

“What Does the Bible Say About the Resurrection of Christ?”

1 Corinthians 15:3-20

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1 Corinthians 15:3-20

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.

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Introduction

The resurrection of Jesus Christ has been talked about for 2,000 years. Many believe and doubt the validity of the resurrection. There are three aspects of doubt: scientific, historical, and personal. This text specifically deals with the historical and personal aspects of the resurrection.

To understand the scientific aspect, “correct” scientific laws must be defined because not every claim made by scientists are correct hence the continuing changes made in the claimed scientific laws. If the claimed scientific laws are discovered to be “correct,” the scientists have discovered laws that God has made, placed, and ordained in the natural/physical realm. For example, who has decided that a dead person cannot come back to life? How is a baby conceived? If you really think about it, those laws are miracles themselves.

Science and the Bible do not contradict. Rather, they complement one another in explaining how God created the universe. Additionally, scientific laws are small realities of this world. They cannot be measuring sticks for everything in the world because there are still undiscovered scientific laws. Do we even know 1% of the existing scientific laws in the world? Because

science is one aspect of a much greater reality of the world, it alone cannot be the deciding factor in validating or rejecting the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

When you are physically sick, you take medicine. However, medicine cannot cure all the sicknesses such as emotional sickness because we are not merely biological beings. According to the Bible, we are also spiritual beings where we cannot explain our humanity solely biologically. Therefore, science can prove some things but not everything. So, Christians believe it is more logical to test the resurrection of Jesus Christ historically. How can history be tested? History is a written record of significant events by credible people. In fact, history is what separates Christianity from any other religion. But most historians look for flaws rather than credibility within the Bible because the Bible is very credible.

In this passage, Paul also explains most of the resurrection of Jesus Christ historically. The entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 15 is about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1. Historical foundation of the resurrection [1-11]
 - Paul gives historical evidences of the resurrection.
2. Implications of no resurrection [12-19]
 - What if there was no resurrection?
3. Implications of the resurrection [20-34]
 - So what?
4. Explanation of the resurrection [35-50]
 - What does it mean? What happens to us?
5. Hope of the resurrection [51-58]
 - How then should we live if the resurrection is true?

I. Is it true? [4-11] – For all of us

A. Jesus lived [4]

Apostle Paul treats the resurrection of Christ historically as he names the date of when Jesus was resurrected in v.4 *“that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day...”* Paul is trustworthy despite being a Christian himself because even non-Christian historians wrote about the existence of Christ.

Josephus, a Romano-Jewish historian who lived during the 1st century, heard from people’s rumors that Jesus was raised from the dead. He recorded statements that verified the historical nature of both the Old Testament and the New Testament in the Bible. He also confirmed the existence of a person named “The Christ.”

Simon Gathercole, a reader of New Testament studies in University of Cambridge, said this,

“These all appeared within the lifetime of numerous eyewitnesses, and provide descriptions that comport with the culture and geography of first-century Palestine.”

B. Jesus was raised from the dead [4]

Frank Morrison, an attorney and a professor of Harvard Law, set out to refute the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. While he appreciated the life of Jesus Christ, he believed early followers attached the myth of resurrection onto the story. But as he studied the facts with his legal background, he eventually wrote a best-selling book called *“Who Moved the Stone?”* which sets forth the evidences of the resurrection. Subsequently, he started to believe in the resurrection as the evidences were overwhelmingly true.

When Jesus died, it was a national crisis as hundreds of people were saying that his body was missing. His body could have been easily found considering the magnitude of the crisis, but his body was not found. That led to the false accusations of the disciples saying that they stole the body.

Does this prove that Jesus Christ was resurrected? Not necessarily. There is no way to completely prove that he was. However, it certainly gives both the possibility and plausibility. Therefore, serious considerations have to be made while seeking and investigating.

Simon Greenleaf, a distinguished professor of Harvard Law, discovered that the evidences were so overwhelming that he said this,

“Based on the evidences alone, it takes more faith not to believe that Jesus rose from the dead than faith to believe that Jesus rose from the dead.”

1. *Who Moved the Stone?* Frank Morrison
2. *The Case for Christ* Lee Strobel
3. *The Case for Faith* Lee Strobel
4. *More Than a Carpenter* Josh McDowell
5. *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* Josh McDowell
6. *The Reason for God* Tim Keller

C. Jesus was buried in Joseph’s tomb [4]

John 19:38

³⁸ *After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body.*

The Bible mentions specific names of people because they were well known during that time. Joseph Arimathea was a famous Pharisee and a member of Sanhedrin. Sanhedrin was the highest political and religious organization at that time. Joseph would have lost everything as a Pharisee and as a member of Sanhedrin to claim the body of Jesus Christ. But because of Joseph’s actions, it was a well-known fact that Jesus was buried in a borrowed tomb of a famous politician, which indicated that people could have easily known where Jesus was buried.

D. Jesus appeared to Peter and the twelve [5]

The twelve disciples claimed to have seen the resurrected body of Christ and they preached about Jesus's resurrection. In fact, they lived the rest of their lives preaching the truth and evidently died for the truth. They used to be cowards who ran in fear of the Jews when Jesus was captured. But somehow, they became courageous enough to proclaim the resurrection until death. What kind of change took place for them to do so? One could say that they were either deluded or lying. However, it is farfetched to say the disciples were deluded considering the significant impact they had on the 1st century (who would listen to delusional men?). Additionally, they were too sacrificial to the point of death to be lying. Think about it. Would you die for a lie?

Peter was crucified upside down. James was executed by a sword. Thomas and Matthew were speared to death. Philip was tortured and crucified upside down. Bartholomew was skinned alive and crucified upside down. Andrew, James, and Thaddeus were crucified. John tried to die for Jesus but was exiled to the Island of Patmos where he received the vision for the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. There is a good probability that they really believed they saw the resurrected body of Christ.

E. Jesus appeared to five hundred brothers at one time...most were still alive [6]

The recorded books of the New Testament were all written in 1st century. 1 Corinthians was written about 25 years after the death of Jesus (55 AD). People could have easily verified the facts and testimonies within that timeframe. If the tomb was not empty, the Jewish leaders could have easily trumped Paul's preaching of the resurrection of Jesus.

Chuck Colson, President Richard Nixon's Cabinet member, said this about the resurrection of Jesus and the Watergate scandal,

"I know the resurrection is a fact, and the Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned, and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world – and they couldn't keep a lie for 3 weeks. You're telling me that 12 disciples could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible."

Chuck Colson, while reading a chapter on pride from C.S. Lewis's theological book "Mere Christianity," became a Christian. Eventually, he served time in a federal prison camp and then afterwards became part of prison ministry, leading many people to Christ.

F. Jesus appeared to his brother James [7]

Josephus, the non-Christian historian mentioned before, wrote about James, the half-brother of so-called Christ. James has seen Jesus for at least 30 years as a brother and this James became a leader of a new movement where he proclaimed of seeing the resurrected body.

G. Jesus appeared to Paul [8]

Paul was a Jewish leader who used to kill Christians but by the grace of God, he changed and turned into one of the most famous and impactful missionary in the 1st century. He was one of the most zealous killer of Christians who had intellect, status, and power. One day, he decided to throw away all his status and power and decided to travel thousand miles on his feet, willingly subjecting himself to lashings, beatings, brinks of death, stonings, shipwrecks, starvation, dehydration, and years of imprisonment to tell people of Jesus who died and resurrected was the Son of God.

Notice how Paul does not say, “*I think what I think*” or “*I do what I do*”. He says, “*I am what I am.*” His whole person was changed because of his encounter with the resurrected Lord on that road to Damascus (Acts 9). Only the Gospel can change cannibals to become Christians as it happened in Asia and Africa. Only the Gospel can change a killer to a lover and a persecutor to a missionary.

II. What if it might be true? [11] – For seekers

A. Check the validity of your doubts

Not believing means that there are doubts. When you are disagreeing with something, you believe in something else. Essentially, what you believe in does not correlate with your doubts. But check the credibility of your belief. You may not have all the proof of your faith but often, you also do not have proofs for the assumptions of your doubts either.

C.S. Lewis said this,

“Believing things on authority only means believing them because you’ve been told them by someone you think trustworthy. Ninety-nine per cent of the things you believe are believed on authority. I believe there is such a place as New York. I haven’t seen it myself. I couldn’t prove by abstract reasoning that there must be such a place. I believe it because reliable people have told me so. The ordinary man believes in the Solar System, atoms, evolution, and the circulation of the blood on authority – because the scientists say so. Every historical statement in the world is believed on authority. None of us has seen the Norman Conquest or the defeat of the Armada. None of us could prove them by pure logic as you prove a thing in mathematics. We believe them simply because people who did see them have left writings that tell us about them: in fact, on authority. A man who jibbed at authority in other things as some people do in religion would have to be content to know nothing all his life.”

If you do not believe in the Bible, who told you that the Bible is not true? Is that person credible?

B. Check the validity of the Bible

Most intellectual people that do not believe in the Bible are not seeking for credibility but for the flaws of the Bible because the Bible is already so credible. So, study about the Bible.

C. Study the Bible yourself

Study the Bible. If compelled to, pray. Millions of people in history have been changed through the Bible.

D. Be with others who can help you seek God

Be with believers and check their credibility. Listen to their testimonies of faith. No one claims to be perfect because no one is perfect. So, do not seek for perfection in their lives and rather, see how Jesus's mercy covers their imperfections and how Jesus is powerfully working in their progressions. Jesus Christ dying on the Cross for you is saying, you are a sinner and you need me. I died for you and you need my blood to cleanse your sins. You used to defend yourself from the Cross, but now you see the accusations and the offenses of the Cross.

Initially, you might have been offended, but slowly you start to embrace the Cross. The Cross starts to defend you and will carry you until your heart is naked before the crucified forgiver. Keep seeking because we all have some kind of faith. For example, we have faith that our chairs will hold us. We have faith in the airplane we fly on. Everyone has faith and each faith depends on the object of faith. Keep going even if you have many doubts and to believe, you need to not only see but also to meet the person of Jesus Christ. You will be able to do that as you meet other believers and read the Bible.

III. What if it is true? [12-20] – For believers

A. Our faith is valid – We can run [12-14]

If Christ has been raised from the dead, our faith is valid. It means that we can run. To believe or to put our faith in Jesus Christ means that we are resurrected spiritually. Birth has taken place and you are a child of God. You start to crawl like a baby. You start to walk like a child. Then you start to run like an adult.

That is what Paul means in 2 Timothy 4:7 as he talks about the completion of his Christian life.

⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

2 Timothy is the last book that Paul wrote in the New Testament as he was nearing his death. He describes himself as a runner and the reason why he finished the race was because he kept his faith. If you keep your faith, God will strengthen you and you are

going to be able to finish the race. In the midst of running, you have to fight because there are many obstacles just like in a game of football. We are running warriors or warrior-runners.

B. Our forgiveness is valid – We can rise [15-17]

We are going to fall when we run. But because Jesus has resurrected, you are justified in him and can rise again from your fall all the time. There is a phrase called “*do not count the record of wrongs.*” This phrase is said in 1 Corinthians 13:4-5.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

As Paul talks about love in 1 Corinthians 13:4, love is personified. Paul is always thinking about a person when he describes good character attributes. When Paul says “*Love is patient,*” he is saying “*A loving person is patient.*” He is thinking about Jesus Christ and how Jesus is patient, kind, and does not keep record of wrongs.

Paul uses the same phrase in Romans and says that God does not keep the record of wrongs. He does not keep the record of wrongs of our sins because of the blood of Jesus Christ that is always cleansing and forgiving us. We can always go to God again and again and again. When you fall, you can always rise again and again and again.

C. Our hope is valid – We can finish [18-20]

All of us will be able to finish the race by His grace. Hope in this world for us is temporary but hope in Christ is always eternal. We are not to be pitied in our lives but to be envied. We can persevere and always finish. We can continue to grow to be like Jesus Christ, who is not only the author but also the finisher of our faith.

Conclusion

Poem called “*The Race,*”

*Whenever I start to hang my head in front of failure's face,
my downward fall is broken by the memory of a race.
A children's race, young boys, young men; how I remember well,
excitement sure, but also fear, it wasn't hard to tell.
They all lined up so full of hope, each thought to win that race
or tie for first, or if not that, at least take second place.
Their parents watched from off the side, each cheering for their son,
and each boy hoped to show his folks that he would be the one.*

*The whistle blew and off they flew, like chariots of fire,
to win, to be the hero there, was each young boy's desire.*

*One boy in particular, whose dad was in the crowd,
was running in the lead and thought "My dad will be so proud."
But as he speeded down the field and crossed a shallow dip,
the little boy who thought he'd win, lost his step and slipped.
Trying hard to catch himself, his arms flew everywhere,
and midst the laughter of the crowd he fell flat on his face.
As he fell, his hope fell too; he couldn't win it now.
Humiliated, he just wished to disappear somehow.*

*But as he fell his dad stood up and showed his anxious face,
which to the boy so clearly said, "Get up and win that race!"
He quickly rose, no damage done, behind a bit that's all,
and ran with all his mind and might to make up for his fall.
So anxious to restore himself, to catch up and to win,
his mind went faster than his legs. He slipped and fell again.
He wished that he had quit before with only one disgrace.
"I'm hopeless as a runner now, I shouldn't try to race."*

*But through the laughing crowd he searched and found his father's face
with a steady look that said again, "Get up and win that race!"
So he jumped up to try again, ten yards behind the last.
"If I'm to gain those yards," he thought, "I've got to run real fast!"
Exceeding everything he had, he regained eight, then ten...
but trying hard to catch the lead, he slipped and fell again.
Defeat! He lay there silently. A tear dropped from his eye.
"There's no sense running anymore! Three strikes I'm out! Why try?
I've lost, so what's the use?" he thought. "I'll live with my disgrace."
But then he thought about his dad, who soon he'd have to face.*

*"Get up," an echo sounded low, "you haven't lost at all,
for all you have to do to win is rise each time you fall.
Get up!" the echo urged him on, "Get up and take your place!
You were not meant for failure here! Get up and win that race!"
So, up he rose to run once more, refusing to forfeit,
and he resolved that win or lose, at least he wouldn't quit.
So far behind the others now, the most he'd ever been,
still he gave it all he had and ran like he could win.
Three times he'd fallen stumbling, three times he rose again.
Too far behind to hope to win, he still ran to the end.*

*They cheered another boy who crossed the line and won first place,
head high and proud and happy -- no falling, no disgrace.
But, when the fallen youngster crossed the line, in last place,
the crowd gave him a greater cheer for finishing the race.
And even though he came in last with head bowed low, unproud,
you would have thought he'd won the race, to listen to the crowd.*

And to his dad he sadly said, "I didn't do so well."

"To me, you won," his father said. "You rose each time you fell."

And now when things seem dark and bleak and difficult to face,

the memory of that little boy helps me in my own race.

For all of life is like that race, with ups and downs and all.

And all you have to do to win is rise each time you fall.

And when depression and despair shout loudly in my face,

another voice within me says, "Get up and win that race!"

Whenever you fall, look down because Jesus is right there. Jesus is your rock. His death is your foundation and his resurrection gives you strength to rise again. Keep on running until you are able to fly with him.