

 **Main Street**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



**1 Corinthians 15:1-11**  
**“Digging Down To Bedrock”**

March 27, 2016  
(Easter/ Resurrection of the Lord)

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**“Following Christ From City Center!”**

## I CORINTHIANS 15:1-11 "DIGGING DOWN TO BEDROCK"

First Delivered 51-52AD, Common Ground, Ultimate Importance

### 1) vv.1-2 INTRODUCTION: IMPLICATIONS OF THE GOSPEL: PRESENT & FUTURE. 3:1 Chiasm

General Resurrection Still Future; Jesus' Resurrection = Preview

- 1 Now I would remind you brethren (i.e. brothers and sisters), //12:3, Paul's Objective: Church Needs Reminders!  
 in what terms **I PREACHED** to you "the gospel" (good news), 2:2, Event, Not Advice, Recalls Founding, Basics  
 News Through Persons, //Formula Of 11:23-25
- a which you **received**, Past Reception Acts 18:1-23, At Conversion/Baptism
- b in which you stand, Present Position Positive Assessment By Paul
- 2 c by which you are saved (lit. *being evangelized*), Future Hope Ultimate Kingdom
- b' if you hold it fast- Present Challenge Condition: *If Persevere*
- a' unless you **BELIEVED IN VAIN.** Past Possibility Risk & Warning //vv.58, If A Sham//vv.12-19  
*Without careful thought, Common Ground, Full Of Possibility, Peril*

### 2) vv.3-9 TRADITION/CREED ON JESUS' DEATH, RESURRECTION, APPEARANCES.

vv.3b-5 Originally In Aramaic? What Is The Good News? Jesus' History!

#### a) v.3a Jewish Rabbinic Formula For The Passing On Important Oral Traditions Exactly.

Within 1-3 Years Of Jesus' Death (30-33AD), Common In Early Church

- 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance  
 what I also received: Gospel Has Content & Context, Faithfully Passed On //11:23  
*Nothing More Important! How Paul Evaluated This Creed*  
 Faithful Appeal To Tradition, Received From Eye-Witnesses, Early 30's  
 Not Something Paul Created; Values Faithfulness, Not Novelty

#### b) vv.3b-9 Early Creed: The Tradition Concerning Christ.

FOUR ACTION VERBS

2 Long (1//1'), 3 parts; 2 Short 9//2'), 1 part, Islam Rejects The Death

- Good Friday 1 that the Messiah died/ for *our sins*/ according to the Scriptures, Innocent, Tacitus, **(1) DIED (Atonement)**  
 Is. 53:5-6, 8-9, 11-12 (LXX), Zech. 12:10, Buried (Judges 8:32, Acts 2:29)
- 4 2 and that he was buried, p.v., Tomb Was Filled With A Body, Then Emptied! **(2) WAS BURIED**  
 Rom. 4:24-25, Was Raised And Continues = Perfect Passive, Not Soul's Immortality
- Sunday 1' and that he was raised/ on the third day/ according to the Scriptures, **(3) WAS RAISED (Father By Spirit)**  
 Hos. 6:2(LXX), Jonah 1:7, Dan. 2:12, Mk. 8:31, Rom. 1:1-4, Ps. 16:9b-10, Acts 2:26b-27
- 5 2'a and that he appeared to Cephas (Aramaic for Peter); Mk. 16:7, Lk. 24:34,36 **(4a) APPEARED (List 1)**
- Friends b then to "the twelve"; Lk. 24:36-43, Jn. 21:19, Now Only *Eleven*, (Mt. 28:9-10, 16ff.)
- 6a c then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, Not In Gospels
- b (most of whom are alive, v.6b, vv.8-9 = Paul's Footnote, Check It Out!
- 40 Days though some have fallen asleep [i.e. died]). Seeing Risen Lord Not Prevent Death  
 p.v., *Appeared = Was Allowed To Be Seen, Period Of Time, Sequence*
- 7 A Skeptic a' Then he appeared to James (i.e. Jesus' brother); Unbelief: Jn.7:2-9 **(4b) APPEARED (List 2)**
- Larger Group b' then to all the apostles; Gal. 1:19, Commissioned *Ambassadors*, Mt. 28:16-20, Acts 1:6-11
- 8 An Enemy c' (*Last of all*, as to "the one untimely born," he appeared to me. Stillborn, Aborted
- 9 For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, Eph. 3:8, Testimony  
 because I persecuted the church of God." Phil. 3:4-5, Acts 8:1-3, Gal. 1:11-19  
 3 Individuals/3 Groups, Paul's Is Equivalent, Gal. 1:18-2:10

### 1') vv.10-11 CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS OF THE GOSPEL: PRESENT WORK OF GRACE.

God Was Gracious To Paul! To Corinthians Above = New Life

- 10 a By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me was not **IN VAIN.** 3:10, Grace To Me Not Useless
- b On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, Effort (not earning!) As A Response To Grace
- b' though it was not I, Grace Bridges The Gap, Negation Of Pride
- a' but the grace of God which is with me. Divine Synergy, Grace's Energy Within Me Was Effective  
 Not Many Gospels But One! Same Message, Paul On Par With Apostles  
 What Happened To One Is The Key For All
- 11 Whether it was I or they,  
 so **WE PREACH** and so you **BELIEVED.** Key Idea = Witnesses All Agree On The Basic Message, vs. 15:12

#### SUMMARY OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CREED (vv.3b-9).

Resurrection, His And Ours, Is Not Optional But Central

- 1) **THE WHAT:** Christ (Israel's Messiah) died  
**THE WHY:** For our sins, in our place  
**THE WHO:** In accordance with the Scriptures (i.e. God's revealed will, not an accident)  
**HOW DO WE KNOW HE DIED?** He was buried.
- 2) **THE WHAT:** He was raised (Passive tense = by the Father and thru the Holy Spirit)  
**THE WHEN:** On the third day the empty tomb was discovered and the appearances began  
**THE WHO:** In accordance with the Scriptures (i.e. God's revealed wil, not an accident.)  
**HOW DO WE KNOW HE WAS RAISED?** He appeared; the empty tomb is implied and assumed.

## DIGGING DOWN TO BEDROCK

*“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received.”*

Paul was not a slave of novelty but a servant of faithfulness.

### 1 C O R I N T H I A N S 1 5 : 3

**D**r. John Ortberg is a pastor and author with a knack for connecting Christian faith and practice with modern life. It doesn't hurt that he lives in the heart of technohip culture in Silicon Valley and is a clinical psychologist. And since we pastors plunder the stories of others, here's one of my Ortberg favorites:

“A friend of mine,” he writes, “once worked as a denominational official in Minnesota. One of his jobs was to travel to rural communities to do funerals, and he'd ride out with the undertaker in the hearse. One time, on the way back, my friend John was quite tired and thought, “Well, I'll just lie down in the back.” A creepy thing to do, but this is a true story. The undertaker pulled into a service station. The attendant was kind of freaked out because there was a body stretched out in the back. While he was filling the tank, John woke up, opened his eyes, knocked on the window and waved at the attendant. John never saw a man run so fast!”<sup>1</sup>

Expecting death and finding life is unnerving, frightening, bizarre and disturbing because it undoes our expectations of normalcy, of how the world works. It's disorienting, the cause of intellectual vertigo to find out there's more to the world than you thought. Thus the first Easter, and if we lose the shock of what an empty tomb and encounters with the risen Jesus meant to eyewitnesses, we misread the foundations of Christian faith. If Jesus was bodily raised by God the Father who sent

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<sup>1</sup> Edited from John Ortberg, "The Empty Tomb: How Will You Respond?" PreachingToday.com search under 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.

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**1 Corinthians 15:1-11. . . . . 4**

him and the God the Spirit who accompanied him,<sup>2</sup> then the foundations– whatever the later developments– are rock solid. If not, if Jesus has not been bodily transformed and divinely vindicated, then the whole of what we’ve believed and all our cultural achievements– including our work in world missions for two millennia– are based on a lie. We’re claiming something happened when it did not.<sup>3</sup>

It all hangs on the historicity and meanings of this one event. Did the one God of the Jews bodily raise Jesus from the dead, send him back in a series of tangible audiences with individuals and groups, with those who followed him and a brother who did not– James– and a sworn enemy– Paul. If so, then Jesus is vindicated and established as the gold standard of divine revelation. Is he the one in whom God is finally and fully revealed within history? Is he now the mark against which all other claims must be measured?

Classic Christians who understand the implications of his bodily resurrection answer Yes. Those of other religions– and of the religion of no religion– answer No. Just a good man, they say, one of many prophets because to say Yes would mean the rewriting of their entire life script and a new world view, which is a high price to pay. Moral repentance is hard enough, but intellectual repentance is indeed difficult because it means starting over with a new set of eyes like a child. But let’s make it clear and not water it down; the bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth– if it happened– is a claim to ultimacy which puts him in a category all his own; he is– literally– one of a kind, the only one fully approved by the highest authority.

But Pastor Phil, it’s just not normal. It never happened before, and hasn’t happened since. Yes, I reply. You’re right. And historians will tell you that while all historical events are by nature unrepeatable since time keeps moving, an event without analogy– a unique one-off like the resurrection of Jesus– is especially difficult to account for. And you are right to think such, but that does not mean it didn’t happen, only that it’s in a category by itself and not as easy to grasp as something that happens over and over.

If the early church is right in its reading of what happened, Jesus was not resuscitated like Lazarus or the widow of Nain’s son or Jairus’ daughter which was

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 1:3-4.

<sup>3</sup> Paul deals with these implications in the next paragraph, 15:12-19.

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**1 Corinthians 15:1-11. . . . . 5**

a kind of minor preview to what happened to Jesus himself. He resuscitated others, but God resurrected him. He did not just come back to this life in his former frame and then later die at a ripe, old age off in India as a mystic— as some claim. To be resurrected is different from mere resuscitation. Resuscitation is to come back to this life with an extension, but resurrection is to be taken from death into the presence of God and given the very first prototype of a resurrection body which— while fully human— has marvelous new properties fit for the coming new world.

In the moment of divine action, the person of Jesus— his soul or spirit or personality we might say— was rejoined to the old body now taken up and transformed with the empty tomb and empty linens left behind as negative evidence. He just disappeared, the grave clothes collapsing as a cocoon with the contents now gone. Elvis has left the building!<sup>4</sup>

Whatever happened at that moment between Jesus the Son, the Father and the Spirit, no one saw the event itself since it was in a sealed tomb, only the amazing after effects. The resurrection, whenever it precisely happened— which we do not know, was a secret event. Only then did the appearances begin on Sunday morning, the first being to Mary Magdalene.<sup>5</sup> His appearances were not of a ghost or phantom but of a marvelously re-embodied human being who- in a manner of speaking— had to *uncloak himself* to be seen.<sup>6</sup> He had to show himself and let himself be seen. The

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<sup>4</sup> On the historical evidence, see Craig Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 330-349; N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Scripture* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2014), Chapter 3, “Can a Scientist Believe in the Resurrection?” 41-63; William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway, 2008), “The Resurrection of Jesus,” 333-404; Gary Habermas and Michael Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2004). On philosophical issues, see Robert Stewart, editor, *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N.T. Wright in Dialog* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 2006). For popular treatments, see Lee Strobel, *The Case for Easter: A Journalist Investigates the Evidence for the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003); Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2008), Chapter 13, “The Reality of the Resurrection,” 201-212.

<sup>5</sup> John 20:1-18.

<sup>6</sup> Note the non-recognition of Mary in the Garden (Jn. 20:1-18) and the non-recognition of the two Emmaus pilgrims (Lk. 24:13-15), and in both cases how Jesus’ initiative— calling Mary’s name and breaking the bread at table, opened insight. To see the risen Jesus is not just natural sight but an opening into divine revelation.

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**1 Corinthians 15:1-11. . . . . 6**

risen Jesus carried five open wounds as his identifying credentials, as if to say, “Hey, it’s really me!”<sup>7</sup> But he also popped in and out of places as if from nowhere which signals his freedom in the new physics of the kingdom of God. He had to keep saying to his friends, “Fear not,” because his showing up nearly sent them into heart failure.

In heaven– the invisible part of creation where God is seen- there is now only one resurrection body on display, that of Jesus. The good angels do not need them since they are spirits, and the saints do not yet have them since they are not yet available.<sup>8</sup> But one day it shall also be theirs and ours, thus the futuristic last line of the Nicene Creed, “We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” We do not seek and endless life in heaven but heaven at the end come down to transform all creation, and we will all enter that old world made new in resurrection bodies.

Here and now you are an embodied soul– the breath of God blow into clay, and at death they are separated for a season; in heaven after death you are temporarily a disembodied soul, and in that sense not yet complete; but at the end when the kingdom comes down to earth and all is made new, you will be a re-embodied soul in a new resurrection body with marvelous new properties just like Jesus. It will take that kind of body to live in the new world and in the visible glory and power of God. If it takes special protective clothing and all sorts of precautions to work near a nuclear reactor, what would it take to live fully exposed to the core and not die? A new kind of body, and God will provide it, and already has for one and only one, and it was revealed and showcased starting Easter morning. The one who made nuclear power is so much greater, and what kind of body must it be to stand such glory?

For a season, Luke says forty days,<sup>9</sup> the risen Jesus came and went with no warning, building up the case layer by layer that it was him, that he was unutterably alive, that his work of loving the world up close would continue through them as soon as he sent his Spirit into them like liquid fire, and that everything they’d seen and heard for three years in his company was truth from above. His resurrection lit up every memory of him with a new intensity of meaning. They did not know when he

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<sup>7</sup> John 20:19-31, the Thomas incident.

<sup>8</sup> On two stage post-mortem existence, see N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2008), one of the most important books I’ve ever read.

<sup>9</sup> Acts 1:1-5.

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**1 Corinthians 15:1-11. . . . . 7**

was going to step out of his world into theirs, and then back into his again. The resurrection shines light back across the whole of who Jesus was from birth to death, and in him God announces, “This is what I look like at ground level when I come among you as the Son.” Jesus is transparent to the Father and the Spirit, and from his actions and mode of being we make inferences into the life of the Triune God, so that the most basic Christian affirmation is that *Jesus is like God*.

Universal human experience is that the dead stay dead, or if they have an NDE— a near death experience— then they weren’t yet full dead and still able to be revived. But Jesus was fully dead, dead on the cross, heart punctured by a Roman lance, his last gasp heard by those who were near, a report given to Pilate who signed the death warrant and gave permission for the burial,<sup>10</sup> the body taken down, wrapped in linen and buried in a borrowed tomb to complete the hurried rites before sunset and with women who were at the cross as eye witnesses to which tomb it was.<sup>11</sup>

They knew he was dead and where the body was. No swoon, no suspended animation, no drugs to make him appear comatose, but dead, flat-lined, expired, body temperature dropping to room temperature, rigor setting in. And though the Koran, written six centuries later, says Jesus did not die on the cross but that a clever substitute died in his place as a way of avoiding what is required for there to be a genuine resurrection,<sup>12</sup> the death of Jesus at Roman hands is one of the best attested

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<sup>10</sup> Mark 15:44-45.

<sup>11</sup> On burial customs, see C. Evans, N.T. Wright, *Jesus, The Final Days* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2009), Chapter 2, “The Silence of Burial,” 39-74. For a thorough review of the evidence for Jesus’ death, see Michael Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2010), “Jesus’ Death By Crucifixion,” 303-318.

<sup>12</sup> Sura 4:157-158, “And for claiming that they killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of GOD. In fact, *they never killed him, they never crucified him* - they were made to think that they did. All factions who are disputing in this matter are full of doubt concerning this issue. They possess no knowledge; they only conjecture. *For certain, they never killed him*. Instead, GOD raised him to Him; GOD is Almighty, Most Wise” (ital. ad.) For an analysis, see Timothy George, *Is The Father Of Jesus The God Of Mohammed?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderman, 2002), Chapter 5, “Jesus With Freckles,” 89-104.

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**1 Corinthians 15:1-11. . . . . 8**

facts of ancient history.<sup>13</sup> Even the skeptics agree: there really was a man named Jesus, and now he was dead, having been executed by crucifixion one Friday morning before Passover, most likely in the year 30 A.D, though some argue for three years later. He was buried because he was dead and because Jews required bodies to be buried the same day by sunset. Roman death squads knew exactly what they were doing, and pious Jews of means sometimes made provisions for the burial of such criminals, in this case Joseph of Arimathea.

So the base line is that Jesus, who for three years publicly preached and enacted the great news of the reign of God, and who had gone to Jerusalem to confront the powers with his story of what God was now up to, is betrayed and tried, crucified and dead and gone to wherever the dead go, one more case of a naive reformer ground up in the cogs of real world power. You don't have to be a Christian to accept this; it's just history. And if something did happen two days later, then the world is a different place than we thought. Not sealed off, but porous to God's immediate action. Human beings, with Jesus as the prototype, are designed— weak as we now are— for full transformation; and if we are, then so is the whole of the world in which we are embedded and on which we depend for life. And if we and our world have such a glorious future, then how does that change how we live in the here and now? It means that we take the risks of love as the friends of Jesus, our Lord. Not safe but risky living. Not cautious but bold witness. Not wimpy but bold prayer.

**TURNING TO THE TEXT**

Now for the next few minutes I want to take you on a journey, and our map is the text before us, the first eleven verses of 1 Corinthians 15.<sup>14</sup> Dr. Gary Habermas, perhaps

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<sup>13</sup> Tacitus (noted Roman historian, 55-117 AD) alludes to the death of Christ and the existence of Christians in his *Annals*, chapter 15. “Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. *Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus (ital. ad)* , and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the word find their center and become popular.”

<sup>14</sup> The literature on 15:1-11 is vast. A good approach is to consult recent commentaries for a summary of technical work. I recommend PHEME PERKINS, *First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012); CRAIG KEENER, *1-2 Corinthians*

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**1 Corinthians 15:1-11. . . . . 9**

the world's expert on all things resurrection, has catalogued over 3500 scholarly treatments of Jesus resurrection written since 1975, and many of them are on this passage.<sup>15</sup> His passion is to catalog and organize all the opinions of the scholars on the central claim of Christian faith and map out their positions.

And when someone asks him, "Why so much ink spilt on eleven verses?" his answer is simple: because here, in verses 3 through 7, we have a creed that is the earliest written witness to Jesus' resurrection. It's core is very early, perhaps within a few months of the events themselves.<sup>16</sup> It's highly likely a formulation of eye witnesses, and with historians early eye witnesses are the gold standard.

It's the year 51 or 52 A.D. and Paul the missionary and leather worker has just arrived in the great port city of Corinth. He sets up shop and there meets a Christian couple—Aquila and Priscilla— recently expelled from Rome with other Jewish Christians, and with them he forms a team.<sup>17</sup> In the give and take of the work day, he speaks to whoever is open of what the one God of the Jews has recently done in Jesus, and on the sabbath speaks as a visiting rabbinic scholar in the synagogue using the Old Testament as a bridge to Jesus as the crucified and risen Messiah.

And if you asked Paul to summarize the basic affirmations of the new form of Judaism he represents, he'd have replied with a pithy little creed of two longer lines and two shorter lines, to which is added a list of appearances. The first long line is in three parts, and it is a condensed, loaded statement: *that the Messiah died/ for our sins/ according to the Scriptures*. "Let's discuss that first," he might say.

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(Cambridge, ENG: CUP, 2005); David Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003); Charles Talbert, *Reading Corinthians* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002); Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000); Richard Hayes, *First Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997); Ben Witherington, *Conflict & Community In Corinth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), also N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> Many of his lectures are on YouTube. His web site, containing many of his papers and presentations, is GaryHabermas.com.

<sup>16</sup> The historical opinion of Dr. James D. G. Dunn, who writes, "This tradition, we can be entirely confident, was formulated as tradition within months of Jesus' death" (*Jesus Remembered* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003]), 55.

<sup>17</sup> For the founding events in Corinth, see Acts 18:1-23.

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**1 Corinthians 15:1-11. . . . . 10**

And how do we know he died? Well, that's the first short line: *and that he was buried*. Then a great reversal in the second long line, again in three parallel phrases: *and that he was raised/ on the third day/ according to the Scriptures*. Now that's quite claim to make! And how exactly do we know he was raised? Well, that's the second short line: *then he appeared to Cephas*, which is Peter's Aramaic nickname.

Four verbs about Jesus anchor the mini-creed: *died, buried, raised, appeared*. But why? To deal with our sins in a great self-offering– the cross, and to restart his kingdom movement on a new basis– the resurrection. And who sponsored it? The God of the Jews; it was God's intent all along, which is what the phrase *according to the Scriptures* means. God was behind the whole glorious mess of who Jesus was and what happened to him. And so, if you don't believe in God, it makes no sense.

With Peter's encounter there begins a cascade of appearances in two series of three. First *Cephas, then to the twelve*, who are now only *eleven* because of Judas' betrayal. Then an amazing report of an appearance to *more than five hundred at one time*, many of whom– says Paul– are available if you have time and money to go interview them. It was not a mass hallucination but a mass appearance,<sup>18</sup> and– oddly enough– this is the only report we have of such a mass event, but Paul could recite it as a matter of course. To Peter– an individual, then to a symbolic group– *the twelve*, Jesus' core followers, then a very large group, more than five hundred, only some of whom have died in the two decades since the event.

Then a second set, again beginning with an individual, in this case Jesus' half brother James who was not a follower during the ministry. Then another group, *to all the apostles* who followed Jesus but were not part of the symbolic core of *twelve*, and at the end Paul's own testimony as a surprise delivery, "Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to me."

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<sup>18</sup> Dr. Gary A. Sibcy, a licensed clinical psychologist writes:

"I have surveyed the professional literature (peer-reviewed journal articles and books) written by psychologists, psychiatrists, and other relevant healthcare professionals during the past two decades and have yet to find a single documented case of a group hallucination, that is, an event for which more than one person purportedly shared in a visual or other sensory perception where there was clearly no external referent" (email, Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 484).

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## **1 Corinthians 15:1-11. . . . . 11**

Now that's quite a list of people to confirm the resurrection appearances of the risen Jesus, somewhere near six hundred. Jewish Messiahs don't die for the sins of the people. But this one did. Messiahs don't rise from the dead, but this one did. Jesus' resurrection was the first of its kind and one of kind. He came back to relaunch his healing movement and presented himself alive to singles and groups, to old friends and skeptical family, even to any enemy like Paul who persecuted his people.

What he did not do— and I think this is significant— was make a mass, spectacular appearance in Jerusalem before tens of thousands of pilgrims; he did not wow the crowds with a resurrection display. He did not appear to Pilate or Caiaphas to wreak vengeance. Rather, he entrusted his person and message to a group of loyalists, so that on the Day of Pentecost fifty days later there were only a hundred and twenty after three years work. Significant, but not yet a mass movement.

He will soon send them out— beginning in Jerusalem, back their preaching with his presence and power, and welcome into his fellowship all who respond to the Holy Spirit's inward push to place their trust in him and his message about who God is and what his Father is up to. Jesus' outreach through his people is the method, not a big display, but one-to-one and face-to-face is how God makes his appeal.

That was the early 50s in Corinth. And when Paul wrote them five years later from Ephesus, he reviewed the content he delivered when he first arrived, and he was very careful about not changing it. So sacred was the summary that he used a technical rabbinic formula for the passing on of traditions that are to be memorized, verse 3: "For I delivered to you/ as of first importance/ what I also received...."<sup>19</sup> He was the custodian of an apostolic confession and passed it on as received. You do not want your pastor to be an innovator. Creative? Perhaps, but not an innovator. Faithful transmission is a very high standard these days.

Paul gave it to them intact, but who gave it to Paul? Well, if Jesus died in 30 AD, and if Paul presented it to them in the early 50s, that's only twenty years after the events. But where did Paul get it? Two answers are possible. He may have received it in Damascus shortly after his conversion,<sup>20</sup> say one to three years after Jesus' death

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<sup>19</sup> On the formula and its background, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), Chapter 11, "Transmitting the Jesus Traditions," 264-289, especially 264-271 on Paul.

<sup>20</sup> Acts 9:1-31.

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**1 Corinthians 15:1-11. . . . . 12**

and resurrection. Or, it may have been during his first trip to Jerusalem three years later where he met for two weeks with Peter and James and perhaps others.<sup>21</sup> And, as C.H. Dodd once quipped, “I don’t think they spoke about the weather!”

So Paul first received the creed in Damascus from those who received it from the apostles, or else from them face to face three years later. And where did they get it? They didn’t get it; they wrote it. To answer the questions, What happened to Jesus, and what does it mean? they agreed on a tight, easily memorized formulation. They did theology; they wrote doctrine; they crafted a confession that would eventually become the central article of the Apostles’ Creed a hundred years later, but it started here with a necessity!

In a world where only about ten percent could read and write, you need a brief summary of essentials to capture the new faith. Jesus removes the inherited and actual blockage of sin between us and the Father, “It was God’s will that he— Messiah Jesus— die for our sins as a self-sacrifice.” In other words, Jesus heals our relationship with God. But that’s not the end, because the one who stripped away the crud from our lives and purged the stains on our soul returned as the risen Lord to lead us forward. He’s still with us, though in a new mode. And he was not stingy in his appearances either. They ended, but they were many and varied and reinforced one another. It’s hard to deny an unusual experience which has been repeated to so many different people. The resurrection itself was a one-off, but the appearances were repeated. “For three years we watched his every move, and after the horror of his death he came back to make sure we understood the new arrangements.” And that is why this passage is so important. It takes us back to bedrock.

So what, Pastor Phil? So God rescued Jesus long ago, what’s it mean for me? It means, first of all, that God who made it all is just as Jesus portrayed him. If Jesus was raised, not only does God exist but is the kind of God who is interested in rescuing us from sin, death, evil and the devil, from all that ails us. God is *our Father in heaven whose kingdom is on the way and is already on display*. It means the world is not a closed cause-and-effect machine. It means Jesus is the God-approved outlet for divine revelation. Resurrection is the ultimate seal of approval. Jesus is God with a human face. So pursue him out! The church- for all its faults- is the people entrusted with the truth about the Triune God. Dr. Michael Green writes of the implications, and his conclusions are as bold as I know:

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<sup>21</sup> See Galatians 1-2.

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"There is... much to admire and learn in other religions, as well as much that is cruel and disgusting.... But world religions do not contain anything good and true which cannot be found in Christianity (Wow!). And none of them will tell you about a God who loves you enough to die for you, to rise from the grave as a pledge of your future, and be willing here and now to come and share your life with you.... Islam has ninety-nine names for God, but none of them is Father. Hinduism can offer you no power of forgiveness to break the iron grip of karma. The Maharishi cannot come and indwell his disciples."<sup>22</sup>

Resurrection means disciples will one day stand before Jesus for a true accounting of our lives and receive a resurrection body. Just as God transformed the corpse of Jesus, God will transform this broken, bedraggled cosmos into the new heavens and the new earth. Easter is a glimpse of what's ahead, and it makes us permanently a people of hope. In Jesus the future is brought into the present as preview. Jesus Christ is alive and therefore available; he's still messin' with people, and he wants your full attention. He keeps sending you hints, and if you listen carefully, the knock on the door is his. We are not a memorial society for a dead hero or just another do-gooder group. We are the followers of a living, dangerous Jesus.

### CONCLUSION

But you must prove it. I can lay out the case; I cannot provide confirmation. He reserves that for himself.<sup>23</sup> But if you seek him, he will find you. If you speak to him, he will speak back. If you obey what you already know of him, he will show you more. If you read his four biographies, he will gain your attention and stir your curiosity. He doesn't want to make you religious— whatever that means; he wants to make you his and join you to the lively fellowship of his other followers for his work in the world. This is classic Christian faith, grounded in the experience and testimony of the apostles, and I'm betting everything on it. Where are you placing your trust and your life? I'm done now. Anything more and anything else is up to him.

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<sup>22</sup> *The Empty Cross of Jesus* (Downer's Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity, 1984), 129.

<sup>23</sup> In his article, "A Manifold Resurrection: Why The Risen Jesus Met People In Five Different Ways— And Still Does," *Christianity Today*, April 2007, 62-65, John Witte offers five meeting points with the risen Jesus based on biblical examples: 1) a calling by name (Mary Magdalene), 2) a delivery of peace (the ten disciples), 3) a sacramental vision (Emmaus disciples), 4) a physical encounter (Thomas), 5) a miracle and conversation (Peter). This is a fruitful line of thinking.

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**KNOWN HISTORICAL FACTS ON THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST**

**By Noel Coypel**

At least eleven events are considered to be knowable history by virtually all scholars, and a twelfth event is considered to be knowable by many scholars. Whatever school of thought, liberal or conservative, atheist or theist, critical historians, philosophers, theologians, and scripture scholars who address the subject of Christ's resurrection accept the following as factual history.

- 1) Jesus died due to the rigors of crucifixion;
- 2) He was buried;
- 3) Jesus's death caused the disciples to despair and lose hope;
- 4) Many scholars hold that Jesus was buried in a tomb that was discovered to be empty just a few days later;
- 5) At this same time, Jesus's disciples had real experiences that they believed were literal appearances of the risen Jesus;
- 6) Because of these experiences, the disciples were transformed from doubters who were afraid to identify themselves with Jesus to bold proclaimers of His death and Resurrection, even willing to die for this belief;
- 7) This message was central to the early church preaching;
- 8) This message was especially proclaimed in Jerusalem;
- 9) The church was born and grew;
- 10) Sunday became the primary day of worship for these believers;
- 11) James, the brother of Jesus and a skeptic, was converted to the faith when he also believed he saw the resurrected Jesus;
- 12) A few years later, Paul, the persecutor of the Christians, was also converted by an experience he believed to be an appearance of the risen Jesus.

These historical facts are crucial to any investigation of Jesus' Resurrection. Except for the empty tomb, virtually all critical scholars who deal with this issue agree that these are the minimum known historical facts regarding this event. Any conclusion concerning the historicity of the Resurrection should therefore properly account for this data.

Because these core historical facts have been established by critical and historical procedures, no one should reject this evidence simply by referring to "discrepancies" in the New Testament or to its general "unreliability." These facts are attested to be true by virtually everyone. It can be demonstrated even when the minimum number of historical facts are utilized. In short, instead of stating what cannot be believed concerning the Gospel accounts, skeptics would do well to concentrate on what they admit to be known about the texts. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then what happened on that first Easter morning? (Excerpted from the book, *Did Jesus Rise From The Dead?, The Resurrection Debate between Gary Habermas and Antony Flew*, edited by Terry L. Miethe, (San Francisco,CA: Harper & Row, 1987, 19-20).

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**WHAT THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OFFICIALLY TEACHES  
CONCERNING THE BODILY RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST  
ON THE BASIS OF SCRIPTURE AND CLASSIC CHRISTIAN TEACHING**

**A. From The “Articles Of Religion”.**

Article III—Of the Resurrection of Christ

Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body, with all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all men at the last day.

**B. From The “Confession Of Faith”**

Article II—Jesus Christ

We believe in Jesus Christ, truly God and truly man, in whom the divine and human natures are perfectly and inseparably united. He is the eternal Word made flesh, the only begotten Son of the Father, born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. As ministering Servant he lived, suffered and died on the cross. He was buried, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to be with the Father, from whence he shall return. He is eternal Savior and Mediator, who intercedes for us, and by him all men will be judged.

**SUMMARY OUTLINE OF THE CHURCH’S OFFICIAL TEACHING**

**A. The Resurrection: Christ Rose from the Dead**

1. The resurrection of Christ is a central truth of our faith
2. He now lives in his resurrected body
  - a. A real body
  - b. A glorified body
  - c. A body having all things pertaining to the perfection of human nature

**B. Christ’s Ascension, Session, and Intercession**

1. Christ ascended into heaven
2. Christ sits at the right hand of the Father
3. Christ presently intercedes for the faithful

**C. Christ’s Return To Execute Judgment At The Last Day.**