

Raised or Not?

1 Corinthians 15:1-34

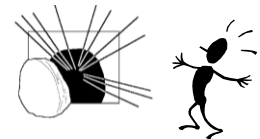


What We Preached, What You Believed

- ❑ Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. Paul reminds the Corinthians of “the gospel” that he preached to them. They received it (*past*).¹ They are standing on it (*present*), and by it, they are being saved (*view to future*).
 1. What is the heart (essential content) of the gospel? What is of “first importance?”²
 - That Christ _____ for our sins, according to the Scriptures (*v. 3b*).³
 - That he was buried (*v. 4a*).
 - That he was _____ on the third day, according to the Scriptures (*v. 4b*).⁴
 - That he _____ to Peter and the Twelve (*and many others*) (*v. 5, ff.*)
- ❑ Paul says that the risen Christ appeared to Peter, then “the Twelve,” then to more than 500 brothers at the same time, then to James, then to all of the apostles, and last of all, to Paul.⁵
- ❑ In v. 11, Paul says that the message *he* preached is the consistent message of the apostles (it’s what *we* preach). If you do not hold firmly to *this* gospel, you have “believed in vain” (15:2).

If There is No Resurrection ...

- ❑ Apparently, while they believed in Christ’s resurrection, some of the Corinthians *did not* believe in the future resurrection of believers.⁶ Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19.
 2. Paul argues that if we deny the resurrection from the dead, then Christ himself has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, what is true according to this passage?⁷



¹ Paul does not attempt to prove Christ’s resurrection. The Corinthians have already believed it. If you doubt the historicity (historical actuality) of Christ’s resurrection, consider Jay’s handouts entitled “The Passion of Christ,” “The Resurrection of Christ,” and “The Reliability of the New Testament.” See Jay for other resources.

² Paul writes four phrases in verses 3-5, each beginning with “that” (ὅτι, *hoti*). It is likely that Paul is repeating a very early creed (statement of beliefs) common to the entire church.

³ Jesus Christ is our “Passover lamb” (1 Corinthians 5:7). He died as an “atoning sacrifice” for our sins (1 John 2:2; 4:9-10). He died in our place, so that we could be forgiven of our sins. See “What is Atonement?” (on ICF website) This was “according to the Scriptures.” It was according to “God’s set purpose and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23). Specific Scriptures pointing to Jesus’ death include Isaiah 52:13-53:12 and Psalm 22:1, 6-8, 15-18; among others.

⁴ As in verse 3, “according to the Scriptures” is probably general. Specific Scriptures pointing to Christ’s resurrection may include Hosea 6:2 and Psalm 16:8-10 (quoted by Peter in Acts 2:25-28).

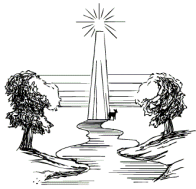
⁵ The risen Jesus appeared to hundreds of people, “most of whom are still living.” Thus they could confirm or dispute Paul’s statement, adding credibility to his claim. Paul refers to himself as “abnormally born” or “untimely born” (ESV), which is interpreted in various ways. David Garland says the Greek word *ektrōma* means “aborted, or stillborn child;” and Paul was referring to his being “dead,” relative to the other apostles, when Christ appeared to him.

⁶ The Bible teaches a future resurrection of all people (Daniel 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Rev. 20:12-13). Believers will rise to everlasting life, while others will rise to condemnation. Here Paul focuses only on believers.

⁷ If Christ has not been raised; the apostles’ “preaching is useless (κενον - empty);” your faith is “useless;” the apostles are liars (false witnesses); your faith is “futile” (ματαιία); “You are still in your sins;” Christians who have died are “lost” (απόλοντο – have perished). If our hope in Christ is limited to this life only, we “are to be pitied.”

The Necessity of the Resurrection

- ❑ Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-28. Christ is called “the firstfruits”⁸ of those believers who have died.⁹ Christ’s bodily resurrection is the beginning of the resurrection from the dead, and is the guarantee that his followers will also be bodily resurrected.
- ❑ All people are identified with either Adam or Christ. In Adam, all die. In Christ, all will be made alive. But there is a particular order of events. Christ’s bodily resurrection has occurred in history. His followers’ resurrection will occur “when he comes.”¹⁰
- ❑ “Then the end will come” (v. 24a). Christ will “destroy”¹¹ all dominion, authority and power.”¹²



Death will be destroyed completely. Death is the “last enemy.” It is abolished by resurrection, beginning with Christ’s resurrection, and completed with the resurrection of all believers at the end. The resurrection of believers must happen to finally defeat death.

- ❑ Finally, God the Father will establish his absolute sovereign rule in the new perfect order.

3. Why is a *bodily* resurrection of believers needed in God’s plan of salvation?¹³

If There is No Resurrection ...

- ❑ Read 1 Corinthians 15:29-34.¹⁴ If there is no resurrection from the dead, it affects the basis of Christian motivation in life. If it is not true, why make sacrifices for the sake of Christ? Why deny oneself from the selfish pursuit of earthly pleasures?
 - 📖 “If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’ (15:32b).
- ❑ But there *is* a resurrection from the dead! As Christians, this fact should greatly affect our motivation in life, and our way of living. This fact also means *power* for Christian living.¹⁵ The “Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead” empowers *us* to live the Christian life.

Reflection & Application

- Do you believe that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead? What is the basis for your belief or disbelief? If you do not believe, have you thoroughly investigated the evidence with an open mind? Read the next two pages, and ask Jay about other resources on this subject.
- Christ has been raised! Do you need to respond to the gospel by trusting in the risen Christ?
- Since Christ has been raised from the dead, his followers will also be bodily raised! As a Christian, what difference does this make in your daily life? Pray and reflect on this passage, asking God to show you how it should affect your attitudes, priorities, and actions.

⁸ “firstfruits” (ἀπαρχή, *aparchē*) – agricultural metaphor, referring to the beginning of the harvest, and the guarantee that the rest of the harvest is coming.

⁹ “fallen asleep” (ἐκοιμήθησαν, *ekoimēthēsan*) – a common expression referring to physical death

¹⁰ “when he comes” – lit. “at his coming” (παρουσία, *parousia*) – refers to his glorious second coming

¹¹ “destroy” (καταργεῖν, *katargein*) – “to render ineffective,” - here meaning “dethrone,” “abolish,” or “overthrow.”

¹² “all dominion, authority and power” – refers to all opposing forces, including opposing spiritual forces

¹³ Greek philosophy influenced the idea that salvation involved the soul, but not the body.

¹⁴ “baptized for the dead” - interpretation is difficult, resulting in various views. Two include 1) baptism on behalf of persons who have died (but it seems that Paul would criticize this practice); 2) baptism of “dead,” as a metaphor for believers who are baptized in anticipation of resurrection. There are other views, but the exact meaning is uncertain.

¹⁵ This is not Paul’s emphasis in this passage, but it is important to remember. See Romans 6:1-14; 8:1-11.



The Resurrection of Christ

"He was dead ... He was buried ...
He was raised"



1. The Empty Tomb

- a. The wide majority of New Testament scholars affirm the Gospels' assertion that Jesus' body was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea (*Mark 15:42-47*).
- b. The tomb was secure. The stone covering the entrance to the tomb was "very large" (*Mark 16:4, cf. Mt 27:60*). A disk-shaped stone was probably rolled down an inclined groove and lodged into place. The Roman government took precautions to make sure that the tomb was secure (*Matthew 27:62-66*). In response to the Jewish leaders' concerns that Jesus' disciples might steal the body, Pilate said to them, "Take a guard...Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.' So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting a guard" (*Matthew 27:65-66*).
- c. On Sunday morning, the tomb was found empty. William Lane Craig offers the following arguments for the historical credibility of the empty tomb story.
 - The empty tomb is implicit in the creed passed along by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. It is generally agreed that this creed (set of fundamental beliefs) was a very early statement of beliefs common to the entire church, and not the product of later legend.
 - The site of the tomb was known. If it were not empty, it would be impossible for a movement founded on belief in the resurrection to have come into existence in the same city where Jesus was publicly executed and buried.
 - The source material for Mark's gospel is obviously early (perhaps no later than A.D. 37) and is much too early for legend to have seriously corrupted it.
 - Mark's narrative is written in a simple, non-apologetic style. It does not exhibit the characteristics of legend.
 - The unanimous testimony that the empty tomb was discovered by women argues for the authenticity of the story, because the testimony of women was regarded as worthless (women did not qualify as legal witnesses). If the story were invented, the first people to discover the empty tomb would certainly not be women.
 - The earliest Jewish polemic (refutation) presupposes the empty tomb (*Matthew 28:13-15*). The empty tomb was not denied. Instead, they claimed that the disciples stole the body.



2. The Post-Resurrection Appearances of Jesus Christ

- a. The testimony of Paul shows that the disciples saw appearances of Christ. At the end of the creed stated in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, Paul writes, "[Christ] appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep (died). Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born" (*1 Co 15:5-8*). As noted above (1.c), this creed is a very early statement of beliefs, supporting the historic credibility of the reported appearances.
- b. The Gospel accounts of the resurrection appearances are historically reliable. They are early, and the presence of living eyewitnesses would hinder significant accrual of legend.

- c. The resurrection appearances are historically credible. They involve a significant variety of people, locations, and reactions (*Mt 28:9-10; 16-20; Mk 16:9-18; Luke 24:13-49; John 20:11-31; 21:1-23; Acts 1:3-8; 9:1-19; 1 Co 9:1, 15:5-7*). The following are a sample:
- Appearance to the women. The fact that women were the first to see the risen Jesus lends credibility to the story (see 1.c above).
 - Appearance to the five-hundred (500). Paul wrote that most of these eyewitnesses are “still living.” Thus there were many people who could verify or refute Paul’s claims.
 - Appearance to James. Earlier skeptical and embarrassed concerning his half-brother Jesus (*Mark 3:21; John 7:1-5*), James became a leader of the church in Jerusalem (*Acts 15:13ff; Galatians 1:19; 2:9*) and was eventually martyred for his faith.
 - Appearance to Paul. Earlier very aggressive in his opposition to Christianity (*Acts 7:59-8:1; Galatians 1:13*), Paul became a fearless proponent of the Christian faith after his encounter with the risen Christ (*Acts 9:1-19*). He was eventually martyred.
- d. The resurrection appearances were physical, bodily appearances. Some critics contend that Jesus’ resurrection body was “spiritual” involving no physical reality. However, this is contrary to Paul and the Gospels, as well as the Jewish conceptions of resurrection.
- Paul teaches that our future resurrection bodies (modeled after Jesus’ resurrection body) will be “spiritual” (*1 Corinthians 15:42-49*). However, πνευματικός means “spiritual” in the sense of orientation, not substance (*cf. 1 Co 2:15*). It is a body fitted for the new age (that is, imperishable, incorruptible, immortal), as opposed to a “natural” body (which is perishable, corruptible, mortal).
 - The Gospels confirm that the appearances were physical and bodily. Every resurrection appearance in the Gospels is a physical, bodily appearance. As Jesus said to his startled and frightened disciples, “Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have” (*Luke 24:39*).



3. *The Results of the Resurrection*

- a. When Jesus was arrested, “all the disciples deserted him and fled” (*Mt 26:56, Mk 14:50*). During Jesus’ trial, Peter denied him three times (*Mt 26:69-74, Mk 14:66-71*). After Jesus’ crucifixion, his fearful disciples hid in a room and locked the doors (*John 20:19*). After seeing the risen Jesus, the disciples became fearless witnesses of the risen Christ (*Acts 3:14-15; 10:39-41*). They were willing to suffer and die for their beliefs (and most of them did). In general, people do not suffer and die for something they know is not true.
- b. Hardened skeptics, like Paul and James, were radically transformed as noted above (2.c).
- c. The Christian church was born as a result of the death and resurrection of Christ. The earliest Christians were Jews who abandoned cherished religious and social traditions to follow Christ. The early Christians were beaten, stoned to death, tortured, and crucified. Yet they remained peaceful, and the church rapidly expanded across cultures. Without the resurrection of Christ, the birth and growth of the Christian church is inconceivable.

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