

The Evidence for the Resurrection

(1 Corinthians 15:1-11 ~ Part 1)

Introduction

- With the completion of our “Summer Sermon Series” on the Minor Prophets, we turn our attention back to our study of the New Testament book of “1 Corinthians.” This book was actually a letter written by the apostle Paul to the Christians in the church in the city of Corinth (Greece) – “*To the church of God that is in Corinth*” (1:2). The apostle planted the church in Corinth during his second missionary journey (see Acts 18; approx. 51 A.D.). A few years later, approx. 55 A.D., Paul wrote “1 Corinthians” to address disunity and immorality (i.e., sin) in the church.
- After studying fourteen chapters of Paul’s practical instructions and admonitions to the Corinthian church (e.g., conflict/factions, sexual immorality, singleness/marriage/divorce/remarriage, Christian freedoms, corporate worship, gender roles/responsibilities, spiritual gifts) we find that chapter fifteen almost entirely doctrinal – almost entirely devoted to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In fact, 1 Corinthians fifteen is the longest and broadest teaching on the resurrection in all of the Bible (and the longest chapter in 1 Corinthians).

Chapter fifteen is not, however, a stark change in subject or unrelated topic. In fact, this chapter represents that which is foundational to the church – not just doctrinally but also practically. For the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not just something Christians believe but the very basis their faith. The resurrection not only affects how Christians think but also how they live. The fundamental reason why we have hope and joy is because we serve a risen Savior! The doctrine of the resurrection of Christ influences our attitudes and behaviors, as well as our preaching and teaching.

- While it is true to say, “without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, there would be no salvation” the same can be said of Christ’s miraculous birth, His sinless life, and His substitutionary death. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the climax and fulfillment of Jesus’ birth, life, and death. It is God’s “Amen” to Jesus’ “*It is finished!*” (Jn.19:30).

Without the resurrection of Jesus Christ Christmas would just be another religious holiday, impotent to have any eternal impact on our lives. Without the resurrection, the crucifixion would be nothing but a tragic death of the “would-be” Messiah that God sent to die for the sins of the world. And without the resurrection of Jesus Christ each and every one of our lives would be without hope, without joy, without purpose, and lost in the eternal damnation of our sins (more on this, Lord willing, next week).

- This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why so many non-Christians have, for millennia, have sought to undermine and mock the resurrection of Christ. Every Easter season, various media outlets promote “historical” and “logical” reasons to cast doubt on Christ’s resurrection. In fact, ever since the day when Christ rose from the dead people tried to refute, and even coverup, the truth of Christ’s resurrection.

Matt 28:11-15 [30/33 A.D.] ~ “While they [the women] were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. ¹²And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers ¹³and said, ‘Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ ¹⁴And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.’ ¹⁵So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.”

Acts 17:16-21, 32 [49 A.D.] ~ “Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, ‘What does this babbling wish to say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities’ – because he was

preaching Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, ‘May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.’ ²¹Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. ... ³²Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, ‘We will hear you again about this.’”

➤ The primacy of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is also why Paul included it in his letter to the Corinthian church. The book of “1 Corinthians” (55 A.D.) was written only a couple decades after Christ’s bodily resurrection. Writing words inspired by the Holy Spirit of God (2Pet.1:20-21; 2Tim.3:16-17), the apostle wanted to “*remind*” (vs.1; *gnōrizō*; make it known/clear) Christians of the truth concerning Christ’s resurrection. While the Corinthian Christians had previously heard of (15:1, 3) and believed in (15:2, 11) the resurrection of Christ, they were all-too-prone to minimize or misunderstand (or forget) the importance of doctrine of the resurrection. If we are not careful, we can fail to “*hold fast*” (vs.2; *katechō*) to the truth of Gospel and the truth of God’s Word. Therefore, we (like the Corinthians) need to be instructed, and regularly reminded, concerning the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1 Cor 15:1-11 ~ “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ²and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you – unless you believed in vain. ³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰But 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. ¹¹Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.”

➤ From this passage, we can identify four major proofs concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

A. The proof of the **SAVED** (vs.1-2)

➤ Paul goes back to the beginning – when the Corinthians first heard the Gospel – “*Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand*” (vs.1). The word “*gospel*” (*euangelion*) means “good news” or “good message.” It is used to describe the miraculous birth, the sinless life, the substitutionary death, and (more specifically) the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Gospel refers to the saving work of Jesus Christ – whose life, death and resurrection paid the penalty for all the sins of everyone who would ever believe.

Paul knew the Corinthian Christians heard the Gospel because he was the one who preached it to them. Here is an interesting play on words. Paul wrote, “*I want to remind you of the “gospel* [euangelion] *I preached* [euangelizō] *to you*” (vs.1) [loose translation: “I want to remind you of the Gospel I gospelized to you”]. Paul was a good news messenger (“evangelist”) of the good news.

➤ Notice the language of this passage. Paul “*remind[ed]*” (vs.1) them of the Gospel that he “*preached*” (vs.1) to them, and that they “*received*” (vs.1) it and took their “*stand*” (vs.1) upon it and were “*saved*” (vs.2) by it. That is, they heard the Gospel, they believed the Gospel, and they were saved by the Gospel. Their Christian testimony was evidence of the power and veracity of the Gospel.

Rom 1:16 ~ “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

Rom 10:16 ~ “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

➤ However, notice also that Paul states *“if you hold fast to the word I preached to you – unless you believed in vain”* (vs2). This does not, as some have suggested, teach that a true believer can lose their salvation. The word *“vain”* (*eikē*) means without reason, cause, or purpose. Paul is saying that not holding fast to the Word of God – i.e., persevering in faith and faithfulness – reveals that one’s profession of faith is meaningless (worthless). Those who are truly saved will ultimately, though not perfectly, persevere in their faith. Those truly belong to Christ – who are in Christ and Christ in them – will not, indeed cannot, lose their salvation (see Jn.10:27-30; Phil.1:6; Rom.8:28-30).

1 John 2:19 ~ “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”

➤ **Matt.13:1-8, 18-23** ~ This parable is not about spiritual growth or successful living. In it, Jesus reveals the heart (vs.19) of those who truly believe. Each of the four soils represent different conditions of the human heart in response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ (the *“seed”* is *“[hearing] the word of the kingdom”* (vs.19). The *“path”* (vs.4, 19) represents the person who, through disbelief, rejects the Gospel entirely. The *“rocky ground”* (vs.5, 20) represents those who superficially respond to the Gospel, but *“when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word”* (vs21) their shallow, shallow faith *“immediately ... falls away”* (vs.21; cf. vs.6). The *“thorns”* (vs.7, 22) is the heart that hears the Gospel, *“but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word”* (vs.22). The *“good soil”* (vs.8, 23) *“is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty”* (vs.23; cf. vs.8).

Only one soil produced fruit (i.e., the good works of righteousness), thus, proving itself to be good soil. The point of this parable is simple: those who are truly saved will persevere in faith and faithfulness. While imperfect, the true Christian will produce (with the enabling power of the indwelling Holy Spirit) will produce a harvest of righteousness.

➤ The power of the Gospel is seen in the transformed life not simply an enhanced life! A superficial belief in Jesus – without a radically changed life – is an empty, meaningless, and powerless belief. It is merely the faith of demons (Jms.2:19), which cannot/will not save (Matt.7:21-23). Jesus is not merely a “get-out-of-hell-free” card. The one who does not *“hold fast”* (vs.2; *katechō*; to hold down/firmly, retain, remain) to the word only exposes the fact that their faith was shallow or nonexistent from the beginning.

Phil 3:8-11 ~ “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith – ¹⁰that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

1 Peter 1:3-6 ~ “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

➤ To the Corinthians, and to us, Paul is saying, “Remember the power of the Gospel that you believe.” Remember how it changed your life. Remember, that once you were in sin but now you are saved from that sin. Remember, that Christ died for our sins and was risen for our lives. Remember when you first received and believed the Gospel. Remember, how it changed your life. Remember that you have not believed the Gospel in vain.

B. The proof of the SCRIPTURES (vs.3-4)

➤ We must know, and never forget, that the whole of Scripture is ultimately about the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the main theme and the very fulfillment of all Scripture – both Old Testament and New (see 2Cor.1:20). “The OT as a whole, through its promises, its symbols, and its pictures of salvation, looks forward to the actual accomplishment of salvation that took place once for all in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ” (*ESV Study Bible*; “Overview of the Bible”). A person cannot truly believe the Bible and not see Jesus as the Incarnate Son of God, and the Savior of the world.

Matt 5:17 ~ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

Matt 26:51-56 ~ “And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. ⁵²Then Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?’ ⁵⁵At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, ‘Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. ⁵⁶But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.’ Then all the disciples left him and fled.” (see Jn.18:4-11; 19:36-37)

John 5:39-40 ~ “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, ⁴⁰yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”

John 5:45-47 ~ “Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. ⁴⁷But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”

Luke 16:29-31 ~ “But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰And he [the rich man] said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

Luke 24:25-27 ~ “And he said to them [the two disciples on the road to Emmaus], ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” (see Gen.3:15; Ps.22; Is.7:14; 53; Mic.5:2; Zech.12:10; 13:7)

Luke 24:44-47 ~ “Then he said to them [the “eleven” (vs.33) and others who were with them], ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’”

➤ As these passages plainly indicate, the “Scriptures” refer to the Old Testament – all three sections of the Old Testament in our Bibles – the Law (or books of Moses), the Psalms (or poetry/wisdom literature), and the Prophets (both major and minor prophets). The Old and New Testaments are not unrelated to one another, and they do not contradict or cancel each other. The New Testament does not represent God’s ‘Plan B’ (there is no Plan B, and no Plan A, there is only The Plan). As Jesus alluded to (Matt.5:17), the New Testament does not abolish the Old Testament – rather, it fulfills it. The New Testament explains, fulfills, and illustrates the Old Testament.

This is one reason while it is absurd for people to think or say: “I like the New Testament, but I do not like the Old Testament”, or “I like the New Testament God but not the Old Testament God”, or “I am a New Testament Christian.” The entire Bible is the story of God’s redemptive plan for mankind. Again, the New Testament is the interpretation and fulfillment of the Old Testament. In fact, as we saw throughout our study of the Minor Prophets, the New Testament is replete with Old Testament quotations and allusions.

- We see this clearly in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians: *“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures”* (vs.3-4). To what *“Scriptures”* (vs.3, 4; *graphē*) was Paul referring? Since there was no “New Testament”, Paul was obviously referring to the Old Testament – the Law (or books of Moses), the Psalms, and the Prophets. The culmination of the entire Bible is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – the Old Testament foretold it, and the New Testament describes it. The Old Testament looks ahead to the cross of Christ, and the New Testament looks back at the cross of Christ.

Acts 26:22-23 ~ [Paul to king Agrippa]: “To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: ²³that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

- Paul’s ministry and preaching was Bible-saturated and Bible-centered. Notice that this was the message that Paul first proclaimed to the Corinthians (not self-empowerment, or self-actualization, or “health and wealth, or “Your best life now”). Paul did not preach himself – his views, his opinion, or his “gospel.” Paul preached the Gospel *“in accordance with the Scriptures”* (vs.3, 4). It is what he himself *“received”*, and what he *“delivered”* (vs.3). Paul’s ministry and his preacher were Bible-centered!

Gal 1:11-12 ~ “For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. ¹²For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” (see Acts 9:1-8)

1 Cor 11:23 ~ “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread”

Hag 1:13 ~ “Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord’s message ...”

- Notice also that Paul referred to this *“as of first importance”* (vs.3; *prōtos*). This word can mean first in order or first in priority, or both (oftentimes what is first is also foremost). Paul is declaring that the Gospel is of the utmost importance. The substitutionary death and supernatural resurrection of Jesus Christ, in accordance with the Scriptures, is the very heart of the Gospel. These are essential truths of the Gospel, truths that every person must believe in order to be saved.

It should be the preacher’s (Christian’s) first message, and their most frequent message. The Gospel of Christ should, directly or indirectly, influence every sermon and affect every Christian testimony. No faithful preacher will ever tire of preaching the Gospel or prioritize some other topic over it. Likewise, no faithful Christian will ever tire of hearing the Gospel preached, or desire to omit the Gospel from their Christian testimony.

C. The proof of the **EYEWITNESSES** (vs.5-10)

- Christ’s resurrection was not an apostolic fairytale or deception. Nor was it an event witnessed only by a handful of people. Many unbelievers attempt to discredit Christ’s resurrection with such rhetoric. They insist that the disciples of Christ lied about His resurrection, or that they were self-deceived or delusional.

Here are some feeble attempts by skeptics and atheists to explain the empty tomb, and deny Jesus' resurrection (adapted from *More Than A Carpenter*, by Josh McDowell):

- a) The Wrong Tomb Theory: A theory offered by Kirsopp Lake assumes that the women who reported the body missing simply went to the wrong tomb. This cannot be valid since the women, the disciples, and the Roman guards would of all had to have missed the tomb even though they all had been there before. In addition, if this had been true the Jewish leaders would simply have gone to the right tomb and produced the dead body of Jesus – squelching any rumor of His resurrection.
- b) The Swoon Theory: Others, namely Venturini, said that Jesus didn't really die; He merely fainted ("swooned") from exhaustion and loss of blood. Everyone thought He was dead, but later He resuscitated, and the disciples thought it to be a resurrection. But even skeptics and atheists like David Friedrich Strauss admit that Jesus beaten, scourged, crucified and speared body (pouring out blood and water) could resuscitate Himself while lying bandaged and bleeding in a cold dark tomb.
✓ Illust: Letter to Christian advice column ~ "Dear Eutyclus, Our preacher said, on Easter, that Jesus just swooned on the cross and that the disciples nursed Him back to health. What do you think? Sincerely, Bewildered." "Dear Bewildered, Beat your preacher with a cat-of-nine-tails with 39 heavy strokes, nail him to a cross; hang him in the sun for 6 hours; run a spear through his side ... put him in an airless tomb for 36 hours and see what happens. Sincerely, Eutyclus."
- c) The Stolen Body Theory: Still another theory maintains that the body of Jesus was simply stolen by the disciples at night while the guards slept. This goes completely contrary to the state of fear and depression the disciples were in when Jesus was buried. To suddenly assume they became brave and daring enough to steal the body from a detachment of soldiers is quite unbelievable. Besides, the guards could not have slept while the disciples moved the large stone in front of the tomb. One would have surely woken up. Likewise, almost every one of the disciples died a martyr's death because they wouldn't renounce their belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. People might die for a false belief, but not for a belief they know to be false.
- d) The Hallucination Theory: This theory declares that the disciples, so overwhelmed with grief and depression, simply imagined (hallucinated) when they say they saw Jesus. If this was true then the same thing happened to over 500 people over a period of forty days. Furthermore, this goes completely contrary to what the guards themselves reported to the Chief Priests (Matt.28:11-15).

Conclusion

➤ After Jesus rose from the dead, He did not immediately ascend to heaven. As we harmonize all of Scripture, we discover that Jesus appeared some (at least) eleven different times over a period of forty days to hundreds of people (most of whom were still alive as Paul wrote this letter; see vs.6). Paul states that he could have called hundreds of eyewitnesses to testify to the truth of Jesus' bodily resurrection.

Luke recorded for us that "*He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God*" (Acts 1:3). He then ascended into heaven where He now is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (see Rom.8:34; Col.3:1; Heb.1:3; 1Pet.3:22). Jesus gave irrefutable proof (empirical evidence) that He is the one and only Savior from God, through His life, death, and resurrection.