

Body of Proof **Part Two**

1 Corinthians 15:13-20

The Appearance Evidence

1. The convincing creed

- *1 Corinthians 9:1, 15:1-8*

- The words "received" and "passed on"
- The style and parallelism
- The name "Cephas" is used for "Peter"
- The primitive phrases
- The narrative words

2. The 500 club

3. The Gospels

Jesus appeared to:

- Mary Magdalene (John 20:10-20)
- The other women (Matthew 28:8-10)
- Clopas and the other disciple (road to Emmaus) (Luke 24:13-32)
- Eleven disciples and others (Luke 24:33-49)
- Ten apostles (and others) without Thomas (John 20:19-23)
- Thomas and the other Apostles (John 20:26-30)
- Seven Apostles (John 21:1-14)
- The Disciples (Matthew 28:16-20)
- Apostles at Mt. of Olives (Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:4-9)

4. The alternatives

- Legendary
- Hallucinatory

Conclusion: no rational doubt!

- *1 Corinthians 15:54-57*

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Body of Proof¹ *The Appearance Evidence*

There used to be a magazine and website until the early 2000s called *Omni* that wrote about science and science fiction. They held an annual competition called the “Creative Scientific Theories Contest.” People would submit outlandish scientific theories, and here is a sampling of some of them (keep in mind these were not supposed to be serious!):

- When a cat is dropped, it always lands on its feet. And when toast is dropped, it always lands with the buttered side facing down. I propose to strap buttered toast to the back of a cat; the two will hover, spinning inches above the ground. With a giant buttered-cat array, a high-speed monorail could easily link New York with Los Angeles.
- Here's a theory of why yawning is contagious: you yawn to equalize the pressure in your eardrums. This changes the pressure outside your eardrums, which unbalances other peoples' ear pressure, so they must yawn to even it out.
- Here's another interesting one: Birds take off at sunrise. On the opposite side of the world, they are landing at sunset. This causes the earth to spin on its axis.
- Here's my favorite: the quantity of consonants in the English language is constant. It never changes and there are only so many to go around. If a consonant is omitted in one place, it turns up in another. Therefore when someone from Boston says he “pahks his cah”, the lost “r's” migrate southwest, causing a Texan to “warsh his car” and invest in “erl wells.”

Those theories might be creative, but they are still false. There are also some creative theories that try to explain away the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But even though they are creative, that doesn't mean they are true. Does the resurrection itself pass the test? Can it stand up to investigation?

Whenever there is an investigation into a legal case, investigators will pore over the finest details, interviewing people of interest and witnesses and gathering information and data in order to come to a correct conclusion. When they've finished their work, the sum of the evidence is called a “body of proof” – where all the individual pieces of evidence are taken together as a complete whole. A single piece of evidence might be weak on its own, but a large body of proof makes an argument much harder to refute.

Today we are continuing in a three-part series we're calling “Body of Proof” – we'll get a large volume of evidence to the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. These sermons are in a style that's called “apologetics.” The term doesn't mean that I'm

¹ Sources: Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan) 2009, 2016
Jeremiah Johnston, *Body of Proof* (Bethany Publishers, Minneapolis) 2023

apologizing for what the Bible says; it's a term that describes a systematic and rational defense – in this case of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Did Jesus really rise from the dead? If he didn't, then his torture, crucifixion and death are nothing more than another human tragedy. As horrible as it was, without the resurrection it doesn't do much for you and me.

But if Jesus *did* rise from the dead, then his suffering and death for us takes on a powerful, life-altering and history altering impact that allows us to be forgiven of sin and in a relationship with God and gives us an entirely different level of living that endures beyond our own graves and into eternity.

Many of us believe it is true that Jesus really did rise from the grave, but many of us who believe do so simply because we've been told it was true – on blind faith. Now, faith is a very important thing, and ultimately faith involves believing what we can't actually see or prove with our finite minds. But our faith is not blind; Ours is an *informed faith*. So we want to explore the evidence of the resurrection, because everything about our faith rises and falls on whether the resurrection is true or not. Listen to what the Apostle Paul wrote:

“For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead.” (1 Corinthians 15:13-20, niv)

If you have faith in Christ, it is critical to your faith and mine that we come to a firm belief in the resurrection as a true event in history. If you do not yet have faith in Christ, resolving this issue is imperative to your search for truth and identity. If he did rise from the dead, it changes everything. It means that everything the Bible says is true.

Last week we talked about the missing evidence; Christ's body was missing from the tomb. So we answered the question, “How secure was the tomb?” because if the tomb was secure, most theories opposing the resurrection can't be true. Then we looked at the contradictory evidence in the gospels – that the secondary details in the descriptions don't all match up, but we saw that those actually help confirm the historicity of the resurrection. Then we looked at the affirmative evidence – all the evidence that in fact worked in favor of the resurrection to explain his body being gone from the tomb. But not only was Jesus' body missing from the tomb, it actually showed up outside of the tomb – with Jesus in it! That's what we are going to look at today...

The Appearance Evidence.

Now keep in mind that when we talk about those who saw Jesus alive, there are no eyewitnesses to the resurrection event itself; nobody was sitting inside the tomb and saw the body start to vibrate, stand up, take the wrappings off, fold them up neatly, and roll

back the stone and step out of the tomb. There were eyewitnesses to the resurrected Jesus, but not the resurrection of Jesus. That doesn't hurt our study at all. Science is all about causes and effects. We don't see dinosaurs, but we study the fossils. We might not know how a disease begins, but we study the symptoms. There might not be a witness to a crime, but police study the evidence after the fact to piece together what actually happened. So did Jesus really appear after his burial? Let's start with what almost all scholars agree on...

1. The convincing creed.

Nobody questions that the Apostle Paul wrote a book in the Bible called 1 Corinthians that we read from earlier. In that book Paul affirms in two places that he personally encountered the resurrected Christ. In 1 Corinthians 9:1 Paul says:

"Am I not as free as anyone else? Am I not an apostle? Haven't I seen Jesus our Lord with my own eyes?" (1 Corinthians 9:1, nlt)

And in 15:8 he says:

"He appeared to me also." (1 Corinthians 15:8, niv)

What's important about that second statement is that it is Paul's personal addition to what is well known to be a creed. I want you to follow me on this, because this is amazing. Let's look at what Paul said in that passage in 1 Corinthians 15. Would you stand with me as I read it?

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: (*this is where the creed begins*) that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, (*here's Paul's personal addition to the creed*) and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (1 Corinthians 15:1-8, niv)

Thanks, you can be seated.

It is important that we see and understand that Paul is quoting a creed; in other words, Paul is quoting something that was a kind of statement of faith that people had been memorizing and reciting to each other. And if it is a creed, it is incredibly important evidence of the appearance of the resurrected Christ. Let me give you some reasons that we know it's a creed and then you'll understand why that's so important:

First...

- **The words "received" and "passed on"**

Those are two words that Paul uses, and in the original language they are technical rabbinic terms, or terms used by rabbis and teachers that indicate they are passing along a holy tradition. So for example, when you are in a setting and they ask you to stand and recite the pledge of allegiance, you know right away that you did not make up the pledge; you are quoting a creed. Same thing here.

Second is...

- **The style and parallelism**

The way Paul is saying it and writing it is *not* his normal style; instead, it's in the style of a creed. You can't see that in the translation, but it is in the original language. For example, if I say this: "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now I am found, was blind but now I see." You instinctively know by the style and the parallel rhythm that it's not my normal way of talking; I'm quoting some kind of poem or song. It's the same in the original language here.

Third is...

- **The name "Cephas" is used for "Peter"**

Cephas was Peter's Aramaic name before Jesus renamed him Peter. By the time Paul came along, he knew him as Peter. But in the creed he recites the name "Cephas" – which means that when the creed was written, not everyone was used to calling him "Peter" yet. That means that this was a creed that started essentially from the beginning from Christ's resurrection.

Fourth...

- **The primitive phrases**

...that Paul uses are ones he normally didn't use. Phrases like, "The twelve," "the third day," "he was raised," and others indicate that Paul was quoting a creed.

Lastly, the words are...

- **Narrative words**

...instead of normal conversational words that Paul uses in his letters.

So if you were *telling* a story, you might say, "We saw the clouds building so we ran to gather wood and then out of the blue the clouds burst and we ran for cover." If it were a narrative style, you would say, "First, we noticed the weather change, then we gathered wood, and finally, we found shelter." See the difference? That's what's going on with Paul's writing here.

There are other reasons that we know that Paul is reciting a creed, but those are the big ones that convince all scholars, whether Christian or not, that Paul is stating a creed. Okay? NOW – here’s why that’s important:

We know that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians between 53-57 AD, and he says that he passed along this creed to them when he visited there in 51 AD. More than likely, that means that Paul got the creed during his time in Jerusalem that he described in Galatians 1:18-19, which was just three years after Jesus appeared to him, which means Paul first learned that creed between 34-37 AD. That means it was being recited by believers not later than 1-3 years after the resurrection. Got it? That is as close to eyewitness as you will ever get in ancient history, and that means that if it wasn’t already accepted as true by people of that day it would not have survived for twenty more years by the time Paul wrote it in 1 Corinthians. That means the events described could not be argued against, because the eyewitnesses described were still alive. Do you follow that?

Okay, speaking of eyewitnesses, then let’s look at...

2. The 500 club.

The creed says that Jesus appeared to over 500 people at one time. These were people who were contemporaries of Paul. Paul could say to anyone: “Go and ask Frank – he was there, he was one of the 500. Go ask any of those guys. They’ll tell you what they saw.” Anyone who heard this could go and check it out for themselves.

And remember, before Jesus’ death he would typically teach several hundred to many thousand people in the countryside of Galilee, so it wasn’t that unusual for him to do it again after he had risen from the dead.

I recently read a story of a letter that was sent from Health and Human Services to a resident of Greenville, South Carolina. The letter said, “Your food stamps will be stopped, effective March of this year, because we received notice that you passed away. May God bless you, and you may reapply should your circumstances change.” It’s interesting that the government left that possibility open for him! If he was alive, all he would have to do is bring his neighbor with him to vouch for him. Or at least some ID. Well that’s exactly what Paul was saying – “Check with any of these people – they can verify what I am saying!” We have the creed, we have the 500 club, and we have the testimony of...

3. The Gospels.

The creed mentions appearances to several people, and the Gospels agree and *add* to that list of eyewitnesses by naming names. Look at the list...

Jesus appeared to:

- Mary Magdalene (John 20:10-20)
- The other women (Matthew 28:8-10)
- Clopas and the other disciple (road to Emmaus) (Luke 24:13-32)

- Eleven disciples and others (Luke 24:33-49)
- Ten apostles (and others) without Thomas (John 20:19-23)
- Thomas and the other Apostles (John 20:26-30)
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Now, science says that if there is any such thing as infallible proof, it is the repetition of the same experiment that brings the same result. I just gave you nine experiments that involved hundreds of people, all with the same results. We'll accept scientific evidence after only a few experiments bring the same results. How much more than can we believe this?!

For the sake of argument, though, let's look at...

4. The alternatives

There are a couple of alternative arguments that have been offered against this kind of proof.

This is going to be a quick review because we talked about this a couple weeks ago, but let's hit a couple of them again. One is that the appearances were...

- Legendary

This idea suggests that the appearances didn't really happen; it just started with one rumor and then it grew greater every time it was told – like a lot of urban legends. But the reality of the convincing creed removes that idea, because the creed is dated so early, and the facts never changed from the beginning.

Another suggestion is that the appearances were...

- Hallucinatory

This idea is that the sightings were some kind of mass hallucination. Dr. Gary Collins is a psychologist, university professor, president of a national association of psychologists, and author of dozens of books on psychological issues. This is what he had to say about this business of hallucinations: "Hallucinations are individual occurrences. By their very nature only one person can see a given hallucination at a time. They certainly aren't something which can be seen by a group of people. Neither is it possible that one person could somehow induce an hallucination in somebody else. Since an hallucination exists only in this subjective, personal sense, it is obvious that others cannot witness it." In other words, he says that hallucinations come one at a time.

Not to mention that the disciples were afraid and clearly didn't know what was going on when Jesus was killed – the last thing they were expecting was a resurrection. And hallucinations are rare – most are caused by people who are either on drugs or going

through some kind of severe deprivation, whether food, water, sleep – something like that. That was not the case for the disciples.

Given the problems with alternative theories, and given the reliability of the documents containing testimony of those who were eyewitnesses to the appearances, we are left with one...

Conclusion: no rational doubt!

Jesus was tragically killed on a cross – that is a historical and medical, undisputed fact. Then, Jesus' tomb was empty that first Easter morning. His disciples and others saw him, spoke to him, even touched him and ate with him – all *after* the resurrection! Dead people don't do those things.

Prominent British theologian Michael Green said, "The (post resurrection) appearances of Jesus are as well authenticated as anything in antiquity. There can be no rational doubt that they occurred, and that the main reason why Christians became sure of the resurrection in the earliest days was just this. They could say with assurance, 'We have seen the Lord.' They *knew* it was him!" Dr. Green is right!

These same facts can be the reason that you can say with assurance, "Jesus is alive." And if it is true, then the resurrection of 33 AD makes a difference in your life in 2026. It means that there is something more for this life than what you are currently experiencing. It means that there is more beyond this life that you can live in and enjoy forever and ever.

For many centuries, men and women in Europe would stand at the shore and look west at what we now call the Atlantic Ocean, and they would wonder if there was anything beyond. The scholars of that time said that if you sailed west you would sail right off the edge of the world – that there was nothing beyond. For hundreds of years, the national motto of Spain was "Ne plus ultra" – Latin for "no more beyond" or "there is nothing beyond" – assuming they had explored all that there is.

One day a guy named Columbus went sailing west. They watched him sail off into the horizon, knowing he would simply slip off the edge of the world into nothingness. But one day, after a long time, a ship appeared as a speck on the horizon, growing larger and larger. Columbus had returned! He spoke of a paradise beyond the horizon and he came back to testify to it.

One of the most beautiful monuments to Christopher Columbus to this day is a statue in Spain of a huge lion with the words "ne plus ultra" at the base of it – "no more beyond." But after Columbus returned, the national motto was officially changed by the king. On this statue, the lion is eating the first word of the old motto – "ne." All that can be read now is the new motto: "Plus Ultra." More beyond. That was Columbus' greatest legacy. He proved there was more beyond.

There was another day when a young man disappeared over the edge into the abyss. People thought for sure he was gone. But one Sunday morning three days later, the sun rose in the east and the Son of God stepped forth from the grave. Jesus has shown us that there is more beyond. Like the lion on Columbus' monument, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah

has erased the notion that death was the end. Through Christ's death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, we can say with certainty, "Plus Ultra"!

There is more beyond this life as we know it – now, and after we die!

That's why Paul writes in that same chapter:

"Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:54-57, niv)

Prayer

Benediction:

Live each day in the certainty of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, so that the Holy Spirit might give you power and gifts to make a difference in this world for the Kingdom of God.

Life Group Questions

Body of Proof: The Appearance Evidence

Week of September 27, 2026

1. If this is your first time together, take time to introduce yourselves with your name and a brief statement about yourself.
2. The sermon emphasized that Christian faith is not “blind faith,” but an “informed faith.” What does that mean to you, and how does the evidence for the resurrection affect your faith?
3. Which piece of “appearance evidence” from the sermon stood out to you most—the early creed, the 500 witnesses, the Gospel accounts, or the responses to alternative explanations? Why?
4. Why do you think the early Christian creed in 1 Corinthians 15 is significant? What does its early origin suggest about the resurrection claims of the first Christians?
5. The disciples were not expecting Jesus to rise from the dead. How does that detail affect the way you think about their testimony and their willingness to proclaim the resurrection?
6. The sermon discussed alternative explanations such as legend and hallucination. Why is it important for Christians to be willing to examine objections to their beliefs rather than simply dismissing them?
7. If Jesus truly rose from the dead, as the sermon argues, how should that reality affect the way we live, face suffering, or think about death?
8. The closing message was “Plus Ultra”—there is “more beyond.” Where do you most need the hope and victory of the resurrection in your life right now?
9. Spend time in prayer together to close.