

**§ 7. Doctrine of Christ**  
**Lecture 25**  
**Biblical Data for Jesus' Resurrection**

Having discussed the atonement of Christ for several months, we now turn today to a second aspect of Christ's work which is his resurrection from the dead. The resurrection of Christ from the dead is tightly connected with his atoning work on the cross. Indeed, the cross and resurrection are like two sides of the same coin. In Romans 4:25 Paul says Jesus Christ "was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification." The resurrection of Jesus is a consequence and a ratification of Christ's satisfaction of divine justice on the cross. On the one hand it is a consequence of the satisfaction of divine justice. Because divine justice has been fully satisfied by the substitutionary punishment and death of Christ, Christ can no longer be held by death. The punishment cannot continue. The price has been paid and therefore a consequence of the satisfaction of divine justice is Christ's rising from the dead and breaking the bonds of death and hell and sin. On the other hand, it is also a ratification of Christ's satisfaction of divine justice. It shows us that the cross was not ultimately a pointless tragedy of history but that this was indeed God's great redemptive act in human history. The resurrection of Christ from the dead shows us clearly that the price has been paid, that justice has been satisfied, and our redemption has been completed by Christ's work on the cross. So the resurrection is not some independent and separate appendage to Christ's atoning work. It is a consequence and ratification of it.

We want to first look at the scriptural data (or some of it anyway) concerning Jesus' resurrection. As we do so we will first look at one of the earliest historical testimonies to Jesus' resurrection from the dead. This is the fifteenth chapter of Paul's first letter to the church of Corinth, Greece. This is a separate and independent treatise on the resurrection which is included in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church. Paul had spent the year AD 50 to 51 in Corinth planting a church there, and then later around AD 55 he wrote again to the Corinthians reminding them of the Gospel that he preached to them. It includes in his letter this treatise on the resurrection which we want to look at this morning.

Let's turn in our Bibles to 1 Corinthians 15 and look at this chapter. The purpose of Paul's writing this chapter is found in verse 12. Paul says, "Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" There were evidently people in Corinth (not all, but some of them) who were denying that the dead are ever raised. They apparently did not believe that we will eventually be raised from the dead, as Jews typically believed. We don't know exactly what motivated this denial on the part of some of these Corinthian Christians of the doctrine of the end time resurrection of the dead. It could have been that Paul was encountering here a kind of

incipient Gnosticism which says that the spiritual is good and pure and the material is evil and fallen. Therefore the idea of a resurrection of the body was repugnant to them and impossible.<sup>1</sup> For these proto-Gnostics, the idea of a resurrection of the physical body was something that could not take place. Or it may have been that what Paul was encountering in Corinth was a kind of simple materialism that said that we are simply physical bodies and that when you die the lights go out and that is the end of your existence and therefore there is no immortality of the soul, no immortality of any sort to be had. Scholars debate over exactly what the Corinthian heresy was. The difficulty is that we have nothing from the Corinthian heretics themselves. We have to reconstruct their position as best we can from the way in which Paul responds to it. That is very difficult to do. But the bottom line is that there were people in the church of Corinth who denied that the dead will be raised. Paul writes this chapter in order to refute this error.

The chapter falls naturally into two parts. In verses 1 to 34 Paul talks about Christ's resurrection as the guarantee of our resurrection. The reason that we can believe in the resurrection of the dead at the end of human history is because Christ has been raised from the dead in advance as the forerunner and the guarantor of our eventual resurrection. That is verses 1 to 34. From verses 35 to the end of the chapter in verse 58 he answers a Corinthian objection based upon the nature of the resurrection body. Here he is responding to these heretics who say that it is impossible that a resurrection of the body should occur. Paul will refute this objection in verses 35 to 58.

Let's begin to delve into this chapter by looking at part one which is Christ's resurrection as the guarantee of ours. First, in verses 1 to 11 Paul discusses the evidence for the resurrection of Christ. Let's read these verses together.

Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast—unless you believed in vain.

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, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 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

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<sup>1</sup> 5:00

harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

In this passage that we've read together, Paul quotes an extremely early tradition that he himself had received and in turn passed on to the Corinthian church when he founded it. This passage (or this tradition) comes in verses 3 to 5 when he says "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received." And now he begins to quote this formula: "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, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve."

It is universally agreed among scholars today that Paul is not writing in his own hand here. He is not freely composing. Rather, he is relying on and quoting from an old tradition that he himself received from those who were in Christ before him and then passed on to his converts in Corinth. How do we know this? In verse 3 Paul uses the technical rabbinical terms for the transmission of sacred tradition.<sup>2</sup> When he says, "I delivered what I also received" the words for "receiving" and "delivering" are the rabbinical terms for the transmission of sacred tradition. Moreover, this passage – these verses – are filled with non-Pauline traits, that is to say stylistic traits that are not characteristic of the apostle Paul. For example, the phrase "according to the scriptures" or "in accordance with the scriptures" which appears in lines one and three of the formula is non-Pauline. Paul typically will quote Scripture by saying "as it is written" but here there is this non-Pauline phrase "according to the scriptures." Also, the verb in line three, "He has been raised on the third day" is not a Pauline expression. This is only found elsewhere in the broader Pauline corpus in 2 Timothy 2:8 where he says, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my Gospel." This verse in 2 Timothy likewise seems to be very stylized and probably reflects itself earlier tradition rather than the author's own composition. Finally, the use of the expression "the Twelve" is not typical for Paul. This indicates probably a group of people that was comprised of the original disciples – the original twelve disciples that followed Jesus, though of course by this time Judas would have fallen away. So "the Twelve" is a designation or a name of a group, not necessarily an enumeration of the number of people. "The Twelve" just as we might say "The Big Ten" referring to a conference that may have more than or less than ten universities in it. These are non-Pauline characteristics that indicate the use of prior tradition.

Moreover, the formula that he cites in verses 3 to 5 overshoots what needs to be proved. What needs to be proved in this chapter is that Christ rose from the dead. That is going to be the linchpin of his argument. *You Corinthians cannot deny the resurrection of the dead because Christ rose from the dead.* But the formula expresses more than the

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<sup>2</sup> 10:05

resurrection. It also has in the first line Christ's death for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures and in the second line the burial of Jesus. These play no part in the argument of 1 Corinthians 15 which shows that Paul is citing a unitary formula that includes all of these elements even though his interest and focus is simply on the third and fourth lines – in Christ's rising from the dead and appearing to various witnesses.

Finally, there is a sort of parallelism or Semitic quality to this tradition. By saying it is Semitic I mean it is Hebraic – it is Jewish. First there is the parallelism of these four lines: Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, he was buried, he was raised from the dead on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and he appeared to Cephas then to the Twelve. Obviously the first the third lines are parallel – they both include the expression “according to the scriptures.” Similarly, the second and fourth lines are both very brief: “he was buried; he appeared to Cephas and to the Twelve.” You have this sort of typical Semitic parallelism in the structure of this formula.

Moreover, the expression “on the third day” is written in awkward Greek but it seems to reflect a Semitic origin or Aramaic origin. If you translate “on the third day” back into Aramaic, this is an Aramaic sort of construction rather than a natural Greek construction.

Then the word “Cephas” itself. This is Peter that we are talking about – Simon Peter. But Simon Peter is a Greek name.<sup>3</sup> His Aramaic name was Cephas. So in this formula Simon Peter is referred to by his Aramaic name Cephas.

I think you can see there are a number of Semitic features of this tradition that betray its origin.

The last point that I wanted to mention with regard to this formula is that Paul says in verse 11 that it represents the preaching of all the apostles. He says, “whether it was they or I, so we preach and so you believe.” He is not giving back here some idiosyncratic Gospel that was peculiar to Paul. This is the apostolic message summarized in four brief lines by this tradition which Paul himself preached in the city of Corinth.

Compare in this regard the sermons in the Acts of the Apostles. Look at Acts 13:28-31 where we have some of the early preaching of the apostles with respect to the Gospel. In Acts 13:28-31 you will see that it follows like an outline the four line formula of 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. In Acts 13:28 and following it says,

And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him [notice: “according to the scriptures” - he died according to the scriptures for our sins], they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by those who

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<sup>3</sup> 15:01

came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people.

As I say, this follows like an outline of 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. Christ died, he was buried, he was raised, and he appeared. What we have here is a faithful summary of the early apostolic preaching.

You can also discern this by looking at the Gospel of Mark chapter 15 and chapter 16. Here we have the climax to the Passion Story as Mark relates it. In chapter 15 we have the crucifixion of Jesus and his death. Then in the latter part of chapter 15 we have the burial of Jesus in the tomb. Then in chapter 16 we have the discovery of the empty tomb, the proclamation of his resurrection by the angel, “He is risen. He is not here.” Then the foreshadowing of the appearances - “He is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him as he told you.” Again, in the Passion Story you have all four elements of 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. You've got the death on the cross. You've got the burial in the tomb. You've got the discovery of the empty tomb and the resurrection from the dead. Then finally the appearances to various witnesses. This has convinced, as I say, all scholars that what we have here in 1 Corinthians 15 is an extraordinarily early and primitive (primitive in the sense of being early and unvarnished) tradition of the apostolic Gospel that was proclaimed by the church.

### **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* When he is talking about some who may not believe in the resurrection of the dead, is it possible that these are Christians who came from the Sadducee tradition?

*Dr. Craig:* That is a very good point. You remember Paul elsewhere in the book of Acts splits the Jerusalem council that is judging him by discerning that some were Pharisees and some were Sadducees and the Sadducees denied the resurrection of the dead. And Paul says, *Brethren, I am a Pharisee and I am on trial for the hope in the resurrection of the dead!* And the Pharisees and Sadducees turn against each other, and Paul gets to be released. Maybe! Could it be these are Jews in Corinth who reflect this conservative Sadducean tradition. We just don't know. But that is a possibility.<sup>4</sup>

*Student:* Could you comment on 1 Corinthians 15 when Paul says that Jesus was raised “in accordance with the scriptures?” Do you think there is a particular passage he is thinking of?

*Dr. Craig:* I wasn't going to talk about that but of course that is much debated. What is Paul thinking of here when he says he has been raised from the dead in accordance with the Scriptures? Some have suggested this is a reference to Hosea 6:2 where God says of Israel, *I have torn them but on the second day I will restore them. On the third day I will*

*raise them up.* Some have suggested that maybe Hosea 6:2 is in view here. The problem with that is that the verse is extremely obscure. It is not cited anywhere else in the New Testament as a proof text for Jesus. When you look at the proof texts that Jesus cites for his resurrection it is the story of Jonah. As Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights so the Son of Man shall be in the belly of the Earth for three days and three nights. The Jonah story seems to be the one at least that Jesus had in mind. Another possibility is this could be a reference to Isaiah 53. I think that is very plausible because the phrase “he died for our sins” in accordance with the Scriptures, I think, has got to be a reference to Isaiah 53 because there is nowhere any place in the Old Testament even remotely about Messiah's dying for our sins apart from Isaiah 53. If this is what is in mind in the first line of the formula it is very plausible that that is also in mind in the third line of the formula when in the last part of Isaiah 53 he says, *He will see his progeny and be satisfied.* He seems to foreshadow his resurrection from the dead. I think that is a very real possibility.

*Student:* Along the same lines, David – not allowing the Holy One to see corruption.

*Dr. Craig:* Psalm 16, I believe that is. That is cited in the book of Acts about the resurrection of the dead. Again, it seems a remote possibility. That passage really isn't about resurrection when you read it. David is talking about how he won't die. That is what he means when he says he won't see corruption. It doesn't mention the third day motif either. So that is a possibility but I think more remote than the ones that have been mentioned.

*Student:* Can you flesh out for us a little bit . . . I know you've talked often times about how early this goes back. Can you flesh that out a little bit? How scholars get to those dates?

*Dr. Craig:* That is the next point on my outline! I will use that as a segue to the next point which is the origin of this tradition.

## **END DISCUSSION**

I mentioned that Paul delivered this tradition to the Corinthian church when he founded the church there in AD 50. That is just twenty years after Jesus' death in AD 30. But obviously the tradition that Paul received goes even further back. I think we have a clue as to Paul's reception of this formula in Galatians 1:15-19. Let's turn to Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia, Galatians 1:15-19. Here Paul is describing his Damascus Road conversion. He says,

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to

Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus.

Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.

Here Paul says three years after his Damascus Road conversion (which probably took place around AD 33) he goes up to Jerusalem on this fact-finding trip and spends two weeks with the apostles Peter (or Cephas) and James in Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> It is very interesting to note that these are the two names that appear in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7. The only two individuals named are Cephas and James, the very people that Paul saw during this visit. I think it is highly unlikely that any later reception of this tradition would have supplanted in Paul's mind the testimony first-hand of Cephas and James that he got on this occasion. As C. H. Dodd, the great New Testament scholar from Cambridge University, said, "We can assume that they didn't spend all their time talking about the weather." Talking to Cephas and James during these two weeks, he undoubtedly learned the facts about Jesus' resurrection and the empty tomb and so forth. I think it is very likely that he received this formula at this time, if not before while he was in Damascus. He was involved in Christian ministry in Damascus after his conversion for around three years. He could have even received it then. But it means that this formula probably goes back prior to AD 36 – that is to say it goes back to within the first 5 years after Jesus' crucifixion. This is incredibly early material. When people say to you, *Well, the documents of the [New] Testament were written decades after the events occurred, after memory had faded*, what they don't understand is that these New Testament documents rely upon traditions which go right back to the time of the events. Incredibly early and therefore valuable sources of historical information. That is the case with 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. This is some of the earliest tradition embodied anywhere in the New Testament. What does it tell us? Christ died for our sins, he was buried, he was raised from the dead on the third day, and he appeared to all these various witnesses. Incredible.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 25:11

<sup>6</sup> Total Running Time: 28:24 (Copyright © 2017 William Lane Craig)