

Who Raised Jesus Christ from the Dead?

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Background

Our memory verses a week or two ago included 1 Pet 3:18, “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.” With Easter on the way, the last clause caught my attention.

- “Quickened” = “made alive.” Clear reference to the resurrection. I don’t usually think of the Holy Spirit as involved in the resurrection. What is the role of each member of the trinity?
- In particular, what does Peter mean in this verse?

Examine the role of each member of the Trinity in the resurrection. Most of our time will be spent on the Spirit, the point of Peter’s verse.

Note: interesting to compare these with Aristotle’s four causes: material, efficient, formal, and final.

Father

God spoken of as the one who raises the Son.—Two references in Acts; the earliest view chronologically.

- Peter’s sermon on Pentecost, Acts 2:24,32
- His sermon after healing the lame man, Acts 3:15

The Son requested and depended on this intervention.—Hebr 5:7, which refers to his request for resurrection (“saved *out of* death”).

God viewed the resurrection as a way to manifest his glory.—Rom 6:4

Application.—When we are tempted to feel that the world is out of control and there is no one who can help, remember the resurrection. It shows the glorious power of God. If he can raise the dead, he can do anything.

Son

The Son is not only the one raised from the dead, but also derives from the Father the power to take up his own life.

Christ claims to raise himself.—John 2:19

He does this by power delegated from the Father.—John 10:17,18

He will use this same delegated power to raise the dead at the last day.—John 5:19-30. Note emphasis on the Son’s inability to do anything by himself, but the power that God has given him to do this deed that particularly manifests the Father’s glory.

Application.—God’s power is not just “out there” somewhere. He chooses to exercise it through his people. To his Son he delegated the power of resurrection, not only his own but that of all

humanity. Similarly, he will give us the power to do what he requires us to do. “I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me,” Phil 4:13.

Spirit

Finally we come to the verse that set us on this quest: 1 Pet 3:18. It and a close parallel pose a puzzle, resolved in yet another text.

The Puzzle

1 Pet 3:18 and Rom 1:3-4 both relate Christ’s resurrection to the Spirit, but in a parallelism with the flesh that is confusing. Peter may in fact have derived his verse from Paul, whom we know he read with great attention (2 Pet 3:15).

1 Pet 3:18.—“Flesh” and “Spirit” are entirely parallel in Greek (not “in” vs. “by” as in AV). So should look for a meaning that can fit both places. Possible meanings:

- “In” for both. He died physically, but he was raised spiritually. But this is heresy. He died spiritually as well as physically (separated from God); he rose physically as well as spiritually.
- “By” for both. The flesh killed him, but the Spirit raised him. But the Spirit played a role in his death as well: Heb. 9:14 “Christ ... through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God”

Rom 1:3,4.—Notice three contrasts:

- **Made vs. declared by resurrection.**—v.3 describes the result of his physical birth. V.4 describes the result of his resurrection from the dead.
- **Seed of David vs. powerful son of God.**—The humanity and deity of our Lord clearly set side by side. The point is not his becoming son of God (he was always that), but his being declared to be the Powerful Son of God by the resurrection.
- **Acc. to the flesh vs. acc. to the Spirit.**—“According to flesh/Spirit.” Moule suggests that “acc. to the Spirit” refers to the OT prophecies. But his physical coming no less than his resurrection was the subject of these prophecies.

Rom 7:1-6 as the Key

Paul uses the “flesh/spirit” contrast extensively to contrast our state before and after we were saved: Rom 8:5-9, Gal 5:16-25. Perhaps the key to these verses is that Christ’s coming as seed of David deals with our unsaved condition in the flesh, while his resurrection deals with our position in the Spirit. Rom 7:1-6 in fact seems to develop this idea, in four steps: 1, 2-3, 4, 5-6. Note that 5-6 deal with the flesh/spirit contrast, while 4 deals with the death and resurrection of our Lord. This relation works out in more detail what Peter and Paul are saying elsewhere.

- v.1 *states* the general principle that the law binds a man as long as he lives.
- v.2 *illustrates* this from marriage. At first glance it is confusing: the husband dies, but the law’s bondage over the wife ends. But “those who know the law” (v.1) would recall from Gen 2:24 that marriage makes two people one flesh, and the death of one is the death of the

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other. In the husband's death the wife dies, though not the woman, and this death sets her free from the law of marriage. *This insight from Stifler's commentary, p.120.*

- vv.4 *applies* the principle to our relation with Christ. Our marriage with him is viewed as having two phases. First, the focus is on his body, and when that is slain, we become dead to the law. Then we are married to him in his resurrection, free from the law.
- vv.5-6 *explain* this change in terms of the flesh and the spirit. While under the law, we were "in the flesh." Now, v.6, we are "dead to that wherein we were held" (we, not the law, having died—AV is in error here), and as a result we "serve in newness of Spirit."

Thus the death of Christ has broken the power of the flesh over us, while his resurrection has brought us into the life of the Spirit.

Compare 1 Cor 15:42-49:

- The subject is the effect of resurrection (42).
- Death consumes a natural body; resurrection yields a spiritual one (44).
- Specifically, through his resurrection our Lord becomes "a quickening spirit" (45).
- We come to bear that image ourselves (49).

The Resolution

With these thoughts in mind, we can return to 1 Pet 3:18 and Rom 1:4.

- Our Lord's incarnation and death was *with reference to* the flesh, "according to the flesh" because he was dealing with the problem of the flesh. Rom 8:3, he came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" to "condemn sin-in-the-flesh."
- His resurrection was *with reference to* the Spirit, "according to the Spirit," because it made him "a quickening Spirit," able to endow his followers with that same Spirit (cf. John 16:7, "if I go not away, the Comforter will not come").

Application.—Our Lord's resurrection is the foundation for our spiritual life, the basis on which we are able to enjoy the work of the Spirit and the blessings of the New Covenant. We do not simply observe the glory of the Father in raising Christ, or look forward to the future resurrection of our bodies when the Son exercises his delegated power of resurrection. We share in Christ's resurrection now. His new life is our new life, a life in the Spirit.

Summary of the Three

The Father raised the Son to manifest his own glory. The Father is the *source* of the resurrection.

The Father gave the Son power to lay down and take up his own life, and in this power the Son will raise the dead physically at the last day. The Son is the *agent* of the resurrection.

Through resurrection, the Son becomes "a quickening Spirit," able to bring spiritual life to his own people by giving them the Spirit. The Spirit and his work in our lives is the *object* of the resurrection. Roma 8:11-13.