compromising his justice. In mercy, the righteousness of Christ, which is also fulfilled at the cross, gets "imputed" to us or placed on our account, making us worthy of God's favor. God ends up being just in justifying sinners. Since justice is fulfilled at the cross, all

¹⁴ Ibid, 210

¹⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1—8*, Word Biblical Commentary 38A (Zondervan, 1988), 241.

that is left for the resurrection to do with regard to justification is vindicate or reveal as valid the justice of the cross by which God can justly forgive sinners.

I consider this version of justification through the atonement to have an important element of truth but one that is truncated and even possibly misleading. If God can only show mercy once his wrath or punishment is appeased, God can be made to look vengeful and bloodthirsty. Christ can come off looking more merciful than the Father, since his crucifixion is necessary to turn his Father towards mercy. What does one then do with the priority granted to divine love and mercy in the very sending of the Son to the cross (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10)? How can the appeasement of divine wrath at the cross turn the Father towards mercy, if the Father's love and mercy sent Christ to the cross to begin with? An emphasis on the Father as the object of appeasement can be misleading neglecting the point that must be emphasized at the start, namely, the Father is the subject who takes his own judgment against sin upon himself in his Son to overcome it with love so as to show mercy to sinners. This idea of the Father is subject of the overcoming of judgment can also account for the fact that the justice that comes from punishment is not the justice God wants, only the justice that overcomes judgment for the sake of mercy: "I take no pleasure from the death of the wicked" (Ezek. 33:11). Indeed, "he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone" (Lam. 3:33). How do these verses cohere with a vengeful God who needs his wrath towards sinners appeased as a precondition for showing mercy? If God is the one who does not desire such punishment, he would not be appeased simply as a passive recipient. He would take the initiative to take up his own judgment against sin into himself so as to overcome it in love to offer mercy to sinners. This is what God does in his faithful Christ and Messiah under the anointing and leading of his Spirit. Popular versions of the appeasement of wrath at the cross require revision.

Kazoh Kitamori helpfully proposes that the Son goes to a cross to bear our judgment for sin, not to fulfill God's demands for punishment, but to overcome that punishment in suffering love.¹⁶ When God as the Judge pays the price for the criminal, he overcomes punishment as a barrier to his love. This beautiful analogy is potentially lost if Christ ends up appeasing the anger of his Father by being punished in our place. In the former analogy, the Father is the one who out of mercy, sends his faithful Son to pay the price for sin so as to triumph over it in love. The emphasis on the appeasement of the Father's wrath is in danger of losing the goal of the triumph of the Father's love, which is the theme most powerfully preserved in the resurrection as the fulfillment of the cross! It is not appeasement but something richer, triumph, that God seeks at the cross, and for this we need the resurrection. The cross ultimately enacts God's love for sinners, to fulfill his eternal decision to overcome wrath with love for the sake of mercy. Moreover, justification as the "imputation" of Christ's righteousness to our "record" sounds like a legal transaction resulting in a just status. The context for justification in the Spirit is richer theologically. It has to do with something more participatory and transformative. God enters the depths of our sorrow in the Spirit-anointed Son at the cross and takes it into himself so as to overcome it in love. This overcoming is fulfilled in Christ's resurrection "in the Spirit" where love has its eschatological triumph so as to make God's righteous favor available to all flesh in the outpouring of the Spirit. A legal process resulting in a legal status is just pneumatologically barren. Where is the drama of God's participation in our poverty so that we in the Spirit and in Christ could be elevated into his riches? Where is the triumph and the glory? Where is the incorporation into the embrace of the Triune God where all blessings, including divine favor, are found? There is an element of truth in the legal or imputation model of justification, but it ends

¹⁶ Kazoh Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God* (Wipf & Stock, 2005), passim.

up being a Spiritless and more shallow representation of a much richer concept in the process (unless qualified, which is rarely done by those who use it).

I am not saying that divine displeasure is not provoked in the face of the cruelty and destruction of our sin, for God loves us and is displeased with our rejection of grace and willingness to give ourselves over to its devastation. But wrath is deeper than that theologically. It is not just a divine emotion. It is a state of gracelessness that devastates the soul, for we were made for God in the grace of the Spirit of life. Sin and its consequence in death (spiritual and physical) have to be taken seriously. They cannot be ignored. God doesn't ignore them. In suffering love, the Father delivers his Son over to this sin and its consequence in death to bear them and overcome them in the Spirit on the way to fulfilling the triumph of love in the resurrection. I speak of the Father's righteous favor that Christ wins for us in the Spirit which then is lavishly bestowed in the outpouring of the Spirit towards all flesh. God's way of demonstrating the victory of his righteous favor at the cross in overcoming sin and judgment with love and its triumph in resurrection shows us the path to grasping that victory in faith. In yielding to Christ by faith, we are called by how God fulfilled justice to face our sin and to lay it down so as to grasp his overcoming love in faith and devotion, faith because we grasp a righteous favor has been won for us by another, and devotion because this is what God's overcoming love demands of us. Here is where Romans 4:25 ("He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification") takes on deeper meaning. That Christ was "delivered over" to sin for our transgressions refers back to Romans 1:24-28 where Paul says three times that God "gave over" the sinners to the degradation of their sin. One may not recognize it in English but the Greek word for "delivered over" of Christ to the cross in 4:25 and the Greek word used for "giving over" the sinners to their self-degradation in Romans 1:24-28 is

the same (just a different form of the word is used)! The message is clear. The judgment against sinners in Romans 1 is not meant as the final word. The final word is rather God's handing his Son over to a cross to bear their sin, shame, and condemnation in order to triumph over them in the resurrection! Christ rises for their justification!

The notion of divine righteousness that informs Paul's understanding of justification is not informed primarily by the Roman courts as many have mistakenly noted. Paul was primarily Jewish, and not Roman (though he was a Roman citizen). He was most influenced by the eschatological victory of Yahweh's redemptive and merciful justice over sin and death revealed in the Old Testament. Brevard Childs points out that righteousness in the Old Testament "consists, above all, in acts of the saving deeds of redemption by which God maintains and protects the divine promise to fulfill the covenant obligations with Israel" and through Israel's witness to the nations.¹⁷ In a similar vein, Hans Heinrich Schmid also points out that righteousness in the Old Testament is ultimately a new "creation event" that sets things right *for* creation and *between* creation and God. The sense of forensic judgment is not absent from the Old Testament. God declares in advance what God will do, and these words sustain people in faith, even in absence of sight (Isa. 46:10).¹⁸ In the context of the New Testament, righteousness has its victory in the obedient suffering of the Messiah who takes on our condemnation and death so as to overcome them in the Spirit in resurrection. Resurrection in the Spirit fulfills the righteousness of the cross by being its victory in life. Christ is indeed "justified" ("righteoused") in the Spirit in his victory over sin and death in his resurrection, which is then opened to us in the

¹⁷ Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Fortress, 1992), 488.

¹⁸ With regard to the Old Testament, Hans Heinrich Schmid can state: "The establishment of justice and righteousness is nothing less than a creation event" ("Rechtfertigung als Schöpfungsgeschehen: Notizen zur alttestamentlichen Vorgeschichte eines neutestamentlichen Themas," in *Rechtfertigung: Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann zum 70. Geburtstag*, Hrsg. Johannes Friedrich, Wolfgang Pölmann, and Peter Stuhlmacher (J. C. B. Mohr, 1976), 406 (403-414).

Spirit by faith in union with Christ. Divine righteousness detached from its concrete victory in the world would have been foreign to the ancient Jewish mind. As Childs states, “clearly the New Testament usage stands in the tradition in continuity with the Old Testament in emphasizing, not God's revenging justice but [God's] saving righteousness.”¹⁹

Ernst Käsemann noted as well that the Old Testament and Jewish apocalyptic backgrounds inform Paul's reference to the saving righteousness (justification) of God as both a gift and the redemptive power by which God manifests his eschatological saving activity toward humanity. According to Käsemann, Paul was convinced that justification would be achieved through Christ's death and resurrection, which set in motion an eschatological hope of a human (even cosmic) restoration that has already appeared as a present reality to be grasped in faith.²⁰ As Käsemann wrote, “To be justified means that the creator remains faithful to the creature, as the father remained faithful to the prodigal son, in spite of guilt, error, and godlessness; it means he changes the fallen and apostate into new creatures.”²¹ Justification manifests God's faithfulness, God proves himself mercifully and faithfully just by justifying us in his Son. “If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself” (2 Tim. 2:13). Justification in the Spirit transforms, but remains in itself entirely a gift that is never earned. In justification, we are taken up into the life of the Spirit in union with Christ, which is a life filled with God's righteous favor, a life of which we are never worthy, and a life that is never based on the quality of our yielding and receptivity. Though justification by faith applies directly to humanity, there are implications for all of creation that suffers the futility of sin and death and groans with humanity

¹⁹ Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 494.

²⁰ Ernst Käsemann, “The Righteousness of God in Paul,” in *New Testament Questions of Today* (Westminster, 1969), 168-82.

²¹ Ernst Käsemann, “Justification and Salvation History in the Epistle to the Romans,” in *Perspectives on Paul* (SCM, 1971), 74-5 (60-78).

for the liberty of the righteousness and life of the Kingdom of God (Rom. 8:18-23). As Pannenberg pointed out, only in the final new creation will God's verdict of "goodness" over the creation be justified.²² A humanity justified in the Spirit in Christ unto life everlasting does not exploit creation for its own selfish gain but realizes that creation too has its own legitimacy and purpose in Christ the first born from the dead of all creation (Col. 1:16-18) and the eschatological Spirit who raised him up and makes his inheritance an eschatological gift for all of creation. Humanity created by the Spirit and for the Son of God (Gen. 2:7; Col. 1:16-17) will only find justification in that Spirit and in union with that Son (1 Tim. 3:16; Rom. 8:9).

If There Were a Law that Could Give Life:

Justification unto life in Christ and in the Spirit cannot be obtained by the works of the law. Justification in union with Christ by faith occurs in the Spirit. "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). The Spirit's involvement in justification is not only due to the rise of faith in us. The explanation of the Spirit's role in justification is not first anthropological (the rise of faith in us) but rather trinitarian (the Christ who was justified in the Spirit under the Father's favor unites himself to us and the benefits of his saving righteousness in the Spirit he grants us by grace). As Paul said, without the Spirit we do not belong to Christ (Rom. 8:9). As we have been noting, justification in the Father's favor is won by Christ for us in his life, death, and especially resurrection. But it is also true that it is experienced in the Spirit in union with Christ. In a sense, as Paul Tillich put it, justification is received when our unworthy fallen life is taken up into the embrace of God's favor and life solely by grace through faith.²³ Justification though is never

²² Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2 (Eerdmans, 1995), 645.

²³ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 (University of Chicago, 1977), 222, 226.

based on the growing quality of our spiritual lives. What about faith? Faith is not a work but rather depends on the achievement of another (Christ). Faith is reckoned (“credited”) as righteousness, not because of the greatness of our faith, but because faith yields to the Spirit in union with Christ. Faith is reckoned as righteousness in what it clings to and not because what it merits (for it merits nothing). Luther saw this clearly when writing in his 1519 lectures on Galatians that God graciously reckons faith as righteousness, not because faith merits this reward; rather, because faith takes hold of the Spirit (and in the Spirit takes hold of Christ)! He wrote, “Now is not the fact that faith is reckoned as righteousness a receiving of the Spirit? So either he proves nothing or the reception of the Spirit and the fact that faith is reckoned as righteousness will be the same thing.”²⁴ For Luther, we are justified in the Spirit! Even more importantly, God also justifies us in the Spirit for Luther in order that grace may prove to be more than a mere divine disposition or spoken word but also a gift that is present to us (and in us) by grace. Luther writes further of how important the Spirit is to justification by “grace,” for, without the gift of the Spirit given to us, grace remains distant as a mere divine disposition. Even a spoken word by itself is not quite adequate to make grace a gift given to us. So, Luther writes that grace must be present in the gift of the Spirit to be justifying: “Otherwise grace was there from eternity and remains within God, if it signifies only a favorable disposition in the way that favor is understood among men. For just as God loves in very fact, not in word only, so, too, He is favorably disposed with the thing that is present, not only with the word.”²⁵ Luther did not agree with Osiander that we are justified based on the divine nature or Spirit within us. It is Christ in his life, death, and resurrection who is our righteousness. The Spirit rather unites us to

²⁴ Martin Luther, “Lectures on Galatians, 1519, Chapters 1—6,” *Luther’s Works*, V. 27, ed. J. Pelikan (Concordia, 1964), 252.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Christ and in him the Father's favor and, in the Spirit, we receive what Christ won for us. But neither did Luther regard justification as a mere legal relationship that keeps God's grace at a distance from us. Rather, we are justified by grace in the sense that in the Spirit we are united to Christ. I see an implied reference to the gift of the Spirit in Paul's reference to grace as 'lavished on us' (Eph. 1:7-8). Justifying righteousness is still a gift given to us in Christ and in his Spirit and never in any sense warranted or deserved by us. The Finnish interpretation of Luther initiated by Tuomo Mannermaa in dialogue with Orthodox soteriology has explored Luther's focus on the participation of faith as a vehicle of the Spirit in Christ as the righteousness of God. A connection was forged between justification via this participation and the Orthodox notion of theosis or partaking by grace in the divine nature.²⁶ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen has written with great insight of the broad ecumenical appeal of this Protestant ecumenical engagement with the Eastern Church.²⁷ The idea that we participate in Christ the righteousness of God by grace alone unto the renewal of life is also the chief breakthrough on the border of Catholic and Protestant views of justification. Initiated on the border of a major Catholic and Lutheran engagement but since taking on other Protestant participants, The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999) is worthy of careful attention. Key is article 15:

In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works

²⁶ See Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Fortress, 2005).

²⁷ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One with God*.

The integral connection between justification and the gift of the Spirit discussed above indicated that the grace which justifies is based on what God did for us in Christ and in the Spirit but is extended to us through Christ and in the Spirit. Put differently, the risen Christ who is the Spirit Baptizer (meaning the one who imparts the Spirit) is the means by which Christ's appointment as the favored Son for all time in resurrection becomes an eschatological gift extended to us. Christ's baptism in fire (the fire of his death) is the means by which he bears and overcomes our sin and condemnation (Luke 12:49-50) so that he could baptize us in the Spirit, incorporating us in the Spirit into union with him the favored Son and communion through him with the Father. Though centered on Christ, justification is indeed wrought by the Triune God.

The Father's righteous favor is attained in Christ's very flesh in the Spirit throughout his life but especially in his death and resurrection. He rises in victory over sin and death "in the Spirit." The Spirit is also integral to justification in our own justification in the Spirit in union with Christ, as Christ unites himself to us and incorporates us into the loving embrace of the Triune God. Lastly, justification and the gift of the Spirit are integral in our act of faith by which the Spirit is received and in the Spirit Christ is received, thereby allowing our faith to be reckoned to us as righteousness, not that our faith in itself deserves any credit, but rather faith as instrumental of the Spirit in grasping Christ. Justification in the Spirit is indeed grasping a righteousness that is not our own by grace through faith alone. But it is also something that involves us entirely, leading to our fallen life being taken up into the divine life by grace alone. This leads to the renewal of our lives to be sure, as well as to a devotion to the righteousness of God in our souls (inner purity through spiritual formation), in liturgy and worship (holy habits instrumental in inner transformation), and in our behavior (expressed and enhanced through righteous living and good works). But justification is not based on any of this, nor on the ever-

increasing quality of that spiritual life. Based on Christ alone, it frees that life to be all that it can be. We are sustained by the reality of our justification, always comforted by the fact that God reconciled himself to us “not counting our sins against us” (2 Cor. 5:19) and continues to forgive our sins.

As Luther saw so well, Galatians 3 makes the Spirit integral to our justification, so that we say “justified in the Spirit” in union with Christ who is our righteousness. Throughout that chapter, Paul argues that the Spirit cannot be gotten through the works of the law but only by grace through faith, which is proof positive that we are justified the same way. In Galatians 3, Paul switches from the fact that we receive the *Spirit* by grace through faith alone (3:2) to the fact that we are *justified* by grace through faith alone (3:6) in the very same passage (3:2-6) as if making the same argument of both justification and the gift of the Spirit. As H. W. Heidland states, Galatians 3:1-6 “equates” justification and the reception of the Spirit.²⁸ We are thus justified through Christ’s redeeming work in the gift of the Spirit. To confirm my point, take note *why* Paul says in Galatians 3 that the law cannot justify. He states, “Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! *For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law*” (Gal. 3:21). What Paul means by “righteousness” here is justification, the gift of Christ’s righteous favor with the Father warranted by his fulfillment of righteousness on our behalf. Though the law is righteous, it cannot justify. Christ was righteous and he *can* justify! What is the difference? Christ imparts the Spirit of life! Though the law witnesses to life, it cannot impart it. In fact, the law only ends up condemning us to death if we seek it as a path to salvation. In this light, Paul wanted to make it clear that the law’s failure to justify or be the righteousness of God that justifies us did not mean that the law is

²⁸ H. W. Heidland, “λογίζομαι,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 4, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Eerdmans, 1967), 292.

opposed to the promises of God. The failure of the law to justify is not the “fault” of the law: “For if a law *had* been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.” Since for Paul justification is “unto life” (Rom. 5:18), the law’s failure to impart life shows that the law cannot justify. What justifies gives life. Since Christ gives life by giving us the Spirit, Christ is the only one who can justify. He justifies in the Spirit “unto life.” Justification and the gift of the Spirit are thus integral to each other in Galatians 3. Ronald Fung in his commentary on this text gets it right: “This argument from scripture falls to the ground unless the reception of the Spirit is in some sense equated with justification.”²⁹ Dunn also notes from Galatians 3 that “The gift of the Spirit and justification are two sides of the same coin.”³⁰ Christ is “justified in the Spirit” in his resurrection as the favored Son who overcame sin and death to justify us. He was handed over to death for our trespasses but raised to life for our justification. Now, by imparting the Spirit and, in the Spirit, uniting himself to us, he shares his fulfillment of righteousness under the favor with the Father with us.

Luther is not the only one who can be cited in favor of being justified in the Spirit. As noted above, Calvin views justification as “in the Spirit” in relation to Christ’s resurrection, even insightfully connecting 1 Timothy 3:16 with Romans 1:3-4 to make the point. Moreover, Calvin often described union with Christ as attainable only in the Spirit. He writes poetically that “Christ breathes into his people that they may be one with him.”³¹ Calvin then writes that both justification and sanctification (the two-fold grace) occur in union with Christ in the Spirit and by faith.³² The logic of all of this is that the Christ who was justified in the Spirit in resurrection

²⁹ Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Eerdmans, 1988), 136.

³⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Westminster Press, 1970), 108.

³¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, V. 2, trans. Henry Beveridge (Eerdmans, 2013), 1. 3. 1.

³² *Ibid.* 1. 3. 2.

causes us also to be justified (and sanctified) in the Spirit in union with him. However, Calvin does not to my knowledge speak explicitly of justification as received *by us* “in the Spirit.” He will say instead that we are justified by Christ’s bearing our punishment to appease God’s wrath and also positively fulfilling righteousness in our stead. This then causes the Father to justly reconcile us to himself, forgive us, and reckon us righteous: “We confess that while through the intercession of Christ's righteousness God reconciles us to himself, and by free remission of sins accounts us righteous, his beneficence is at the same time joined with such a mercy that through his Holy Spirit he dwells in us.”³³ Interestingly, Calvin does not explicitly involve the Spirit ~~or union with Christ~~ in justification. The Spirit in this version of justification is an added bonus, an overflow of divine beneficence, but not vital to our justification. Putting the matter this way protects Calvin from any hint of Osiander (that we are justified based on the divine nature in us by way of the Spirit’s indwelling rather than from the righteousness of Christ under the favor of the Father). But it does nothing to explain his larger theology of union with Christ in the Spirit, a union that provides us with both justification and sanctification. Clearly, if we are united to Christ in the Spirit and in that union are both justification and sanctification, then the Spirit is more than a beneficence added to justification. To be consistent, Calvin had to say that justification is granted because of Christ in the Spirit and in union with Christ. There is an inconsistency here that requires correction. Bruce McCormack recognizes the inconsistency in Calvin and tries to correct him by removing justification from union with Christ in the Spirit, a union which then includes only regeneration and sanctification. Justification as forensic is then logically prior to union with Christ in the Spirit.³⁴

³³ Ibid, 3. 14. 9.

³⁴ See Bruce McCormack, “What’s at Stake in the Current Debates over Justification? The Crisis of Protestantism in the West” in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates?* ed. Mark Husband and Daniel J. Treier (InterVarsity, 2004), 102 (81-117).

I deal with this problem and McCormack's solution to it in my book, *Justified in the Spirit*.³⁵ I solve the problem by arguing that Calvin needed to follow through with his pneumatologically-rich understanding of union with Christ in the Spirit and by faith and say that we are justified in the Spirit by faith. The Christ who is justified in the Spirit justifies us in the Spirit. Those who are justified in the Spirit shall live! Indeed, "you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). Calvin even says that Christ's redemptive work is useless to us unless Christ is united to us in the Spirit that dwells within.³⁶ All of the benefits of salvation, including justification, comes by way of union with Christ in the Spirit for Calvin. He needed to stay true to that idea in all that he says about justification. No devotion to Osiander would be implied since the Spirit unites us to Christ who is the righteousness of God for us. Since the Spirit who gives new life cannot be earned, and since even regeneration as we are justified "unto life," cannot be earned, no legalism would be involved either. Since the gift of the Spirit that involves new life is by grace through faith alone, and not in any sense warranted or earned by us, there is no need to hesitate to say that we are justified in the Spirit by faith. The faith by which we receive the Spirit is not a work but rather a dependence on the work of another. It earns and warrants nothing. Christ is the one who won the Spirit for us. God gives us the Spirit for Christ's sake, as Calvin noted.³⁷ Even regeneration is not earned by us just because we receive it in faith. We no more merit regeneration than we merit resurrection. There is no reason to deny that we are justified in the Spirit unto life anew. As Tillich said, justification based on the redemption of Christ, our fallen life is taken up into God's perfect life as won for us in Christ.

³⁵ Frank D. Macchia, *Justified in the Spirit*, 61.

³⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 3. 1. 1.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 3. 1. 2.

Justification is indeed forensic in the sense that the only human being worthy of it is Christ and he won it for us. His favor is indeed “imputed” to us by grace and in the Spirit. But justification is also participatory because we receive it in the Spirit by faith in union with Christ and incorporation into communion in the life of the Triune God. As E. P. Sanders says of justification in Paul’s letters: “...righteousness by faith, the Spirit by faith or sonship by faith mix indiscriminately with participationist language in such a way as to exclude the possibility of a systematic working out of righteousness as the forensic preliminary to life in Christ Jesus.”³⁸ This is precisely my critique of many evangelical forensic versions of justification by grace through faith. What this means is that Paul does speak of justification as forensic in the sense that we are justified by a righteousness that is not our own but is given to us by a divine decision enacted in Christ and in the Spirit on our behalf. But justification in the Spirit in union with Christ is also justification in the embrace and favor of the heavenly Father, justification in the communion of the Triune God. Justification in divine favor and communion explains why justification, though personal and individual, is not an individualistic concept. There is even a social dimension to justification as we participate *together* in God’s favor in the Spirit as a church. Both forensic and participationist, individual and communal, dimensions are at work in this wonderfully simple but also complex reality of justification by grace through faith. Paul powerfully speaks of the communal experience of justification in Ephesians 2:14 where he writes of Christ as the focal point of peace, reconciliation, and a sharing of life between Jew and Gentile in the communion of saints: “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.” Gentiles who were considered unclean and aliens to the household of faith are brought near in Christ. Peter had to remind the

³⁸ E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Fortress, 1977), 506-7.

Jewish Christians concerning the “unclean” Gentiles that God “showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us” (Acts 15:8). God’s acceptance of these unclean Gentiles was based on Christ but was also concretely revealed in the Father’s taking them up in the Spirit into Christ and communion with himself. The Jews are justified in the Spirit along with Gentiles, who they now accept into fellowship within a shared experience of justification in the Spirit. If God accepts and embraces them in Christ and in the Spirit, so must we. Justification thus has revolutionary social implications! Christians who live from their justification in the Spirit of Pentecost cross boundaries and welcome into their midst those who are considered invisible, voiceless, or undesirable. In our shared acceptance and favor with God, they are accepted and shown favor. They become those who are seen, heard, and fully welcomed in the household of faith with all of their unique gifts.

The horizon of justification is resurrection and new creation which are the realization of the victory of Christ’s righteousness over sin and death in the fullness of the Spirit and the Father’s favor, perfectly conformed to the cruciform love and beautiful glory of the exalted Christ. This is the fulfillment of the righteousness and peace of the Kingdom of God. This is the consequence in all of creation of Christ’s appointment as the righteous and favored Son of God in power and glory in resurrection according to the Spirit (Rom. 1:4). Where condemnation, sin, and death once reigned, Christ is justified in the Spirit in resurrection, so that “grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life” (Rom. 5:21). Justification eschatologically fulfilled brings all that is a far off onto the embrace of a just and loving communion of love. All of creation will share in this communion of life. Paul wrote in climax to his discourse on election in Christ: “[God] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity

to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (Eph. 1:9-10). Sin and death swallowed us whole, but in Christ we are “swallowed up” (baptized!) instead in the Spirit of righteousness and life through resurrection and the new creation (2 Cor. 5:4), the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God where righteousness dwells.

DRAFT

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