

The Ship, the Tomb, and the Truth: *Why the Real Jesus Rose Again*

D. Gene Williams Jr., PhD
Defend the Word Ministries
NorthPointe Church

INTRODUCTION

Some people think the resurrection of Jesus is just a spiritual story. Others think it's a metaphor or a legend. But the resurrection is more than just a hopeful tale—it's a real, historical, and physical event. In this paper, we'll explore what it means to say that Jesus truly rose from the dead, why that matters, and what it means for us today.

WHAT DOES A SHIP HAVE TO DO WITH THE RESURRECTION?

There's an old story called the Ship of Theseus. Imagine a ship where, over time, every wooden plank gets replaced. If you rebuilt the ship using all the original parts somewhere else, which one would be the real ship? This raises a big question: What makes something—or someone—the same over time, even if parts change? Now think about resurrection. If your body decays, or is burned, or eaten by animals, how can it rise again and still be 'you'?

HOW THE EARLY CHURCH THOUGHT ABOUT RESURRECTION

The early Christians didn't avoid tough questions. People like Gregory of Nyssa, Tertullian, and Origen wrestled with how the dead could rise again. They believed that

God knows and remembers every part of us, and that He can bring our bodies back—transformed, yes, but still us. They didn't believe in re-creation or copying, but in resurrection: the real you, made new.

THE BIBLE SAYS JESUS ROSE IN THE SAME BODY

After Jesus died, His tomb was empty. He appeared to His followers, and they touched Him, ate with Him, and talked with Him. He even showed them His scars. That wasn't a ghost or a copy—it was Jesus. The Bible says, 'A spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have' (Luke 24:39). This matters, because Jesus' resurrection shows us what our future resurrection will be like too.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE GET THIS WRONG?

Some groups, like Jehovah's Witnesses, teach that Jesus didn't really rise in His body. They say His body dissolved and that He returned to being the spirit being known as Michael the Archangel. In their view, He didn't rise in the same body that was crucified. Instead, He reappeared as a spirit, creating temporary physical forms when needed. But that's not what the Bible teaches.

If Jesus' body was simply dissolved, the tomb might technically be empty—but not because He rose from the dead. It would be empty because God removed His body.

That's not a resurrection; that's a disappearance. The resurrection is not just about an empty tomb—it's about the same person who died coming back to life in the same body, now glorified. If the person who appears after death is a spirit being with a new

form and only the old memories, that's not the same Jesus. That's someone else.
Resurrection means transformation, not replacement.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR YOU

If Jesus really rose from the dead in a glorified body, then death isn't the end for us either.

Christian hope isn't just about spirits floating off to heaven. In fact, many believers don't realize how close that idea is to ancient Gnostic thinking, which saw the physical world as something to escape.

But the Bible teaches something better. It's about the whole person--body, soul, and spirit--being made new and alive again in the new earth as seen in Revelation 21:1–4 and Romans 8:23. God cares about the real you. Resurrection is personal, powerful, and promised.

CONCLUSION

The resurrection of Jesus isn't just a story—it's the turning point of history. And it's not just about Him. It's about you, too. Because He rose, you can rise. Because His body came out of the tomb, your body can too. Not a copy. Not a spirit. The real you, fully alive.

——— *If it's weird, it's important. What you know may not be so.* ———

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Source

The Holy Bible, *English Standard Version*. Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2001.

Secondary Source

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benziger Bros., 1947.

Augustine. *The City of God*. Translated by Henry Bettenson. New York: Penguin Classics, 2003.

Craig, William Lane. *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*. 3rd ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.

Gregory of Nyssa. *On the Soul and the Resurrection*. In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 2, Vol. 5, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 439–466. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.

Habermas, Gary, and Michael Licona. *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2004.

Lewis, C. S. *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*. Edited by Walter Hooper. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970.

Licona, Michael R. *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010.

Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Peter H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

McDowell, Sean. *The Fate of the Apostles: Examining the Martyrdom Accounts of the Closest Followers of Jesus*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2024.

Origen. *Against Celsus*. Translated by Frederick Crombie. In *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 4, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 395–399. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.

———. *On First Principles (De Principiis)*. Translated by G. W. Butterworth. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973.

Plutarch. *Lives*, Vol. 1. Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914.

Tertullian. *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*. In *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 545–595. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.

Williams, D. Gene Jr. *The Integrated Hypostatic Union Model: Addressing Christological Coherence A Proposal for a Unified Framework in Understanding & Navigating the Dual Natures of Christ through Kenosis and Selective Communication*. Accessed April 2025. <https://triinitysem.academia.edu/GeneWilliamsJr>;
<https://defendtheword.com/insights-and-studies.html>.

Wright, N. T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003.