



Eyewitness Evidence
1 Cor. 15:1-11

NKJ 1 Corinthians 15:1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand,

2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you -- unless you believed in vain.

3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.

6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.

7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.

8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy 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; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

11 Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

We are often tempted to think of heresy and liberalism or liberal Christianity as modern inventions as if they arose fairly recently after thousands of years of unbroken orthodox belief in the church. But of course even a cursory review of the New Testament will reveal that even in the time of the Apostles, people were perverting the gospel and preaching false gospels that had no power to save.

We have already seen many ways in which the Corinthian church had departed from the preaching of the Apostles and had brought in error and confusion, but of all the errors they were guilty of what Paul addresses here is perhaps the most serious. It seems according to verse 12 that reports had reached Paul that there were some in the Corinthian church who said there was no resurrection of the dead.

What Paul wants them to understand then, is not only that there is a resurrection of the dead, but that it is fundamental to the gospel, and that without it there is no gospel no good news. Jesus promised that He would rise again on the Third Day and that we who believed in Him would someday rise again from the dead as well. If He was not raised as some maintained then, and some maintain today then His preaching is proved false. Without the resurrection our faith is vain, and we are still in our sins. It is the capstone of the good news.

This truth is as important today as it was when Paul wrote. We hear all the time not only of skeptics who deny the resurrection, but of people who claim to Christians who spiritualize the resurrection. ***“Well, they say, Jesus didn’t really rise bodily, it’s something the Apostles wanted to believe so badly that they convinced themselves he had risen, but that’s ok that he didn’t there is a sense in which when we believe then His resurrection becomes true to you in your own experience.”*** In other words you enter into the Apostle’s delusion.

I’m reminded of the great confrontation between the orthodox evangelical theologian Carl F.H. Henry and the neo-orthodox theologian Karl Barth. Barth was famous for his statements that there is a *sense* in which the resurrection is true because it becomes true to the personal faith of believers as the believee. But Henry cut through all of that and asked simply: ***“If the cameras had been shooting on the day of the resurrection would they have filmed anything?”*** And in his irritated answer it became clear that for Barth, the answer was “NO” the resurrection did not *really* occur at least not in the history accessible to historians.

The apostolic church also had its “spiritualizers” of the resurrection. Paul wrote to Timothy, for instance warning in

2 Tim 2:16 But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.

17 And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort,

18 who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.

Paul calls this kind of false teaching a cancer that overthrows people’s faith. It is something that must be cut out of the body of Christ, so Paul wants people to understand that this gospel that he preached is not some sort of system of helpful delusions we convince ourselves of. Rather it is based on objective fact, real occurrences that not only could have been witnessed had we been there, but which were witnessed by real people when they happened.

He doesn’t say to the Corinthians look, you have to have blind unreasonable faith in these things, he tells them that the gospel he preaches is based on eyewitness evidence, which piles up and tells them to draw a conclusion. Peter affirms the same thing in his own writings.

2 Peter 1:15 Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease.

16 For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

He says in verse 3 these are the fundamental parts of the gospel that I first delivered to you and which you received.

First ***that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures***. And when he says ***according to the scriptures*** he says, that Jesus dying for our sins, was not some sort of afterthought or a hopeful construction put on a tragic event by the apostles, but something that was foretold in the Old Testament, for instance in Isaiah 53 – “*Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great,*

And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.”

And that is why Jesus was constantly telling the Apostles that he was going to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die and then rise again on the third day. Jesus knew precisely what He had come to do, what He had to do if we were to be saved.

Second, ***Paul tell us that Jesus was buried.*** – He wants there to be no doubt that Jesus really did die. That he did not “become unconscious” and was later revived. He died on the cross, the soldiers confirmed he was dead by piercing his side with a spear that penetrated his heart, and then he was taken down his body prepared and then he was buried.

Thirdly, ***that he rose again on the third day*** – Again Peter says this resurrection is also in accordance with the scriptures. The OT tells us that the Messiah after he dies for his people’s sin will rise again, he will not see corruption for instance in Psalm 16:10 “For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” – Peter points out this verse in Acts 2 saying:

29 "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.

30 "Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne,

31 "he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption.

32 "This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.

These three things are the foundation of the gospel, and while Christians of good faith may differ on many things, infant baptism, limited atonement, the continuation of the sign gifts, and the like. If we do not believe in the reality of the atoning death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, then we have no right to call ourselves Christians.

Paul goes on though starting in verse 5 to prove as Charles Hodge puts it: *“There never was a historical event established on surer evidence than that of the resurrection of Christ”*

Paul could have marshaled even more evidence than he does in these verses, but he probably wants to bring to bear just the facts that the Christians would have been well aware of:

1) That the Resurrected Christ was seen by Peter (Cephas) and the other remaining Apostles (the Twelve) – and that in the flesh, you remember how Jesus when he appeared asked for and ate food in their presence to prove to them that their minds weren’t playing tricks on them and that He really was there in their midst.

2) Next he mentions over 500 brethren witnessing Christ. And he says, most of these guys are still alive, ask them if you don’t believe me.

3) Then he was seen by James, the brother of Jesus, who had been previously skeptical about Jesus being the Messiah, but who eventually believed and became the head of the church in Jerusalem.

4) Finally, he mentions himself with great humility. Noting that he was not originally a friend of Jesus like the others but was a persecutor of the church, and why would *he* have believed if he hadn’t seen the risen Christ. He points out that he didn’t change His mind, it was the grace of Christ who had made Him what he was.

I might personally note, that this of course was my experience as well. I too was one a vicious persecutor of Christians and the church, and it was not *me* who changed my mind. My salvation was due entirely to the grace of Christ which I was not worthy of.

And finally, He says in verse 11, look this is not just what I preach, but what all we apostles preach, this is what was revealed by God, this what the SCRIPTURES teach and this is what you originally believed, so why are you

turning aside and listening to stupid Gnostic theories from people who aren't comfortable with the idea of resurrection because of human philosophies?

Three applications:

1) The Resurrection is the result not of wishful thinking but the testimony of eyewitnesses. The Christian faith rests upon better historical evidence than most historical events. It simply could not be had it not really happened. Do not think to see "not enough evidence".

2) Christians – Hold Fast that word - 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you – The world is filled with skeptics, lost tomb nonsense, and many buy into this. If it was true once, it will be true always. Kids don't let people who seem to be smart persuade you to abandon or ruin your faith. A Spiritualized Gospel doesn't save.

Gal. 1:8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

3) Regarding believing in vain. "The proof that someone really believes the gospel is that he continues to hold fast to it. A lot of people are resting their hope of salvation on some kind of religious experience that they had a long time ago while there is no present evidence of salvation in their lives. Let's nail this down once and for all: continuance is the mark of reality! IF there is no present holding fast, it is because there never was a laying hold of the gospel message with a true and living faith!" – ***Roger Ellsworth***