

SHORT STUDY

***Appointed Son(s):  
An Exegetical Note on  
Romans 1:4 and 8:29***

J. R. DANIEL KIRK  
DUKE UNIVERSITY

Romans 8 portrays the fate of the believer in terms of suffering and glory: suffering now leads to glory at the consummation of all things. What Paul presents in this chapter, however, is not an abstract "pattern" of suffering leading to glory; rather, the movement from suffering to glory forms the plot of Christ's story in which the believer participates. The believer suffers with Christ in order to be glorified with Christ (8:17). The transformation that Paul envisions for believers is a full transformation into the sonship that is Christ's own.<sup>1</sup> Given the close connection between becoming a child of God and dying and rising with Christ, it is somewhat curious that the connection between Rom 8:29 and 1:4 has been largely overlooked by commentators.

In a context where Paul is looking to the "redemption of the body" as the consummation of Christian adoption, he says in 8:29:

ὅτι οὓς προέγνω, καὶ προώρισεν συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνος τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πρωτότοκον ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς

Because those whom he foreknew he also appointed beforehand to be conformed to the image of his son, so that he would be the first-born among many brothers.

This description of the believer's hope contains a verbal and thematic resonance with 1:4. Describing the gospel he preaches, Paul calls Jesus: τοῦ ὀρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει κατὰ πνεῦμα ἁγιοσύνης ἐξ

1. The masculine "sons" here is not being used to imply that Paul envisions all becoming male in the resurrection (quite the opposite; see Nigel Watson, "And if Children, Then Heirs! (Rom 8:17): Why Not Sons?" *ABR* 49 [2001]: 53-56). Indulging such language, however, will help us make clear the close link in Paul's thought between what Jesus is, on the one hand, and what the believer is and becomes, on the other.

ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν, "the one appointed son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from among the dead." Paul uses the same root word, ὀρίζω, to speak of the action of God upon Jesus (ὀρισθέντος, 1:4) and the action of God with respect to believers (προὐρίσσειν, 8:29). What God does for Jesus in the resurrection, he does "beforehand" to believers. Moreover, the end of this action of God is, in both instances, the attainment of sonship. Jesus was appointed son of God, and believers are conformed to that image in order to become Jesus' siblings, that is, sons of God. Finally, this action of God finds its outworking, ultimately, in the giving of resurrection life. Jesus is declared son of God ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν, and believers receive the consummation of their adoption also at the resurrection (8:11, 13-17, 18-19, 23). What we have in 8:29 is more than simply common word usage. We have a common development of a common theme, where the work of God for his chosen people is told in terms of the work of God for his resurrected Son.

The most obvious explanation for the oversight of this connection in modern interpretation is the marginal status of 1:4 in light of its widely proclaimed origin as hymnic material. And scholars will sometimes bolster the claim for a hymnic origin based on deviation from Paul's theology of Jesus' sonship. My exegetical observations indicate that, whether or not this verse is part of an early Christian hymn, its articulation of the resurrection and divine sonship is integral to Paul's own thought.