

1 Corinthians 15: Four Theological Realities of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

By Dr. Jerry Collins

Verse 3—Reality #1—Christ died for our sins

- Paul had heard of the Lord Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and post-resurrection appearances and passed this information along to others, *for I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received*.
- He apparently received the essence of the gospel on the Damascus road and learned more details from other sources (Galatians 1:11). Namely, *that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures* verified in passages like Psalm 16:10 and Isaiah 53:8-10.
- These facts were also reiterated in the early preaching of the church in Acts 3:13-18 and 8:32-35.
- Christ's death is a Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7), a payment for our sin, not atonement, merely covering sin.

Verse 4—Reality #2: Christ was buried

- Christ's death was not an accident. He did not endure His agony away from the notice of the crowd.
- Rather, the crucifixion scene was a deliberate public execution. Executioners took no chances, but plunged a spear into His side. Then He was carried away, wrapped according to the embalming custom of the day, and placed in a tomb, sealed by a heavy rock *and that He was buried* (Matthew 27:57-61).
- Jesus' burial emphasized the finality of His death and attested to the validity of His resurrection.

Reality #3: Christ was raised

- *And that He was raised on the third day* is the perfect tense and passive voice of the Greek verb translated "was raised". It implies that since God raised Him, He is still alive. The third day was Sunday. Friday, the day of the crucifixion, was the first day, and Saturday was the second.
- *According to the Scriptures* would include the previous passages about Christ's death. The entire gospel message is grounded in the testimony of Old Testament prophets and verified by New Testament apostles.

Verse 5—Reality #4: Christ was seen

- *And that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve* is further verification of Jesus' resurrection.
- Peter is prominent as a leader among the group of Jesus' twelve disciples, who all had seen Jesus after His resurrection.
- The fact that Peter and the twelve saw Jesus was objective evidence of His resurrection.

Verse 6—Jesus resurrection was verified by a much larger contingency of believers who witnessed Jesus resurrection *then he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at one time*.

- Many people could testify that they had seen Him on this single occasion.
- Since the resurrection took place about 23 years before Paul wrote this epistle, it is reasonable that the majority of this group of witnesses were *still alive* at that time.
- Any skeptical Corinthian could check with them, *though some have fallen asleep* (a euphemism for death—emphasizing the hope of resurrection).

Verse 7—The resurrection itself brought some to faith, not merely confirmed the faith of believers.

- *Then he appeared to James*, most likely the half-brother of Jesus. James did not believe Jesus was the Messiah initially (John 7:5), but he believed when Jesus rose from the dead.
- James wrote the book of James and referred to Jesus as the *Lord Jesus Christ* and the *Lord of Glory* (James 1:1 and 2:1).
- The Jerusalem church regarded James, Peter, and John as the three "pillars" of the church (Acts 15:13-21).
- *Then [Jesus appeared] to all the apostles* in Acts 1 before He ascended into heaven.

Verse 8—Paul regarded the Lord's appearance to him on the Damascus road as an equivalent post-resurrection appearance and the Lord's last one *and last of all as to one untimely born* (ἔκτρομα refers to a premature birth, a miscarriage, or an aborted child), *He appeared to me [Paul] also*.

- He had missed Jesus' earthly ministry, unlike the disciples. They were each distinguished by having personally seen the resurrected Christ while He was still here, which made Paul the last of their company.

Application

This doctrine of the Christian faith has been attacked more than most. Just the idea that Jesus came back from the dead is a stumbling block to many. Some argue that the early Church simply made up the doctrine to give people hope and comfort. Others suggest Jesus may never have died, but was in a coma and the cold tomb may have revived him. But the Scripture is clear. Jesus was actually dead, buried (under guard), and bodily rose from the dead. The apostles rightly based the Christian faith on Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.