

“Justification and the Book of Acts”

Introduction

If you are looking for a thorough biblical discussion of justification by faith, turn to Galatians or Romans. The Book of Acts has hardly anything, at least explicitly, to say on the matter. This may seem strange, especially since Acts tells the story, and records the preaching of Paul, the chief theologian of justification. If anything, one might say that Acts is a book of justification for Paul himself. That is to say, Acts justifies the place of Paul in the church, and more particularly justifies his position as an Apostle of our Lord.

In an article entitled “Justification in Luke-Acts,” Richard Gaffin notes that “monographs and articles on the theme of justification in Luke-Acts are few indeed.¹” In a footnote, he goes further to say, “Strictly speaking, unless I have overlooked something, there is none.²” If only Gaffin had read the works of the sainted Harold Bull, he would have seen how all of the New Testament, Acts included, speaks of nothing but justification by faith. Indeed, as Jack Preus shows in his eminently-readable work *Just Words*, the truth of justification can be spoken of in a great variety of ways.³ That having been said, the technical language of justification occurs rarely in Luke-Acts. The lone example in Luke’s gospel is found in the story of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector, where we are told that the Tax-Collector “went home justified rather than the other” (Luke 18:14). Here Luke’s primary focus is on the proper posture of

¹Richard Gaffin, “Justification in Luke-Acts,” in *Right With God: Justification in the Bible and the World* (ed. D.A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) 122.

²Gaffin, “Justification,” 271.

³Jacob A.O. Preus, *Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000).

humility towards God. As such, the language of justification is present, but the theology is not developed. Likewise, only one passage in Acts employs the language of justification. At Antioch of Pisidia, Paul proclaims, “Everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. By him everyone who believes is justified” (Acts 13:38). The term justified occurs three times. As Jaroslav Pelikan notes, moreover, it has a strong parallel to Romans 4:8, where Paul writes of God who “reckons righteousness apart from works.”⁴ As such, here is good evidence for the skeptic that Luke was familiar with Paul’s teaching on justification. As an aside: Lutheran fans of the new ESV (English Standard Version) may be disappointed to find that the term “justified” has been removed, substituted with “freed” (i.e., “by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.”). It’s enough to make a good Lutheran suspicious and cranky, as if we needed any encouragement in these areas.

Still, it has to be said that Paul’s emphasis in Acts 13 is on the contrast between the law of Moses and belief in Christ. Justification may be assumed, but not explained. As such, one can sympathize with Richard Hays, who comments, “The effect of this single, rather awkward, reference is simply to highlight the complete absence of justification as a theme of Christian proclamation elsewhere in Acts.”⁵ Whether or not one agrees with Hays, the fact that Luke, a companion of Paul, wrote a quarter of the New Testament, and spoke of justification only twice is quite remarkable. This has led scholars to ask the question: Did Luke know, understand, or

⁴Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005) 158.

⁵Richard Hays, “Justification,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary III* (Ed. David Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992) 1133.

care about the doctrine of justification?⁶

Again, to say that theology of Acts does in no way conflict with that of the Pauline epistles is necessary and true. Others have made the argument well. But then, we do well to ask, “In what way does Luke’s theology compliment Paul’s? Or should we, perhaps, think about it in another way. How does Paul build upon Luke or upon the message he presents? In what way, if any, can the writing of Luke, and his presentation of Jesus, help us to think of the doctrine of justification?”

Paul’s Salutation to the Romans

Perhaps, it would not be out of order to take one more look at the book of Romans. Mark Seifrid, in his wonderful book, *Christ, Our Righteousness*, shows that, contrary to much revisionist thinking, justification by faith is the central message of Romans. Seifrid takes Romans 1:16-17 as a “summary of the gospel which Paul elaborates in the course of the letter,”⁷ and as a theological introduction to the letter as a whole. Likewise, Stephen Westerholm, arguing against the New Perspective, holds that Romans 1:16-17 is Paul’s “opening summary of the message he proclaims” and that that message is that “sinners are justified, apart from the law, by faith in Jesus Christ.”⁸ Both Westerholm and Seifrid prove worthy champions of the doctrine of justification, and bold confessors of Christ crucified..

⁶For a brief review of the topic, see Joseph Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Doubleday, 1998) 145-147.

⁷Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Justification* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 36.

⁸Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2004) 385, 401.

Given though, the theological centrality of Romans 1:16-17, what, we might ask, are we to make of the first fifteen verses of Romans? Do they consist simply of epistolary niceties? N.T. Wright disarmingly suggests that when reading Romans, we should start where Paul starts, “with a passage which many readers have leapfrogged in their eagerness to get to what exegetical tradition has declared to be the main theme stated in 1:16-17.”⁹ If you want to find out the meaning of a Pauline letter, begin at the beginning.

Indeed, students of the New Testament soon come to realize that if you want to find the theme of a Pauline letter, you do well to comb through the salutation. For in the salutation, Paul does much more than introduce himself. He lays the groundwork for themes he will address throughout the epistle. Thus, for instance, in his letter to the Corinthians, he introduces the topics of church unity and eschatology, subjects he will emphasize throughout the letter. Likewise, in Galatians, Paul identifies God as the one who “delivers us from this present evil age.” From such words, we see the theme of apocalyptic eschatology which resonates throughout the epistle.¹⁰

What then can we learn from the salutation in Romans? Paul begins by introducing himself as a “servant of Christ Jesus, set apart as an apostle for the ‘gospel of God’.” The phrase “gospel of God” is, admittedly, an odd one. Paul helpfully provides a definition, describing the gospel as that “which [God] promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to

⁹N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003) 242,

¹⁰See Louis Martyn, *Galatians*

be the Son of God in power according to Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.” (Romans 1:3-4). Thus, in verses three and four, Paul defines the very nature of the gospel, which proceeds from the Father, and is centered on the person of his Son.

Typically, though, exegetes have made little theological hay out of the verses. For starters, it's difficult to understand what exactly Paul is talking about. Cranfield well summarizes the exegetical difficulty: “The fact that two of the most difficult verses in the whole epistle occur so very near its beginning is an acute embarrassment to the interpreter of Romans who is anxious that his readers should not become discouraged and give up before ever they have had a chance to get really interested.”¹¹ Bultmann suggested that verses three and four are a “Pre-Pauline formula” that accentuates the human and divine natures of Christ.¹² Typical of most commentators, Cranfield surmises that Paul is probably “making use of the language of an already existing confessional formula.”¹³

Paul was, in many ways, an outsider to the church at Rome. Romans is the only Pauline epistle written to a church that Paul himself had not founded. By beginning in this way, Paul establishes himself as creedal Christian, and demonstrates the common ground upon which and his Roman audience stood. According to this line of thinking, Paul is doing the same thing he did in 1 Corinthians 15; that is, he is claiming that his gospel is the same gospel as that of the apostles and the church catholic; “That what I have received, I have passed down to you.” As Fitzmyer puts it, “He quotes something traditional that he expects will resonate with the Roman

¹¹C.E.B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 4.

¹²Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1952-55) 1.50.

¹³C.E.B. Cranfield, *Romans* vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975) 57.

Christians.”¹⁴ Paul wants his readers to know, as Luke Timothy Johnson says, that : “What he preaches fundamentally agrees with the traditions of the churches.”¹⁵

But if Paul is simply drawing upon liturgical or confessional language, the creed of Romans 1:3-4 seems, in a way, deficient. To be sure, the creed touches upon Christ’s humanity and divinity, proclaiming him to be, in the words of Ambrosiaster “truly God and truly man.”¹⁶ Christ’s humanity is clearly established in that he is called the “Son of David according to the flesh.”

But what of the following phrase: namely that he was “designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead”? Some have seen this as an example of a primitive, even adoptionistic christology, according to which Christ assumes the role of God’s Son only after his resurrection. Some have seen this as a tension in Paul’s own theology, between an early, primitive Christology, and a later more developed confession. Others attribute this Christology to the creed, but not to Paul. For instance, Kasemann writes, “Unlike Paul himself the formula does not presuppose the preexistence and divine sonship of the earthly Jesus.”¹⁷ Such a reading seems to imply that Jesus was the son of David by birth, but only later *became* the Son of God.

Would Paul make use of a creed that was at odds with his own Christology? Orthodox

¹⁴Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans* (Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1992) 230.

¹⁵Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) 346.

¹⁶See *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Romans* (ed. Gerald Bray; Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1998) 7.

¹⁷Ernst Kasemann, *Commentary On Romans* (trans.Geoffrey Bromiley; Grand Rapids,

commentators are rightly quick to point out that in the resurrection, Jesus was not made the Son of God, only that he was declared to be so. Chrysostom, seeking to champion the ontological divinity of the Son, interprets the phrase to mean that in the resurrection Jesus was “shown, revealed, judged, and confessed” to be the Son of God. That is to say, the resurrection is simply a revelation of what was true all along, namely, that Jesus was and is divine. Likewise, John of Damascus: “By his miracles and resurrection and by the descent of the Holy Spirit, it was made plain and certain to the world that Christ was the Son of God.”¹⁸ In a similar vein, Melancthon interprets the phrase to mean that Jesus’ divinity is not established, but simply “pointed out” by the resurrection. Melancthon writes, “The meaning is that this person was certainly acknowledged to be the Son of God through these testimonies: that he rose from the dead; that he showed his boundless power by many miracles, as when he resurrected Lazarus; that he now gives to the church the Holy Spirit, who strengthens the minds against the devil and performs many great miracles.”¹⁹ In other words, for Melancthon, the resurrection is one miracle among others which prove that Jesus truly is God’s Son. Among modern commentators, Robert Mounce likewise says that the resurrection “authenticates his claim to deity.”²⁰ Thus, the creed is still orthodox, as is Paul.

Anders Nygren, taking a slightly different approach, proposes that the entire creed refers to the eternal Son of God. Nygren writes, “*The resurrection is the turning point in the existence*

MI: Eerdmans, 1980) 12.

¹⁸John of Damascus, *Orthodox Faith* 1.4

¹⁹Philip Melancthon, *Commentary on Romans* (trans. Fred Kramer; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992) 63.

of the Son of God. Before that, he was the Son of God in weakness and lowliness. Through the resurrection he becomes the Son of God in power.”²¹ Nygren’s suggestion, especially in respect to what we refer to as Christ’s state of humiliation and exaltation, has a certain appeal. In the resurrection, Jesus takes up powers which of he has not availed himself during his earthly life. Yet it still seems that in Romans 1:3-4 it precisely the man born of the virgin who is declared to be the Son of God in power.

Something else, I would propose, is going on here. The term ὀρισθέντος means, at its root, “delimits,” and has, as Cranfield notes, the meaning of “appoint, constitute, and install.” As Fitzmyer notes, “It suggests rather a decisive act of divine appointment or establishment.”²² The word, moreover, is used with some frequency in the book of Acts (see Acts 2:23; 10:42; 11:29; 17:26, 31). In Acts 10:42, Peter declares that Jesus is “the one appointed (ὁ ὀρισμένος) by God to be the judge of the living and the dead.” Again, in Acts 17:31, Paul proclaims that God “has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed (ὀρίσειν); and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” Thus, in both cases, the term is applied to Jesus, who has received from God the authority to execute eschatological judgement.

Thus, the word “ὀρίζω means both designated, and appointed. It is then used in the same way that we would say that John Roberts was appointed chief justice of the Supreme Court. Who then is appointed the Son of God in the resurrection? According to Paul, in Acts 17:31, it

²⁰Robert H. Mounce, *Romans* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995) 61.

²¹Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1949) 51.

²²Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 235.

is specifically a man (ἄνθρωπος) whom God has appointed; namely Jesus of Nazareth. Reading Romans 1:3-4 this way means that the one who comes from the seed of David has been appointed or designated the Son of God.

The orthodox person rightfully asks, “Was not Jesus always the Son of God?” The answer, of course, is yes. But in the resurrection, God declares or appoints Jesus the man, to be the one who will judge all of humanity. This is an important Christological statement. The one who sits in final judgment of the world is the crucified one. The man Jesus is our God. This does not mean that Jesus was not already the Son of God by virtue of the incarnation. Sonship, however, is more than ontology or birth. Sons of Abraham are defined, ultimately, not by genealogy or circumcision, but by their faith. Those who are disobedient show themselves rather to be sons of the devil. True sons of God act like their heavenly Father. Thus, sonship is defined by obedience. The true Son does nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. This means that as a man, Jesus would have to prove himself to be a true Son by virtue of his obedience to the Father. Jesus’ death is the ultimate act of filial obedience. The resurrection then is the Father’s recognition of what the Son has done.

Resurrection in Luke-Acts:

In the gospel of John, Jesus walks as God among men. He is the Word made flesh, who has the glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John 1:14) This is graphically illustrated on the Mt. of Olives, where the soldiers who come to arrest him fall down, overwhelmed by his divine presence. (John 18:6) In every way Jesus actively offers up his life, and so also, he rises by his own authority and power. Jesus, as the eternal Logos, has the power to raise himself, saying, “I lay down my life that I may take it up again.. No one takes it from me, but I lay it

down of my own accord. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it up again.” (John 10:18) Thus, in this way, John’s “Christology from above” emphasizes the ontological deity of Christ, who has the power of life within him.. Luke looks at the resurrection from a different vantage point. In the synoptics, and more particularly, in Luke-Acts, the death and resurrection of Jesus are mostly spoken of in the passive voice. In the third gospel, Jesus dies as an obedient son. His death is a necessity brought about by the scriptures and his Father’s will. Typical of the Lukan passion predictions are the words of Jesus in 9:22: “The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” Likewise, in 18:33-35, Jesus predicts that “He will be delivered to the Gentiles and he will be mocked, mistreated, and spit, and after scourging, they will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised.” Again, following his resurrection, Jesus notes that his death and resurrection occurred according to the necessity of God: “Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise.” (24:46) In each case Jesus dies and rises in accordance with the scriptures, and in obedience to God’s will.

This view of the resurrection becomes even more clear in the book of Acts, where God is the subject of the resurrection, and Jesus the object. Consider Peter’s Pentecost sermon, where he says, “This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death” (Acts 2:24). Likewise, in 2:32, Peter refers to our Lord as “this Jesus” whom “God raised up.” At Solomon’s portico, Peter refers to Jesus as God’s “servant” whom he has “raised up.” (3:26) Again, in 4:24 Peter speaks of “Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.” As Peter preaches, so also Paul. To the Christians of Antioch of Pisidia, Paul

speaks of Jesus as him whom “God raised from the dead” (13:33) and again, “the one whom God raised up” (Acts 13:37). Thus, the resurrection functions primarily as God’s vindication of Christ. The one who was put on trial has been “appointed to be judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42). The one whom the Jewish leaders killed, God has vindicated by raising him from the dead. Thus, Jesus is the man raised by God. This theological understanding of the resurrection is, in the words of N.T. Wright, “very close to what Paul says in Romans 1:4.”²³

Again, some see in such passages in Acts a more primitive Christology. There is, however, a sophisticated narrative theology at work. The resurrection of Jesus is depicted as God’s vindication of Jesus, the man of Nazareth. Jesus, however, is not simply any man, he is “the man.” For both Luke and Paul, Jesus is the representative man of a new humanity. The resurrection therefore is not simply an event in the life of Jesus, but it is the decisive turning point in the history of humankind, of which Jesus is the new first-born Son.

Where Luke and Paul Meet: Jesus as the New Adam

The theology of Christ as the New Adam is strong in Paul, especially in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5. In 1 Corinthians uses Adamic imagery to proclaim the resurrection as objective good news for all people: “For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam *all* die, so also in Christ, *all* shall be made alive.” (1 Cor 15:21-22).

In Romans, Paul ties together the new life of Christ and the justification of humanity. Adam’s disobedience brings about the objective downfall of all humanity, and Christ’s obedience brings objective righteousness to all. Paul writes, “Therefore, just as one trespass led to condemnation

²³N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003) 451.

for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.” (Romans 5:18)

Thus, Paul ties together resurrection and objective justification as the foundation of the gospel message.

It seems no coincidence, then, that among the evangelists, Luke, a companion of Paul, has the strongest theology of Jesus as the New Adam. Luke’s theology is not primarily didactic, but narrative in form. Paul teaches about the New Adam, while Luke tells the story upon which Paul’s theology is based. Thus, while Matthew’s genealogy begins with Abraham, emphasizing Jesus’ role as the true Israel, Luke’s goes back to Adam. For Luke, then, Jesus is the new Adam of a new humanity. He is the Son of Adam, the Son of God.” (Luke 3:38) As the new Adam, his goal will be to usher the repentant evildoer back with him, into paradise. (Luke 22:43)

The first Adam defined himself through disobedience, which is the opposite of faith. To be God’s Son, one must do God’s will. Through his willful disobedience, Adam demonstrated that he was not a true son of God, and in the first Adam, all mankind was condemned. It was not enough, therefore, for the second Adam to be God’s Son ontologically. To bring humankind back into paradise, he would have to prove himself, by virtue of his obedience, to be God’s Son.

Interestingly, in Luke’s baptismal scene, the Father does not say, “This is my Son,” (as reported by Matthew), but “You are my Son.” The words “You are my Son” are not meant primarily as a signal to the world, but as a word of encouragement to Jesus. It is up to Jesus now to demonstrate his true Sonship - - not through miracles or power, but through obedience.

Thus, Luke immediately follows his baptismal account and Adamic genealogy with the story of Jesus’ temptation in the desert. Jesus, the New Adam, is led out into the wilderness by the Spirit. Just as the serpent tempted Adam to be like God, the devil tempts the new Adam to

prove that he is the Son of God through acts of divine power. Satan tempts him, saying, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” (Luke 4:3) By turning the stone to bread, Jesus could have very well proven his ontological Sonship and inherent divinity. Jesus knows, however, that he has not come to turn stones to bread, but to turn Gentile stones into God’s children (Luke 3:8). Thus, the man Jesus demonstrates his true Sonship not by the performance of divine miracles, but through his reliance on God, and in his faithful obedience to his Father. Precisely in his humility and humanity does he show himself to be God’s Son. Of course, all is done in accordance with the scriptures which Jesus quotes.

This scene of temptation is resumed on the Mount of Olives. In this “hour of darkness” Jesus once again wards off the temptations of the devils, and shows himself, once more, to be the true and obedient Son. He is the one who follows the will of God, as revealed in the scriptures. Praying, “Let not my will, but yours be done,” (Luke 22:42) the obedient Son willingly takes the cup of sorrow and wrath which his Father has given him. Fittingly, the one who received the Spirit of Sonship in his Baptism, obediently commends his spirit into the Father’s hands at the hour of death. (Luke 23:46)

Interestingly, though Luke does not make much of the language of justification, he does refer to Jesus as the “just” or “righteous” one. At Solomon’s portico, Peter refers to Jesus as “the holy and righteous one.” (Acts 3:14). Facing death, Stephen recalls Jesus, “The Righteous One.” (Acts 7:52). While visiting Jerusalem, Paul says, “The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from his mouth.” (Acts 22:14) In obedience to his Father, Jesus went to the cross. While standing at the foot of the cross, The Lukan centurion declares, “Certainly, this man was righteous.” (Luke 23:47) (Incidentally, the

ESV gets this one wrong too, translating it as “Certainly this man was innocent.”) Compared to the centurion’s confession in Matthew (“Surely, this was the Son of God”), the Lukan passion seems underwhelming and anticlimactic. Yet, the centurion’s confession in Luke is a necessary theological building block. Christ’s righteousness in life and death is the prerequisite for being declared the Son of God in the resurrection. Having completed his earthly course in righteousness, the man may rightly be raised and declared a righteous and true Son of God. Furthermore, since Christ is the representative man of the new humanity, in him all of humanity receives the declaration of righteousness.

Resurrection is Objective Justification

Indeed, Romans teaches not only justification, but also the doctrine of objective justification. Just as all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, so also are *all* “justified by his grace as a gift, through his redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:23-24) This does not mean that all will be saved (subjective justification), but it does mean that God has declared the entire human race “not guilty” in the person of Christ. This verdict first took place in the resurrection, where God declared the man Jesus to be righteous. Objective justification is a necessary foundation, which keeps subjective justification from turning into an “if-then” proposition.

In Jesus is the resurrection and therefore objective justification of all humanity. “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men “(Romans 5:18). Again, “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.” (Romans 5:19) This is not to be equated with universalism. Paul speaks of his belief that

“there will be resurrection of “the just and the unjust,” at which time Christ will act as the final judge (Acts 24:15). Nevertheless, the resurrection of Christ is good news for all humanity, even as the resurrection is the sure hope of all humanity.

For this reason, preaching and teaching on the resurrection dominates the book of Acts and much early Christian preaching. The day of Jesus’ resurrection is the basis and proof for the resurrection of all humanity. Thus, we are told in Acts 4:2 that Sadducees were “greatly annoyed because they [Peter and John] were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead (pl.).” In Jesus (singular), is the resurrection of all humanity, and a reinstatement of mankind to its proper relationship to God.

The Resurrection of Jesus: The Beginning and End of Justification

Thus, while Romans 1:16-17 is the strongest statement of justification by faith, the passage stands on the foundation of Romans 1:3-4, which proclaim the gospel of God who raised Jesus from the dead. Paul’s most concentrated teaching on justification continues through the end of chapter four. How then does he summarize his discussion of justification? Paul speaks of “Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” (Romans 4:25) Thus, Romans 1:3-4 and Romans 4:25 may profitably be viewed as theological bookends. Our justification stands firmly on the foundation of Jesus’ justification and resurrection. Furthermore, as Seifrid says, in *Christ Our Righteousness*, justification is “*in Christ*” and cannot be separated from the resurrection from the dead.”²⁴

Justification in Acts

²⁴Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness*, 174.

You may have noticed that the title of this paper is not “Justification and the Book of Acts,” not “Justification *in* the Book of Acts.” So, we may again ask, “Is justification taught by Luke?” Not very explicitly, though I have no doubt it is implicit in everything that Luke writes. Here, I am more than content to agree with Richard Gaffin, who writes, that Paul’s doctrine of justification is the fruition of the good news announced by Jesus, and “more importantly, was actualised in his death, resurrection, ascension, and baptism with the Holy Spirit.”²⁵ More precisely, Luke emphasizes the foundation of subjective justification, namely the objective justification which is the resurrection of Jesus. No person can be declared righteous apart from the one who was declared righteous in his resurrection. Properly preached, resurrection is objective justification. Justification, apart from the resurrection of Christ, is simply a lifeless, mathematical formula. The Resurrection, properly preached, is justification. The resurrection must then always stand at the center of Christian preaching.

Baptism: Our Incorporation Into the Justification of Christ

Such thinking then places a premium on baptism, which, happily Paul also emphasizes in Romans. Jesus was justified on account of his works and faithful obedience to the Father. He acted obediently on our behalf. Only Jesus has been justly declared righteous. To think that we may be declared righteous because of our works is only to add the sin of pride and ungratefulness to our ledger. By depending on one’s own good works, a person chooses to stand on his own, and thereby places himself outside of Christ, and God’s righteous verdict. As Seifrid writes, “Our righteousness is found in Christ crucified and risen.”²⁶ What needs to happen for the

²⁵Gaffin, “Justification in Luke-Acts,” 125.

²⁶Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness*, 175.

salvation of the individual then is to be incorporated into the person of Christ. For it is precisely through the baptismal waters that the individual is attached to the one righteous man. In Baptism, we are placed in Christ, in the Jordan River, and on the cross. In Christ, all humanity is declared righteous. This becomes a reality for the individual in baptism, where “just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father” (again, note the passive voice) we too might walk in the newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (Romans 5:4-5) To borrow words from Stephen Westerholm, “The baptized are no longer “Adam-people” but, but a divine transference, “Christ-people,” members of the new humanity, whose terms of existence are defined not by Adam’s disobedience, but by the obedience and righteousness of Christ.”²⁷

Canon and Theology: Acts and Romans

It may be noted that the book of Acts falls providentially after the gospels and before Paul’s epistle to the Romans. The gospels provide the theological and christological foundation, upon which the kerygmatic preaching of Acts is based. Besides being in introduction to the person of Paul, Acts may well be seen as primarily a proclamation of Christ’s resurrection. As such, Acts takes a certain precedence over Romans. And, contrary to the way we normally think, perhaps we need to place Luke before Paul theologically as well as canonically. For the resurrection is the foundation for the resurrection and objective justification of all humanity. The theology of Acts, which proclaims that Christ was “designated the Son of God in power” in the resurrection is a good starting point for Paul, who aims to preach that Christ was raised for

²⁷Stephen Westerholm, *Understanding Paul: The Early Christian Worldview of the Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004) 108.

our justification, and that that justification is attained not by works, but faith. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the good news which is for all humanity, and justification by faith is its most wonderful result.

(One more thing: You history buffs may be interested to know: On this very day, in 1931, Dorothy Hronetz was born in Pittsburgh, PA. In her life, she has done many wonderful things which have made this world a better place; including her service as a registered nurse, her many acts of hospitality, and her role as the mother of five children, and devoted grandmother. Any list of good works which follow her would have to include her supreme act of charity; namely marrying David Scaer. Happy Birthday, Mom.)