

Neighborly Apologetics

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Jesus and the Resurrection, Part 6

The Importance of the Early Polemic and Creed: A Powerful Defense of the Resurrection

(Thumbnail Sketch from Del Tackett's Webinar, [January 2, 2024](#))

In a world increasingly skeptical of Christianity, where claims that Jesus and His resurrection are mere myths or legends proliferate online and in popular culture, believers need solid, embedded truths to gently engage their neighbors. In Session 11 of his **Neighborly Apologetics** webinar, Dr. Del Tackett presents what he considers one of the strongest arguments for the resurrection of Christ: the early polemic and creed that arose in the immediate aftermath of the events. Though somewhat technical, this material belongs in every believer's toolkit—not for winning arguments, but for loving, truthful conversations that point people toward repentance and faith.

Tackett opens by thanking participants and praying for the Lord's blessing. He reminds the audience that this series, **Neighborly Apologetics**, equips families to respond to neighbors as relationships deepen and questions surface. Rooted in Jesus' royal law to "love your neighbor," the vision is that ordinary Christian families carry out the kingdom's primary work. Believers function as a royal priesthood (1 Peter), interceding for those God places nearby, praying they would ask for the reason of the hope within us. This is family ministry—parents and children learning together. Tackett illustrates with "Mrs. Smith," who views the resurrection as legend. The session strengthens our ability to defend the faith gently, as 2 Timothy instructs: "The Lord's servant must gently instruct his opponents, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil" (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

The cultural moment underscores urgency. Hostility toward Christianity rises, with headlines and content promoting the resurrection as myth. Tackett notes a British survey where 22% deny a historical Jesus existed. Similar skepticism likely exists in America. When roughly half believe in the resurrection, the other half may view it as fabricated legend. Engaging neighbors per the royal law means encountering this charge. Prayer—both personal Tuesday noon sessions for national repentance and ongoing intercession for neighbors—is vital. God must grant repentance; we must be prepared.

The series has covered major apologetic categories, focusing on the claims of Jesus and the resurrection because of its centrality. Previous sessions examined prophecies, life, words, death, and physical appearances of the risen Christ. Tackett recalls famous preachers regretting insufficient emphasis on the resurrection late in life. The apostles constantly proclaimed it. Paul declares its pivotal importance: "If Christ has not been raised, your preaching is useless and so is your faith... your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:14, 17). The resurrection

bifurcates history—attempts to secularize BC/AD into BCE/CE cannot erase Christ at time's center. Believers daily serve the living Lord who indwells them.

Last session detailed many appearances: to Mary Magdalene, other women, Cleopas, the disciples in the locked room, Peter, the eleven with Thomas, by the Sea of Tiberias, on the mountain, to over 500 at once, to James, and more. These were not rumors but public events. Paul notes most of the 500 witnesses remained alive, enabling verification. Proclaimed during eyewitness lifetimes, the claims carried inherent credibility—living people could refute falsehoods.

This leads to the session's core: the early polemic and creed counter the "resurrection myth/legend" accusation. Other objections—group hallucinations, mistaken identity, spiritual-only resurrection—were addressed previously. The empty tomb and grave clothes remain decisive. No thief would unwrap a body and leave the wrappings. Guards, sealed stone, earthquake, angels—all sparked immediate debate.

Tackett explains a **polemic** as a cultural point-counterpoint discussion. In Matthew 27, after the preparation day, chief priests and Pharisees urge Pilate to secure the tomb, fearing disciples might steal the body and claim resurrection. Pilate grants a guard and seal. Post-resurrection, terrified guards report to the priests, who bribe them to say disciples stole the body while they slept, promising protection from Roman authorities. Matthew records: "This story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day" (Matt. 28:15). The argument began immediately and persisted.

The polemic's origin traces to Jesus' trial. The high priest asks if He is the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One. Jesus affirms and references Danielic imagery. Declared blasphemy, He is condemned. The initial point: "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God." Counter: "He is crucified and dead—end of story." Had no resurrection occurred, the polemic would end. But the empty tomb prompts: "Disciples stole the body." Response: "Soldiers guarded it." Counter: "They slept." Final rebuttal: soldiers were bribed. No strong counter remains. The empty tomb and grave clothes underpin the argument. This polemic arose **at the moment** of the resurrection, not generations later. It testifies powerfully that events were real.

Myths require time—typically three to five generations or more—because eyewitnesses, children, and grandchildren refute fabrications. Tackett's timeline slide illustrates this. God provided polemic within months and creed within months or years. No time existed for legend. Believers can ask skeptics how long myths take and contrast modern examples with the immediate first-century debate.

Tackett then turns to the **creed**. Using Webster's 1828 dictionary, he defines it as a brief summary of Christian faith articles. Historical creeds countered heresies: Apostles' Creed (Marcion), Nicaea (Arius), etc. They affirm truth against challenges. The earliest is in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul writes around 57 AD (within ~20-25 years of the events):

1 Cor. 15:3-8

"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 brothers 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.”

Paul’s language—“delivered... received”—is rabbinical for transmitting tradition. The creed’s style differs from Paul’s, indicating quotation of pre-existing material. Many believe Paul received it during his Jerusalem visit with Peter and James. It likely formed within months or a couple years of the resurrection. It directly counters the polemic by affirming death, burial, resurrection, and appearances—especially the 500, most still living for verification. Myths do not arise this early.

Historian Dr. Sherwin White (Oxford) stated that even after two generations, too much historical truth remains for legend to form. Theologian Julius Mueller challenged anyone to find a myth developing so quickly from its events; the challenge stands unmet. These facts equip believers.

Why do people expend such energy debunking Jesus? Mythicist societies, the Jesus Project, books, and Easter magazine covers aim to deny His historicity and resurrection. Jesus appears frequently on **Time** covers not for honor but debunking. No equivalent exists for Plato, Aristotle, or King Arthur. What is it about Jesus? The charge of legend lacks basis given the early polemic and creed. The deeper reason is spiritual: fallen humanity desires to remove Jesus. Pharisees sought to eliminate Him to protect power. Today, “homo deus” culture centers the self as truth, demanding affirmation. Jesus demands self-denial, cross-bearing, and mortifying the flesh. People prefer a crafted Jesus. Internet content often portrays Him as approving modern trends. Neighbors may resist Jesus similarly. Hence, the priestly role: pray for repentance, build relationships, and prepare gentle answers.

Understanding the early polemic and creed strengthens our defense of the hope within us (1 Pet. 3:15). Next, Tackett plans to address alleged contradictions in timing, events, and locations, using a map to harmonize accounts and affirm Scripture’s trustworthiness.

The session closes with Marc’s reminders about recordings and PDFs, followed by Tackett’s prayer. Thanking the Trinity for the Word and evidence that makes faith no “leap in the dark,” he prays for skeptics and believers. He asks God to open hearts through loving relationships, prepare families to answer gently, stir the church, grant repentance, and strengthen believers to flourish for God’s glory alone (**Soli Deo Gloria**).

This material is profoundly encouraging. The resurrection stands on eyewitness testimony, immediate public debate, and a formalized creed—all within living memory. No legendary development timeline fits. For pastors, teachers, and families, these truths fortify confidence and conversational readiness. As Tackett emphasizes, the resurrection splits time and anchors faith. If Christ is not raised, preaching and faith are vain. But He **is** raised—proclaimed immediately, verified widely, and confessed early. This changes everything.

Believers should internalize these arguments, discuss them in family settings, and pray for neighbors. When “Mrs. Smith” shares doubts, we can lovingly walk through the timeline, polemic, and creed, pointing to the empty tomb and risen Lord. The evidence is robust; the call is to faithful witness.

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The Importance of the Early Polemic and Creed

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In Session 11 of **Neighborly Apologetics**, Dr. Del Tackett highlights one of the strongest yet often overlooked arguments for the resurrection of Christ: the early polemic and creed. While technical, these elements belong in every believer's toolkit for engaging neighbors with the hope within us.

Tackett grounds the discussion in the royal law to love our neighbor. As a royal priesthood, Christian families are called to pray for those nearby, build relationships, and gently respond when questions arise. Many today, like "Mrs. Smith," dismiss the resurrection as myth or legend. Cultural hostility and media promote this view, yet the evidence points powerfully in the opposite direction.

The ***polemic***—a first-century point-counterpoint cultural debate—began immediately after the resurrection. Matthew 27 records the priests' bribe to soldiers to claim disciples stole the body. This story circulated among the Jews "to this very day." The argument originated at Jesus' trial (His messianic claim) and continued through empty tomb, guards, and bribery explanations. It could only arise because the tomb **was** empty and events happened in real time while eyewitnesses lived.

Complementing this is the early ***creed*** in 1 Corinthians 15. Written around 57 AD (within ~20 years of the events), Paul quotes a pre-existing formulation: Christ died, was buried, rose on the third day, and appeared to Cephas, the Twelve, over 500 brethren (most still alive), James, all the apostles, and finally Paul. Rabbinical delivery language and style confirm it formed within months or a few years of the resurrection—far too early for legend.

Myths require generations to develop; living witnesses prevent fabrication. Historians like Sherwin White affirm this. The rapid polemic and creed powerfully testify that the resurrection was historical reality, not later myth.

Believers must know these truths to counter skepticism lovingly. As Tackett urges, pray for neighbors' repentance and be ready with gentle answers. The resurrection stands at history's center. Because Christ rose, our faith is not in vain.

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