

The Gospel of First Importance
(Standing Firm in Christ's Death and Resurrection)

1 Corinthians 15:1–11

BIG IDEA: *The gospel is not just good news to hear once—it is the foundation you stand on, the message that saves, and the truth you hold fast to. Christ's death and resurrection are of first importance and must shape every part of our lives.*

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND: Paul is writing to a church that was confused and divided on many issues—leadership, worship, spiritual gifts, and morality. By chapter 15, Paul turns to the issue of the resurrection, because some in Corinth were doubting or denying the future bodily resurrection of believers (15:12). Before he defends the resurrection of believers, he takes them back to the heart of the gospel message itself: *that Christ died for our sins, was buried, was raised on the third day, and appeared to many witnesses.* This is not a side issue; this is the foundation of the Christian faith. Without it, Paul says later, our faith is empty (15:14–17).

1. The Gospel You Received (vv. 1–2)

- **Remind Them of the Gospel** – “I want to make known to you the gospel I preached to you.” This isn’t new information. They had already received it.
- **The Gospel Saves** – “by which you are being saved” – salvation is ongoing. We are not just saved from something but to something—life with God.
- **Hold Fast** – Paul warns them not to let go of this message. To abandon the gospel is to believe “in vain.”
 - **Application:** In a world of changing opinions and competing messages, hold fast to the gospel. Build your life on it.

2. The Gospel of First Importance (vv. 3–4)

- **Christ Died for Our Sins** – This is substitutionary atonement—He died in our place. This is the core of Christianity.
- **According to the Scriptures** – This wasn’t a surprise. It was promised in the OT (Isaiah 53, Psalm 22).
- **He Was Buried and Raised** – The burial confirms the death; the resurrection confirms the victory.
- **On the Third Day** – A historical claim, not a myth.
 - **Application:** The gospel is not good advice; it is good news. It is history, not sentiment. This is why Christianity rises or falls on the resurrection.

3. The Gospel Witnessed by Many (vv. 5–8)

- **Eyewitnesses of the Resurrection:** Cephas (Peter), the Twelve, more than 500 at once, James, and all the apostles.
- **Many were still alive**—Paul invites them to verify it for themselves.
- **Paul's Personal Testimony:** “Last of all... he appeared to me also.” Paul was a persecutor, now a preacher.
 - **Application:** Christianity is not based on wishful thinking but on verifiable history. If you doubt, investigate. This is not a leap into the dark; it's a step into the light.

4. The Gospel That Transforms (vv. 9–11)

- **Paul's Humility:** When Paul says, “*I am the least of the apostles*,” he’s not exaggerating for dramatic effect—he means it. He had been a violent enemy of the church (Acts 8:3), dragging Christians from their homes, throwing them into prison, and approving of their deaths (Acts 7:58, 8:1). He wasn’t just indifferent to the gospel; he actively tried to destroy it. That memory never left him. It shaped his sense of unworthiness and deep gratitude for grace.
- **God's Grace at Work:** “But by the grace of God I am what I am.” Paul’s past highlights how radical God’s grace is. God’s grace didn’t just save Paul; it energized him for service. He calls himself “*the least of the apostles*” not to wallow in guilt but to magnify the mercy of Christ. In 1 Timothy 1:13–16, he says, “*I was formerly a blasphemer, persecutor, and arrogant man. But I received mercy... and the grace of our Lord overflowed.*” In other words: “If God can save and use me—the former church persecutor—He can save anyone.”
- **Consistency of the Message:** Whether Paul or the other apostles preached, it was the same gospel. In other words, there is one gospel, one message, one Christ. Paul may have come to faith later than the other apostles, and his past as a persecutor made him feel “least of the apostles,” but the message he preached was identical to theirs. This is crucial for the Corinthians—and for us—because it means our faith doesn’t rest on the personality of the preacher but on the unchanging truth of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. Whether Peter proclaimed it on Pentecost, John wrote it in his letters, or Paul preached it in Corinth, it was the same saving gospel that brings life to all who believe.
 - **Application:** The gospel not only saves us but sends us. Grace transforms persecutors into proclaimers, sinners into servants.

WAYS TO PUT THIS INTO PRACTICE:

- **Stand on the Gospel Daily:** Preach the gospel to yourself—remember and remind yourself who Christ is and what He has done—and then tell others.
- **Let the Resurrection Shape Your Hope:** Because Jesus lives, remember that your future is secure, and suffering will not have the last word.
- **Live as a Witness:** Just like Paul, your story of grace can point others to Jesus.
- **No one is beyond the reach of God's grace.** The same gospel that turned Saul the persecutor into Paul the Apostle can transform any life today.
- **Grace shouldn't make us lazy; it ought to make us laborers.** Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:10, “His grace toward me was not in vain; on the contrary, I worked harder than any of them.” Grace propelled Paul to serve tirelessly—not to earn God’s love, but because he had been loved.

AN INVITATION TO ETERNAL LIFE:

- Friend, this message isn’t just for information—it *calls for a response*. “If Jesus really died for your sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day—and He did—then your eternity depends on how you respond to Him. Do you believe this? Are you trusting in Christ’s death and resurrection for your salvation?”
- Don’t wait, believe! Today, you can turn from sin, trust in the risen Christ, and know that your sins are forgiven and your eternity is secure.
- The Bible says there is no neutral ground. Inaction or making no decision is a decision. Scripture says that where you will spend eternity is what’s at stake.