

## **“The Gospel of the Resurrection”**

### **1 Corinthians 15:1-11**

**11/16/25**

#### **Introduction**

1 Corinthians 15:1-11.

Best-selling author Stephen Covey once wrote, “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” And the truths that are contained in what we have before us in this passage are, in fact, the main thing in all of human existence. And that is not my personal opinion, but what God Himself proclaims in His word. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul declares that this message that he declares here is “of first importance.” This is the main thing. If you had the opportunity to stand before the Apostle Paul and ask him, “Paul, what is the most important thing I need to know?” He would say, “That Christ died for our sins and rose again three days later according to the Scriptures so that you may receive salvation.” That message is the main thing. And that is why, to some degree or fashion, we preach that message every single Lord’s Day from this pulpit. But we do have the unique blessing this Lord’s Day to study it in even more detail, as it is the focus of our passage this morning...

But, before fully jumping into our passage, I would like to briefly set the context since we are entering a new section of this letter. In the past couple of months, we have been in a section on the spiritual gifts. Back in 12:1, Paul wrote, “Now concerning spiritual gifts,” and then discussed that topic throughout chapters 12-14. But, now, here in 15:1, Paul writes, “Now I make known to you brethren, the gospel which I preached to you.” And with this phrase at the start of this chapter, Paul is launching into a new topic. And the topic of this chapter is the resurrection. This glorious chapter is entirely devoted to the resurrection gospel. And like all of the topics that Paul has brought up in the book, it was an important one for the Corinthians to hear because it had become an issue in the church. Look at “15:12.” Paul states that some among the Corinthians were saying that there was no resurrection of the dead. They were denying bodily resurrection. But this makes no sense if they have come to believe the gospel, b/c the gospel includes the bodily resurrection of Christ. Look at “15:13.” So, to correct their erroneous thinking, Paul devotes this entire chapter, 58 verses in our Bibles, to addressing this glorious topic of the resurrection. And in the first half of Ch. 15, Paul lays out the doctrine of Christ’s resurrection. But Paul brings up the reality of Christ’s resurrection that the Corinthians say they have believed in when they came to faith, to then make

the point in the second half of Ch. 15 that they need to believe in the bodily resurrection of them as well.

So, this morning we will begin our study of this amazing chapter by examining the first 11 verses... And what we are going to see is that 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 contains three realities about the resurrection gospel.

Outline:<sup>1</sup>

- I. The Eternal Consequence of the Resurrection Gospel (15:1-2)
  - The reception or lack of reception of this message determines whether or not someone will be saved or not.
- II. The Essential Components of the Resurrection Gospel (15:3-8)
  - Paul explains the two fundamental components of the gospel, which are the death of Jesus Christ for the sins of mankind and His resurrection from the dead.
- III. The Experiential Corroboration of the Resurrection Gospel (15:9-11)
  - Here, Paul gives his personal, experiential testimony of the gospel and how it transformed his life.

It is my prayer this morning that we, too, might be transformed by this message of the good news of the resurrection. I pray that we might live a life sold out for the Lord as we look with hope to the coming day in which we will physically be with the Lord in glory...

So, please direct your attention to the first two verses of chapter 15, as we examine our first point in this passage: The Eternal Consequence of the Resurrection Gospel. Paul writes, “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you...”

## **I. The Eternal Consequence of the Resurrection Gospel (15:1-2)**

Again, with this phrase, we are now launching into a new section & topic.

Here, Paul is once again declaring to the Corinthians the core message that he originally preached to them when he arrived in Corinth, as described in Acts 18. And that core message that he originally preached to them was the gospel. Back in 2:1-2, he said, “And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority

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<sup>1</sup> Some elements of this outline were adapted from Dave Doran’s sermon on 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 titled “Of First Importance” on 9/27/25 at Inter-City Baptist Church in Detroit, MI.

of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” That was the message Paul arrived with and declared to these people. It was the good news of salvation through the cross of Christ. And in these verses, that is the message that he is setting out to, once again, declare and clarify to them...

Now, this is not a foreign topic to the Corinthians. Look again at v.1. “15:1-2a.” Notice that the Apostle refers to these people as “brethren.” Meaning that he regards them as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Remember, this book was written to the “church of God at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.” This was written to a church. People who claim the name of Christ.

This is why Paul states he preached the gospel to them and they have “received” it. The good news of salvation through Jesus Christ was a message that the Corinthians had received. Meaning that they had personally accepted it. Additionally, though, Paul says that not only had they heard the gospel and personally accepted it in the past, but this is the message “in which also [they] stand.” This verb “stand” is in the perfect tense. Meaning, the Corinthians had made their stand on the gospel and were continuing to do so in the present day.

So, they had received it in the past and were continuing to stand on it in the present. And then in v.2, he adds that this is the message “by which also you are saved.” In the Greek, this word “saved” is also in the present tense. So, really, you could translate it, “by which you are being saved.” Salvation is a future reality, both a present process.<sup>2</sup> So, they had received the gospel, were standing in the gospel, and presently being saved by the gospel. This present process of salvation speaks to the Lord’s work of sanctification in the life of the believer. And it also speaks to how the Lord is spiritually keeping and preserving us in the faith throughout our lives. The Lord is presently saving us. But, obviously, this all climaxes in our future and final salvation. We are presently being saved unto the day when our salvation is complete and we are perfect and in the presence of the Lord forever...

However... The Apostle adds a condition on that statement at the end of v.2. He says that Christians will be saved “if you hold fast the word which I preached to word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.” This is a sobering statement. Notice what is being said. Paul teaches us an important reality that

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<sup>2</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 683.

nobody will obtain final salvation without holding fast to the gospel and persevering in the faith. You only receive eternal life if you hold fast until the end. And if you do not do that, then Paul says in v.2, this demonstrates that you had a “vain belief.” Meaning that they had a type of belief, but it wasn’t a true saving faith. They had a vain belief that does not save.

Let me illustrate this reality. Now, the Lord Jesus gave us an illustration of this truth in Luke 8:11-15 with the Parable of the Soils. It describes a sower who was scattering seed. The seed is symbolic of the word of God. And then it describes the different soil responses to the seed. I’ll describe just two of them:

The **rocky soil** is to be “those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away” (8:13). These have some type of response. They receive/believe it for awhile, but it was not a true, abiding, rooted belief, so they fall away.

But the **good soil** describes the true believer. The good soil is described as those who “heard the word,” “hold it fast” (same Greek word as 1 Cor 15:2), and “bear fruit with perseverance.” This is the true Christian. The true believer hears, holds fast, bears fruit, and perseveres. Now, that is an inspired illustration from Jesus Christ of what we see in 1 Cor 15:2.

See, whether one perseveres in the faith is evidence of who is a true believer and who is not. Not everyone who claims to be a Christian holds fast until the end. The NT talks about apostasy. Making a shipwreck of one’s faith. Rejecting Christ. And those who do that will not be saved, and that’s b/c it demonstrates that their faith was never real to begin with. Those types of people had a “vain belief” according to this verse. A false/fake/empty faith. John writes in 1 John 2:19, “They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.” Not holding to the gospel is a demonstration that someone was never truly born again.

All true believers will endure until the end. God has promised this. Here in 15:2, the verb “being saved” is passive, meaning that it is God who is doing the saving. We cannot save ourselves. It is only because of God that we will make it until the end. Jesus says in John 10:27-28, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is

greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." Christian, you can rest assured knowing that God will keep you. "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

However, like so many things in the Christian life, we need to account for both God's sovereignty and human responsibility. God in His sovereignty has promised to keep all His people. Yet, this verse says "you need to hold fast." That is human responsibility.

So, church, I gave this point in the sermon this title for a reason. I titled it "The Eternal Consequence of the Resurrection Gospel." I titled it that b/c what you do with this message will determine your eternal destiny. Only those who receive it, stand in it, and hold fast to it will obtain final salvation. Anybody who has not accepted it or anyone who has goes on to reject it will not be saved. The consequence of this message cannot be overemphasized.

So, church, I exhort you today: keep holding on to the gospel. It's the only message that can save you. Don't leave it and turn back to the world. I'm sure we all know people that have done that. People who said they were Christians but have now rejected him and turned back to the world... Do not do that. Be like Peter, who, when many stopped following Christ and Jesus asked the disciples if they would leave also, said to the Lord, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." Do not grow cold to Christ. Do not abandon Christ and the Gospel. Keep holding fast. Keep abiding in Christ. Keep clinging to Christ. Keep loving Christ. Keep doing all of this, knowing that ultimately it is the Lord holding on to you.

And if you do this, there is a day soon coming when you will be with Him. You'll be made perfect. No longer will you battle sin. You'll be rewarded for your faithfulness. You will receive a glorified resurrection body. You'll be with the Lord forever... Keep holding on to this Gospel. It is the only thing that can save your soul. It is a message of eternal consequence...

... Following this point, Paul will now begin to go into further detail about this glorious gospel that is powerful to save. And this leads us to the second reality that we learn this morning. Which is "The Essential Components of the Resurrection Gospel."

## **II. The Essential Components of the Resurrection Gospel (15:3-8)**

He begins by again underscoring the importance of this truth when he writes, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received...” Here, Paul again is clarifying to the Corinthians what he had preached to them at the beginning. And he states that this message was not something that he had made up. In fact, many scholars believe that what is written here is the content of an early Christian confession and creed. The point is that this message didn’t originate with Paul. He says that he delivered to the Corinthians what he himself had received. Paul communicated to them the same gospel that he had received.

But also notice something else here in v.3. Notice what Paul says about this message. He says that this message is “of first importance.” What we are about to read in verses 3 and following is what the Apostle Paul says is the most important message. In this single letter, he has talked about marriage/singleness, issues of morality, Christian liberty, the Lord’s Supper, and miraculous spiritual gifts (prophecy/tongues/etc). But he says that this message that he is about to declare outweighs them all. So, what is this message of supreme importance?

“15:3b-4.” Brothers and sisters, this is the gospel. So much is packed into these two verses. Look at v.3. It starts with Christ. This is a message about Jesus of Nazareth. And this Jesus is both Lord and Christ. He is the Only Begotten Son of God. He has eternally existed and is of the same divine essence as the Father. He is fully God. He is not a creature, but rather is the Creator and Maker of all things. And this divine Son of God came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit, He was incarnate of the Virgin Mary. The second member of the Trinity took on human flesh and became a true man. Fully God, fully man. The God-Man.

Look again at v.3. The Bible says, “that [this] Christ died for our sins.” The reason why Jesus came down from heaven and came to earth was for us and for our salvation. Back in v.2 Paul said that the gospel is the message of salvation. But, that should lead us to ask, saved from what? And the answer of the Bible, as seen in this verse, is that we need to be saved from our sins. Every single person in this room is a sinner. All of us were born sinners and lived in sin. And Scripture says, because God is perfectly holy, sin cannot be in His presence. Meaning that b/c of our sin, we are not in right relationship with God. In fact, Scripture says that “the wages of sin is death.” Meaning that what we rightly earn for ourselves b/c of our sins is a ticket to hell, and where we will burn under wrath and judgment of God forever.

But the gospel is good news that proclaims that you can be saved from this reality! And this is possible because of the amazing truth of v.3, which is that Jesus Christ died for our sins. It wasn't for His sin. He didn't have any. But He died for our sin. Christ was crucified as our substitute. On the cross, He took our place. On the cross, God the Father poured out His wrath against all our sins onto His Son. Jesus paid the penalty so that you and I could be saved.

And all of this was done (look at v.3), "according to the Scriptures." The Scriptures referred to here were the Old Testament Scriptures. See, both through typology and foreshadowing and through explicit prophecies, the OT foretold these events. Going all the way back to Genesis 3:15, there was a promise that the "seed of the woman" would crush the head of the serpent (Satan) & defeat him. That seed was Christ. In Genesis 22, the ram caught in the thicket, slain in the place of Isaac, foreshadowed the work of Christ. The entire Mosaic sacrificial system pointed to the reality that something had to die to atone for sin, and this pointed forward to the Lamb of God who would die to take away the sins of the world (John 3:16).

And there were also explicit prophecies that foretold the death of Christ. Perhaps the main text that Paul is thinking of when he wrote this was what we read this morning, Isaiah 53. There, over 700 years before the birth of Christ, Isaiah wrote of the Suffering Servant of the Lord, the Messiah and King of Israel, who would be "pierced through for our transgressions," "crushed for our iniquities," and "the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." And Jesus is that Suffering Servant. This was all done in accordance with God's Word. This was all part of God's sovereign plan. "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and was buried..."

The eternal Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior of the world, the King of Glory died... He was a real man who died a real death. His heart stopped beating. His brain stopped functioning. His lungs stopped breathing. He really died. And an evidence that this was a real death is that Jesus was buried. His dead corpse was put into a tomb. Isaiah 53:9 said that "His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death," which prophetically spoke of how Jesus would be crucified between thieves but would be placed in the tomb of a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea.

But friends, the story doesn't end there. Paul continues in v.4 and proclaims, "and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." Brothers and sisters, Christ is alive! The grave is empty. Death could not hold Him. There is a

man who conquered death! Muhammad is dead. Buddha is dead. But Christ is alive! He rose again for our justification! Yes, He died for our sins, but ultimately, Christianity is the message of the resurrection gospel. Paul says in 15:14 that if Christ is not risen, then we are all still dead in our sins. But Christ is risen! We have placed our hope in a living Savior. This is the most amazing truth in the world!

And this is God's stamp of approval on Christ. This demonstrates that all that he said and did was true. It demonstrates that Jesus truly is the God-Man. There is one Savior and one Lord over all, and it is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Friends, there is no greater reality than the reality of the resurrection of Christ. Listen to these words of J. C. Ryle on this topic. I don't think I can say it better myself:

"We need not wonder that so much importance is attached to our Lord's resurrection. It is the seal and headstone of the great work of redemption, which He came to do. It is the crowning proof that He has paid the debt which He undertook to pay on our behalf, won the battle which He fought to deliver us from hell, and is accepted as our Surety and our Substitute by our Father in heaven. Had He never come forth from the prison of the grave, how could we ever have been sure that our ransom had been fully paid? (1 Cor. 15:17.) Had He never risen from His conflict with the last enemy, how could we have felt confident that He has overcome death, and him that had the power of death, that is the devil? (Heb. 2:14.) But thanks be unto God, we are not left in doubt. The Lord Jesus really "rose again for our justification." True Christians are "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." They may boldly say with Paul, "Who is he that condemns – it is Christ that died, yes rather that is risen again."<sup>3</sup>

Ryle is right to say, it is no wonder that so much importance is given to this topic...

And, like His death, His resurrection was done in accordance with God's word. Again, in Isaiah 53:10, it was prophesied that the Suffering Servant would rise again. While He would be rendered a guilt offering and die, nevertheless, it was said that "He would see His offspring. He will prolong His days." Meaning that Christ would rise again and live to see the fruit of His work. The early church knew the OT spoke of the resurrection. Peter on the Day of Pentecost explained the resurrection of Christ from Psalm 16, when he proclaimed: "For David says of

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew Commentary, Chapter 28.



Him, ‘... You will not abandon my soul to Hades, Nor allow Your Holy One to undergo decay... And so, because he was a prophet... he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ.’”

The truth that Christ died for ours sins and was raised again three days later is the core message of the Gospel, and a reality that is supported by OT prophecy.

But not only that. It is also supported by eyewitness testimonies.

1 Corinthians 15:4-8.

Here, Paul lays out a list of all the people who are witnesses of the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And just as the burial of Christ was an evidence of the death of Christ, so too do these eyewitnesses serve as evidence for the resurrection of Christ. You can imagine it as if Paul was making his courtroom case here. And with each person or group listed, he brings them to the stand so that their witness and testimony can be given to solidify the fact that Christ did truly rise from the dead.

So, witness number one is, in v.5 is “Cephas.” This is Aramaic for Peter.

Next, witness number two is “the Twelve” in v.5. The Twelve is a reference to the group of disciples that followed Christ throughout His earthly ministry, and obviously, excluding Judas Iscariot at this time.

But Paul has another group of witnesses to call to the stand in v.6. Here, he states that Christ not only appeared to the Twelve, but also to “500 brethren.” Now, this event may have been the Great Commission event in Matthew 28, or perhaps this is the only Bible verse that refers to this specific event, but in either case, we know that Christ appeared to half a thousand people at once. That is more than both of our services combined! And Paul goes on to say in v.6, “most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep.” Meaning, that most of these 500 people at the time of this letter were still walking around! Some of them had died, but most were still alive. You could go talk to them! Again, this demonstrates the rock-solid proof of Christ’s resurrection. This wasn’t a tucked-away event.

But, he continues in v.7. The next witness he calls to the stand is “James.” This James is the half-brother of Jesus. The author of the letter bearing his name. James was not a disciple of Jesus during His earthly ministry, but he believed upon seeing the resurrected Christ and then became a prominent leader in the early church.

Then, also in v.7, Paul mentions that Jesus appeared to “all the apostles.” There is some debate around this, but perhaps Paul uses the “apostles” here in the more general/broader sense of the word, which simply means “sent one,” and not the technical term to refer to the Twelve. But no matter the case, Paul brings this up to point to how the resurrected Jesus appeared to all these men as well...

And then, finally, Paul himself entered the witness stand. In v.10 he says, “and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.” This demonstrates that Paul was the last Apostle of Jesus Christ. And, interestingly, he refers to himself as one “untimely born.” Literally, a Greek word that can be used to refer to a premature birth. Paul was not a disciple for three years alongside Christ during His earthly ministry; rather, he describes his call like being a premature birth. This refers to the Damascus Road event in Acts 9, when the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ appeared to Paul in all His blinding splendor and Paul would go on to be commissioned as the Apostle to the Gentiles. The writer of this letter which we are reading, was also an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ...

What a powerful couple of verses 15:3-8 is. These verses proclaim the two essential components of the gospel: that Christ died for our sins and rose again three days later! And this was all done in fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures and is also evidenced by the testimony of numerous eyewitnesses, who were willing to give their lives for these truths.

So, my question to everyone in here today is this: Do you believe this? I tell you all today that these are the essential truths of the good news that can save your soul. I call on you today to place your faith in this message so that you can be saved!

But not only is this a message of salvation, but transformation as well. In 15:9-11, we come to our third point this morning, “The Experiential Corroboration of the Resurrection Gospel.” In other words, these verses are the personal, experiential testimony of Paul of what the gospel does to somebody... “15:9-10”

### **III. The Experiential Corroboration of the Resurrection Gospel (15:9-11)**

At first, it may seem interesting for Paul to insert some verses about himself in this section about the resurrection. But Paul does this b/c his life story is a story of the power of the resurrection.

He starts by saying that he is “the least of the apostles, and not fit to be an apostle, because [he] persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am.” One major evidence that supports the reality and transformational power of the resurrection and the gospel is the life of Paul of Tarsus. If you don’t believe in the resurrection you have to do something with this man.

Paul explains who he previously was. Paul viewed Jesus of Nazareth as a blasphemer and His followers as dangerous heretics and enemies of God that needed to be snuffed out. And he devoted himself to slaughtering followers of Jesus.

But on the Damascus Road, the amazing grace of God transformed this man. It was resurrection power that changed this man. In his flesh and left to himself, he was a murderer of Christians, a terrorist of sorts. But by the grace of God and through the work of Jesus Christ, Paul was transformed into the Apostle that we all know. The Apostle to the Gentiles. The missionary church planter, who likely traveled over 10,000 miles preaching the gospel everywhere he went. The writer of roughly half the books of the NT.

You want evidence of the truth of the resurrection? Look at this man who went from killing followers of Christ to being killed as a follower of Christ. That is evidence for the resurrection.

But we also see here the transformational power of the message of the gospel. In v.9 Paul says that he is the last person to qualify to be an apostle. He recognized that he, in and of himself, was not worthy of this position. And in v.10 he says, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”

The message of Jesus risen from the grave absolutely transformed this man’s life. He absolutely poured out his life and was mightily used in the ministry of the gospel. There was no one who worked harder than Paul! He outworked all of the other apostles. But this was not just a mere work of human effort; it was resurrection power working in him. Paul is giving us his personal testimony of how the death and resurrection of Jesus will change your life!

So, my question to all of us is this: Can people look at your life and see it as a testimony of the reality and power of the resurrection? Have you been changed? Have you been made a new person? If there has never been any change in your

life, never been any new affections for Christ, then you have never had a run-in with this gospel. B/c this gospel will change your life.

But, for those who have received new life, let us think of Paul's example here. What is a personal application of this passage? In light of the glorious good news of a risen Savior, we should vigorously labor with all our might for Lord Jesus like Paul did! Don't live a vain, empty life. But instead, give your life to striving in personal holiness and striving in ministry for God and others. Live your life with an eternal mindset and a heavenly hope. Live your present life in light of the coming day when we too will be resurrected and glorified and with Christ forever. And do so not relying on the power of God and by walking in the Spirit...

Again, this is the message of the resurrection, which is the central message of Christianity... That is why Paul says in v.11, "Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed." This was the message that all the apostles preached... And this was the message that the Corinthians had believed... But they needed to be reminded of it once again. And I trust that God, in His providence, also has this passage before us today b/c we need to be reminded of it again as well.

Brothers and sisters, this is the gospel of the resurrection. Let us live in light of it...