

The Gospel of First Importance

1 Corinthians 15:1-4

MAIN IDEA: *The mission of the church is driven and defined by one unchanging message: the gospel of Jesus Christ—His death for our sins and His resurrection for our salvation.*

BACKGROUND / CONTEXT: The church in Corinth was gifted, busy, active—and yet, also deeply confused. They were passionate about spiritual experiences, public ministry, and impressive gifts, but they were losing clarity about the very message that had saved them. In chapter 15, Paul writes to bring them back to the foundation. Before he talks about resurrection, hope, or future glory, he reminds them of the gospel that first changed their lives. That matters for us too. In a world filled with religious noise, moral opinions, man-centered therapy talk, and political talking points, it is easy for the church to drift from the one message that actually saves sinners. So Paul does what every faithful pastor must do—he brings God's people back to the gospel and says, "This is what matters most." And in our Sent by the Savior series, this passage reminds us of something essential: compassion sends us, but the gospel is what we carry. We do not go into the world with vague kindness or spiritual talk—we go with the Good News of Jesus Christ that saves.

1. The Gospel We Must Never Outgrow (v.1) "Now I want to make clear for you... the gospel I preached to you, which you received..."

A. The Gospel is not assumed – it must be continually clarified.

- "Paul writes to Christians, yet says, "I want to make this clear." The church can be active yet remain confused. We should be clear about what the *Gospel* is.

B. The Gospel is not discovered — it is preached

- Paul did not invite them to explore truth; he proclaimed it. The gospel is a message from God, not a theory from man.

C. The Gospel must be personally received

- "Which you received" means welcomed, trusted, and embraced. Hearing does not save—believing does.

D. The Gospel is the defining message of the church; it creates identity

- This is what made them Christians. Not morality, not philosophy, not experience — faith in Christ crucified and risen from the dead.

E. Application: If the gospel is not being clearly proclaimed, disciples cannot be made. We must guard the gospel in our own hearts and communicate it to others correctly. You never graduate from the gospel. You either grow deeper into it—or drift away from it. Do you still marvel at the crucified Christ? Or has the cross become background noise? Can you tell someone what the Gospel is if asked?

2. The Gospel That Saves and Sustains (v.2)

"By it you are being saved, if you hold firmly..."

A. The Gospel Establishes Us

- We stand on Christ's finished work, not our performance.

B. The Gospel Continues to Save Us

- "You are being saved." The gospel is not just how we start; it is how we endure.

C. The Gospel Protects Us From Empty Belief

- Some people know the story of Jesus. But saving faith is not just knowing the story—it is trusting the Savior. A person can intellectually agree that Jesus existed, that He died, and that He rose again—and still not be saved. Scripture is clear that saving faith is not just knowing facts about Jesus; it is trusting Jesus Himself. "You believe that God is one. Good! Even the demons believe—and they shudder." (James 2:19) Demons know the facts about God. They know

who Jesus is. But they do not trust Him, love Him, or submit to Him. So when Paul says, "*if you hold firmly to the message I preached to you—unless you believed in vain,*" he is warning against a kind of belief that is real at the level of information, but empty at the level of transformation. "*Believed in vain*" means a belief that never took root.

D. Perseverance Reveals Genuine Faith

- Holding fast does not *earn* salvation—it proves it.

E. Application: Don't replace the gospel with moralism. Don't trade grace for performance. Hold tightly to Christ. A drowning person doesn't analyze the rope; they cling to it. Are you still holding to Christ when life is hard?

3. The Gospel of First Importance (v.3)

"For I passed on to you as most important..."

A. Not all truths carry equal weight

- Some doctrines are absolutely essential; some are secondary

B. The Gospel is non-negotiable

- Get this wrong, and salvation is at stake.

C. The Gospel must define evangelism

- We do not take opinions, politics, or therapy into the world—we take Christ.

D. Application: Is the gospel first in your life? In your conversations? In your church?

4. The Gospel that Actually Saves (v.4)

"...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day..."

A. Christ Died. Not as a martyr. Not as a victim. He died a real death on purpose.

B. Christ Died for Our Sins. This is penal substitution. It is atonement for our sins—He took the judgment and punishment we deserved.

C. Christ was Buried. This is evidence that he was truly dead.

D. Christ Was Raised. This proves He really conquered death; God's plan makes redemption/salvation available to sinners who otherwise have no Hope.

E. According to the Scriptures. God planned it and promised it. God accomplished it.

F. Application: This is the message we carry into the world. Not politics. Not therapy. Not self-improvement. Christ crucified. Christ risen.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR EVANGELISM: If the gospel is the only message that saves, then no amount of kindness, moral advice, or spiritual conversation can take its place. People do not need a better version of themselves—they need a Savior who died and rose for them. When we enter the world, we are not offering opinions or inspiration; we are bringing news that has the power to rescue sinners and grant eternal life.

WHAT TO DO:

- ✓ **Speak the gospel clearly.** Don't just say "God loves you"—tell people that Jesus died for their sins and rose again so they can be forgiven and saved.
- ✓ **Look for natural opportunities.** When people talk about fear, guilt, suffering, or death, gently point them to Christ and why you have Hope.
- ✓ **Hold tightly to the gospel yourself.** Let the cross and the empty tomb shape how you live life, forgive others, and endure trials and hardships.
- ✓ **Pray for courage and clarity.** Ask God to give you both love and compassion for people as well as a boldness to speak.
- ✓ **Invite people to respond.** Encourage others to repent, believe, and follow Jesus, not just admire Him as a good person, or a moral teacher, or a religious figure.