

X. The Apostles' Creed in Biblical Perspective

"I Believe..."

"The Third Day He Arose"

I Corinthians 15:1–20

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This is God's Word inerrant, infallible and inspired Word. It's the truth. I Corinthians 15:1–19 says *[1] Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, [2] and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*

[3] For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, [4] that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, [5] and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. [6] Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. [7] Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. [8] Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared also to me. [9] For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. [10] But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. [11] Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

[12] Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? [13] But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. [14] And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. [15] We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. [16] For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. [17] And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. [18] Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. [19] If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

The year was 1970. Now some reading this may not have even been born yet but I certainly was. I had been a Christian a little bit over a year. I was married and had done what I had promised making sure my wife got through school. After she finished I returned to my educational process at East Carolina University and was met with a challenge. Before I tell you the challenge, I want you to know I was raised in a Christian home even though I had not become one yet. In my home Jesus' virgin birth, His sinless life, His atoning death, His resurrection, His ascension and His second coming were never questioned. All of that was a truth and fact in my home. This was also true in my extended family. My dad and mom made sure the churches we attended were Bible believing churches and that we regularly attended each week so I regularly heard those truths preached unchallenged.

That was not the way it was when I got back to East Carolina as a new believer. Immediately in my classroom and with my classmates I was challenged on many of these issues. One classmate said to me 'So you've now become a Christian since you were gone and have come back.' I said 'That's right. God has saved me from my sins so can I share with you...' He

stopped me and said ‘This Christianity stuff is okay and it’s probably just as good or better as many of these other religions, but don’t bother because all that virgin birth, resurrection stuff, how can anyone who walks and thinks possibly believe that?’ I said ‘I believe that.’ He said ‘I’d like to challenge you.’ We started our discussion and I’ll never forget the book he handed me. I still have it and it’s called The Passover Plot.

This book attacks the resurrection of Christ as a skeptic and he tries to explain what happened. You can’t get away from the historicity that Jesus is real and died on the cross for there is too much extra Biblical evidence to deny that. Now the resurrection is what he says is a myth or a legend so he tries to give a more feeble and rational understanding of what he thinks happens. This book summarizes some of the explanations. For instance, one explanation is people developed the doctrine of the resurrection because they forgot where the body was. They lost the body so this legend about Jesus being resurrected developed because they couldn’t locate the body. Another explanation was that the body was stolen to create this myth or legend of the resurrection, likely by His Disciples or some interested group. A third explanation was a conspiracy explanation that either the Jews or Romans stole the body so that they could put an end to things. A fourth explanation is called the discernment theory. This was that when the Apostles said it really happened because they had seen Him, the theory says that it took the death of Jesus for them to “see” what He was all about. When this would happen to us we would use the phrase ‘Oh now I get it’ type of thing. So this theory says they didn’t really see Him with the senses of the yes but they see it cognitively with all that He was trying to teach them – now we get it.

The one thing you can be assured of is that when someone tells you something like this the next thing out of their mouth will be without due respect. With undue respect, in three days they lost the tomb?? Joseph of Arimathea owned it, had it carved out and couldn’t remember where it was?? That one is a leap of faith. Stolen body by the Jews or the Romans?? When Peter stands up and says ‘this Jesus whom you crucified was raised from the dead,’ all they had to do was roll out the body and Christianity would have been over.

The one that is the most interesting is the fifth theory, known as the swoon theory. That is what The Passover Plot is really all about. This theory says that when Jesus was on the cross He didn’t really die but went into a shock swoon – almost like a coma where it looked like He was dead. There have been times where people were pronounced dead but they weren’t really dead and Jesus was one of those. These people did this almost every day where they would pronounce when people die, but we’ll pretend that the Romans soldiers really didn’t know their trade. So Jesus didn’t really die and therefore He swooned. When they took Him down from the cross, put spices on His body, and put Him in the tomb the coolness from the tomb kind of refreshed Him and resuscitated Him and He came forth. And then came out of the tomb.

Do you remember the movie *Passion*? One of the things that would be an asset of that movie would be giving you some sense of the scourging Jesus went through that just ripped His body to pieces. These men knew how to take you right to the point of death and then leave you to suffer on that cross. Then He is on that cross for hours, with all that weight upon His lungs and the buildup of the fluids. They know where to put the spear into His rib cage into the cavity of His heart and out comes the evidence of death – blood and water separated. They take Him down and put 75 pounds of spices on His body. They put Him in a tomb and rolled the stone in front of it. Then He took a breath of air and said ‘I feel better now so I’m going to remove that two and half ton stone at the entrance’???

This is dishonest, deceptive and it doesn't treat the Bible even as a book much less the Word of God. I can't give it due respect. So what really happened? The writers of the Apostles' Creed wanted you to have a distillation of essential Biblical truth of what Christianity is. I am hoping and praying that somehow out of this the light will go on and when someone asks you to tell them briefly what it means to be a Christian you will know how to answer them. You can use the Apostles' Creed to do that by saying the following;

God made you — *I believe in God the Father Almighty*, (first affirmation)

maker of heaven and earth;

God saves you — *I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord*, (second affirmation)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried;

he descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again;

he ascended into heaven,

is seated at the right hand of the Father,

and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, (third affirmation)

the holy catholic church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body

and the life everlasting. Amen.

It's not all the essentials but it is a collection of the New Testament statements of the fulfillment of the Old Testament precepts and prophecies in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. It is given in an economic fashion with only 100 words in Latin but 75 of those words are in the second paragraph in affirmation of who Jesus is and what He has done. In fact, it borrows the flow of Philippians 2 in Biblical Christology. The flow of His descent into humiliation, then His ascent in triumph. His descent consisted of *who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried* (His body was buried); *he descended into hell* (His soul went to Sheol) but His body, the Psalmist says, will not suffer corruption for God would not abandon His soul to Sheol in hades. The third day He rose again and ascended and sits in session the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and is coming again. This time, not to bear judgment, but to bring judgment and gather His people to Himself. Who are those people? They are the work of the Holy Spirit who brings them into His church universal – His holy catholic church. They enjoy the communion of the saints and know of the resurrection of the body and our assured that they have life everlasting.

Here you are at a crucial point for you have followed the descent of Jesus to its nadir. Now begins His ascent. Philippians 2:5–11 says [5] *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus*, [6] *who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped*, [7] *but emptied (humbled) Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men*. [8] *And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*. [9] *Therefore God has highly exalted him* (step one of exaltation) *and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name*,

[10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

He was three days under the power of death, body and soul – true body, true soul. On the third day He arose! One might say, do I have to believe that to be a Christian? What do you think Paul would say if you asked him that question?

Creeds are confessions in worship. They are used in discipleship and they are used to protect the purity of doctrine in the church. There are Biblical creeds and then there are extra Biblical creeds and they are only so valuable as they are faithful to the Scriptures which is why I take you to the most clear text as we look at each affirmation in the Apostles' Creed. In this study we are on our tenth affirmation – the third day He arose. Now there are many other texts of Scripture that support these affirmations but I try to go to the clearest one to try and affirm that affirmation plus its essential nature due to the time I have in each study.

How do the writers of the Apostles' Creed looking back at I Corinthians 15 answer all those plot theories from The Passover Plot book? They answered by saying on the third day He arose. They are drawing that from I Corinthians 15 but also from other texts of Scripture as well. The Apostle Paul does a lot more than simply state it. We can simply state it because of all that undergirds it but the Apostle Paul inspired by the Holy Spirit did.

What I'm about to say my wife will affirm and that is if I have some free time to watch a television program I try to find some kind of crime solving program because those I really enjoy. My favorite of all time is the vintage Perry Mason. Throughout each program Perry systematically backs into the corner the one who really did it and its implications. I'll try to get a bit more contemporary. Another one of my favorites was Foyle's War. A few places I had to close my eyes and walk out but most of the time it was okay. I really enjoyed trying to solve the cases.

So here is the Apostle Paul writing to the church at Corinth which is right below Athens, the intellectual capital of the world and has become the sensual immoral capital of the world. In fact, if you were an immoral person you would be called a Corinthian. Paul writes to them because there in that church the Gospel is at work saving them. Paul says in I Corinthians 6:9–11, *[9] Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, [10] nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. [11] And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

Paul is saying that God has taken that Corinthian out of you and put Jesus in you and it's showing up in your life. They were also under the influence of Athens and this intellectual capital had stoicism, epicureanism, all these other 'isms and the most dominant Plato who said the spiritual is good and the physical is evil which is why they burned bodies when people died. They had no hope. They wanted to get rid of the evil. That's why when Paul stood up at Mars Hill and preached the resurrection they laughed at him and said 'who wants to be resurrected?' In Corinthian they denied the resurrection of the body of a believer after they die so the Apostle Paul takes them on. You can see the lawyer (Paul) at work for he puts the Corinthians and their false doctrine of denying the resurrection on trial with five questions.

Here are the five questions. The first question is, is the resurrection of Jesus historical? The Apostles' Creed says 'on the third day He arose.' Have you noticed how the Apostles' Creed does not allow us to make Christianity a philosophical inquiry? It keeps rooting it in the authenticity of life, space, time and history. Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate. Jesus was born

of the Virgin Mary – of real people, real time, real space, real events. Now he says Jesus was resurrected, not in their minds, not in a legend, but on the THIRD day He arose. They also put it in the historical framework of Biblical cosmology which is how we view life. They are talking like Hebrews because in Hebrew mentality a day is evening, then morning and any part of that day makes the day.

Genesis 1:5 says *[5] God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.* Most people think the day begins in the morning. In the Hebrew mind the day begins in the evening. The Sabbath begins at 6pm on Saturday evening or in the Old Testament it began on Friday evening, at sun down. So when Jesus dies on that day of preparation that is one day – evening morning and all that is attached to it. Then He goes to the grave on that day – He is buried on that day. Then there is evening and morning the next day. Then on the next day there is evening and then that morning He rises which is the third day. This is a historical reality, not an invented solution to a lost body, a stolen body or a fabrication of a swooned body.

The second question is, is the resurrection of Jesus Biblical? Paul says in I Corinthians 15:3–4, *[3] For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.* What Scriptures? It was the Old Testament. It was prophesied in the Old Testament that the Messiah would die an atoning death, be buried and raised and it would be a third day resurrection. The prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus, the Scripture. The Gospels affirm the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The epistles expound and explain the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The Old Testament Scriptures and the New Testament Scriptures all point to Jesus – one points forward and the other one points backward.

Even more than that and I'm very indebted to Dr. Ferguson for where we are trafficking right now is Exodus 28 which goes into the death, burial, descended into hades and raised on the third day through the description of the tabernacle, sacrifices, the priesthood, the High Priest, his guard and then there was the 12 stones of the 12 tribes that would carry their sins into the presence of God with a sacrifice of an unblemished lamb. He would be clothed with the 12 stones but also with Urim and the Thummim upon his heart, as the priest would go into the holy of holies bearing the sins of the 12 tribes. The question is from Exodus 28, will he come out, because the wages of sin is death. Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement. The High Priest alone can bring it. The sacrifice appointed by God, clothed in the robe that God had ordained for the priest. When he goes in, will he not come out?

Can you not see them on that day, Jesus our Messiah, our Priest, King and Prophet, bearing the sacrifice? He is not only the fulfillment of the Priesthood but He is the Sacrifice, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Now He says 'Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit' (Psalm 31:5, Luke 23:46). Will He live? Will He come forth? That is exactly what is at work for it is Biblical by prophecy, Gospel, epistle, signs, types and symbols.

The third question is, is the resurrection of Jesus verifiable? Paul give us some witnesses for the Bible says everything has to be confirmed by two or more witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15, II Corinthians 13:1). Paul doesn't even point out all he knows about but we know arguably there are 15 different appearances Jesus makes and most of the time to multiple people. Paul doesn't bother calling out the women even though the Gospels make a big deal about them being the last at the cross and first at the tomb. The angel said to Mary, 'Go tell' and she was a witness. The women went to tell, they were witnesses. Paul points out Cephas being a witness

who is Peter and James the half-brother of Jesus who at the time Paul rights Corinthians is the pastor at the church in Jerusalem. By the way, James and his brothers were mocking Jesus but now go ask him if he saw Jesus resurrected.

A third group of witnesses he points out was there was an assembly of 500 professing believers who had gotten together with Jesus prior to His ascension. He points out three things about these witnesses. They all met at one time, with all seeing Jesus who was together with them, not a collection of individual moments of hysteria. Secondly, some of these 500 have fallen asleep in Jesus but the rest are still alive. Go get in touch with them for you to speak with. The Apostles/Disciples saw Jesus.

Then Paul gives himself as a witness. When did Paul see Him? Paul wasn't there was he? No, I didn't see Him there for I'm a Disciple untimely born. My birth, nor did my new birth allow me to see Him then, but he did see Him because according to the book of Galatians after he was converted he was taken out into the wilderness and saw the risen Savior and the risen Savior taught him, not man (Galatians 1:12). So it is verifiable, go check the witnesses.

The fourth question is, is the resurrection of Jesus essential? Can I not believe in the resurrection of Christ and still be a Christian? Paul says 'I've given you the Gospel and if the Gospel isn't true then your faith is in vain. The Gospel I've delivered to you is of first importance. The Gospel is that Jesus died for your sins and was raised.' It is essential. In fact, he creates a way to do it. Paul must have gotten a good law degree from Gamaliel and then he must have gotten some good philosophy training somewhere because he reaches in to a very dangerous tactic that you can use in a fallacious way – it's called *reductio ad absurdum* – stands for reduce in absurdity. You can do this falsely but you can also do it rightly and Paul does it rightly.

Here is how it works. You take the premise that someone is proposing and then you fairly, rightly, and honestly represent it. Then you show where it leads to and ultimately it is absurdity. Fallacy is when you treat it as absurd. No, you treat it with integrity and then you trace it out logically and philosophically to where it leads. So in Corinth they said there is no resurrection of the body. Paul says if there is no resurrection of the body then Christ hasn't been raised. Christ is the firstfruits. What is our resurrection? We're the harvest. When you get the firstfruit you know the harvest is coming. So if there is no harvest then there was no firstfruits. Or think of it this way; if a general resurrection of the believer doesn't happen then a particular resurrection of Christ could not happen. If this doesn't happen then that can't happen, etc. and then Paul really drives it home.

Then Paul gives them the absurdity of such a thought. Not only is Christ not risen but if Christ isn't risen then let's trace it out a step further because that means my preaching is in vain. There is nothing more stupid than what I'm doing and what I have given my life to, Paul says. I will personalize this to myself. I have lived the vast majority of my life as a preacher of the Gospel, the last 50 years. If Jesus isn't raised then I'm an utter idiot and some of you may have already come to that conclusion and that's okay. My message, my calling and my vocation is nothing but a wasted empty endeavor if Christ isn't risen.

Paul then says that if that is so then your faith is in vain. You believed in a lie no matter how sincere you are. If Jesus isn't raised your faith is nothing but vanity. Then we are also false witnesses of God if we say God raised Jesus from the dead and He didn't raise Him from the dead. There is a cult out there called Jehovah's Witnesses. Okay, so you just joined a cult. You're cult is Jehovah's False Witnesses. You are blaspheming Jehovah if Jesus isn't risen. And you are still in your sins – their guilt, shame, its power and destination of hell – if Jesus isn't

raised. Next, all those people that died in Christ they perished – they are worm food. All those platitudes beside the grave who you think are in a better place is all hogwash. Remember loved ones who believed in Jesus who at the grave the pastor comforted you with Biblical truth – absent from the body present with the Lord – then if Jesus isn't raised that's empty. There is no comfort. If Jesus isn't raised we ought to be pitied. Hey world, don't get angry or irritated with us but pity us. Paul says if we believe Jesus isn't raised then we are of most men to be pitied.

Life is empty and I did a podcast with Nancy Guthrie who asked me about my study on Ecclesiastes. I wished I had talked to her before I did my series on Ecclesiastes because she said to me 'have you noticed how many times in I Corinthians 15 tied to the resurrection of Jesus is the word vanity?' Paul is borrowing from Ecclesiastes. If Jesus isn't raised then preaching is empty, faith is empty, future is empty, for everything is vanity if Jesus isn't raised. So do you think the resurrection is essential? I believe in the resurrection and therefore I believe in the resurrection of Christ, on the third day He arose.

Here is the takeaway. While the Bible resolutely affirms that the resurrection of Christ is historical, Scriptural, verifiable, essential and effectual – oh wait, pastor you left out effectual. Not really. Go back to the witnesses. Peter, is Jesus raised? Yes, I saw Him. Peter, is His resurrection effectual in your life? Yes, for I was traitor, now I'm a preacher. I denied Him three times. His resurrection is effectual because I'm forgiven and I'm a preacher. I'll never deny Him again. This Jesus whom you crucified God raise Him from the dead. To the women witnesses – did the resurrection of Jesus change your life? You who were discouraged on the way to the tomb, did you leave it differently because He was risen? James, the half-brother of Jesus, with your three other brothers, did the resurrection of Jesus do anything to you? Yes, I once mocked Him and made fun of Him and now I believe Him. By the way, James is about to die for Him as the pastor at the church of Jerusalem. Paul, did it make any difference to you? Yes, for I used to kill Christians and now I win them to Him. I used to destroy churches and now I plant them. I used to hate Christians and now I love them. I have been changed.

I love the hymn *He Lives*. The chorus says;
He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.
He lives! He lives! Salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart.

You ask me how I know He lives, He's historic, He's Biblical, He's verifiable and yes He lives within my heart. Yes, He doesn't live because I live for I live because He lives. This Savior is the One who took this ungodly, immoral, profane blasphemer and not only saved me but allows me to take His Holy Word and teach it to His people.

The resurrection of Jesus is not only Biblical, historical, verifiable, essential but it is also effectual. Can I be a Christian and not believe in the resurrection? No. Is it a secondary doctrine? No. Romans 4:24–25 says [24] *It will be counted to us who believe in Him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, [25] who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.* For three days after His atoning death He was in the grave. Was it vain?

In Exodus 28 we get to the issue of this; it also relentlessly demands your response and your response to the resurrected Christ will determine your comfort or your condemnation in life and death. Was there a real American Revolution, the War of Independence? Was there a real Declaration of Independence signed? Did Caesar cross the Rubicon? Those are historical events. Jesus was raised and that's history, faithful to the Word. You and I will die and there

have only been two exceptions – Enoch and Elijah – and then the judgment. That’s reality. What you do with this life will determine what happens there.

Why will you die? Will you not live to the One who died for you and lives to ever save you? I can’t imagine what it was like as those Israelites would watch Aaron with the lamb take that sacrifice into the Holy of Holies. They could also hear him for God had put at the hem of the robe that he wore, a golden bell. He passed the court of the women. He passed the court of Gentiles. He passed the court of the Israelites and then they saw him no more for into the Holy of Holies he would go, but they could hear the bell. Jesus, our High Priest, clothed with His righteousness – Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit – will He come again? For three days they heard no bell but then the third day, the Lord’s Day He rose. I see the Redeemer, my Priest, and I see the Lamb standing, who was slain for me. I believe in the resurrection. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments together in Your Word. Would You speak to their hearts through Your Spirit? If you’re a believer I hope and pray the comfort and the encouragement of the resurrection of Christ as a Biblical, historical, verifiable, essential and effectual truth will fill your heart but if you have not yet come to Christ, I pray in some way the Spirit of God will let you see the absurdity of not receiving the One who died for you. He humbled Himself and now exalted Christus Victor, announcing the triumph of His atoning death, will you humble yourself that you might be exalted in Christ who is risen, hallelujah! Holy Spirit do Your work and anyone reading this who is not yet in Christ, bring them to the One who lives to save them. For those who have, comfort them and encourage them. He lives! I pray in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Power Point

“THE THIRD DAY HE AROSE”

Is the Resurrection of Christ...

- I. Historical?
- II. Biblical?
- III. Verifiable?
- IV. Essential?
- V. Effectual?

LIFE TAKEAWAY

While the Bible resolutely affirms that the Resurrection Christ is historical, Scriptural, verifiable, essential and effectual, it also relentlessly demands your response which will determine your comfort or condemnation in life and death.