

1 Corinthians 15 (Part 1): 1-11 • The Simple Gospel

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Let's go ahead and open our Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 15. We've learned a lot about what the church should be. We've learned that the church should be a godly church. We've learned that the church should be a spiritual church, a spirit-led church. We've learned that it should also be an orderly church.

We're going to be talking as we go on here about the resurrection, but actually we're not going to get into it yet today, because we have communion that we're going to do today. I'm going to just take the first few verses of the chapter here. go ahead and follow along with me here.

Chapter 15, beginning at verse 1.

“Now I would remind you brothers, of the gospel I preach to you, which you received, in which you stand, ²and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preach to you, unless you believed in vain.

³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the 12. ⁶Then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James and then to all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to me.” (ESV)

Stop there, please and let's pray.

Holy Spirit we invite You into this place today. We invite You to speak to us and to minister grace and understanding from Your Word, and Lord just to really teach our hearts so that we might walk away today with a greater understanding of who You are, what You've accomplished for us. Guide us, we pray. You are the teacher, we are the students. We open our hearts to You. In Jesus' precious name, we pray, amen.

What Paul is going to do in these verses is he's going to explain for us the benefit of the gospel. That's verses 1 and 2. And then he's going to detail the essence of what the gospel is in verses 3 and 4. First I want to show you here again in verse 1 and 2 about the benefits of the gospel. He says,

“Now I would remind you brothers, of the gospel,” (Of course, that means good news. He says,) *“the gospel I preach to you, which you received, in which you stand, ²and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preach to you, unless you believed in vain.”*

The first thing Paul says here about the gospel is what is required of us to truly enter into the benefits of it.

Look with me again. Notice in verse 1, Paul speaks of *“the gospel which you received,”* and the gospel *“in which you stand.”*

Boy, those are really important words. If you haven't, made a mark in your Bible to underline or highlight those words, those are very key.

First, he says the gospel is something that we receive. It's not just something that you hear. A lot of people have heard the gospel and walked away completely unchanged. Why, wouldn't it be great if everybody to whom we shared the gospel got saved? Wouldn't that be wonderful? Man, we'd go around... I'd get a bullhorn or something and just go around my neighborhood, or around town and just preach the gospel. Because if everyone who heard it got saved, boy, that evangelism would be easy, wouldn't it?

But it doesn't say that. It says, *“the gospel... which you received.”* And of course, to receive something means to accept it. Or, I always think of when the mailman postman delivery man, whatever they're working for shows up at my door and they've got one of those little digital pads and I've got to sign, for a package when it comes to the door. And that's proof, that I've received it. And the person who sent the package knows for a fact that, I'm in possession of that package because there's my name, there's the time and on and on.

Something very similar as it relates to the gospel, that we need to receive it. And, it's one of the reasons I've always liked, Noel, I've loved those Gideon Bibles where they sign the Bible.

When they hear the gospel, you've probably read, Noel talks about that a lot with the Gideons and their Bibles. And I really love that fact that they hear the gospel. They are shared the Gospel and then they signed the back of the Bible to

show that they've understood what the message is and that they've received it. I like that. That's extremely cool.

There's a lot of Christians, frankly, who don't even know when they got saved. And that's not necessarily a bad thing. I mean, I think there's probably a lot of Christians who would say, I know that I know that I'm born again. I'm going to heaven. I'm not really sure when I accepted the gospel, but I do know that I received it. I know that I am in possession of it and all of its benefits.

And that is such a key thing. You need to receive. When I'm sharing the gospel with someone, maybe for the very first time and I'm underscoring this idea of what it means to receive the gospel.

I'll just remind them about things like birthdays and Christmas, when someone gives them a gift. And it's one thing, I'll tell them, for somebody to go out and go to the trouble to buy that gift for you. And it's another thing then for them to wrap it and put your name on it and either put it under the tree or put it somewhere else in preparation for your birthday or whatever. And then it's a different thing altogether for them to come to you, hand it to you, and for you to take possession of that and say, thank you. I received that. That's good. And you begin to open it.

And then I ask him this question, is that present now yours? And they say, well, yeah. Why? Because I took it. I received it. I accepted it. Such a simple concept, but it's so important.

Paul says here, *"I would remind you of the gospel... which you received."* Not just the gospel you heard. You accepted it. You embraced it. You called it your own. It's so important when you're sharing the gospel with people, make sure they've received it.

The Bible says yet *"To all who received him, to those who believed on his name, he gave the right to become children of God."* (John 1:12) And you remember what he wrote to the church in Thessalonica, he wrote these words. He says,

1 Thessalonians 2:13 (ESV)

...we also thank God...that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God...

...we also thank God...that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God...

Notice those two key words in that passage “*received*” and “*accepted*.” It's something that we must receive.

But I want you to also notice Paul says, “*I would remind you of the gospel... in which you stand.*” Now, this is the Corinthian church. You know, we're, almost done with this first letter, Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, and we've seen this was a troubled church.

There was a lot of issues. There was a lot of things. There was a lot of disorder and yet for all of that, they still stood for the gospel and Paul says to them “I want to remind you of that gospel “*in which you stand.*” And they were kind of weird. Let's just face it. As a church, they were a little bit weird. But you know what? They were standing. They were standing in the gospel.

And this is contrasted, like with the Galatian churches. You read Paul's letter to the Galatians. He doesn't talk to them about the fact that they're standing. He talks to them about the fact that they are not standing and they're beginning to be drawn away from a posture of standing in the gospel.

And they're beginning, in fact, to redefine what it means to be saved and beginning to add things related to the keeping of the law, circumcision, and keeping special days and mixing all kinds of elements of the mosaic law in with it. And so Paul didn't say to the Galatians, hey, I'm just really glad you guys are standing in the gospel, because they weren't.

So, you can kind of see what this means. What standing on the gospel or in the gospel means, is holding fast to the biblical definition of what it means to be saved and not compromising that message in any way. People, this is so important for September, what, 4th 2016? This is not something that you're going to just read in your Bible and go well, that's cool. Paul told them, you know. It's really great. You're standing the gospel. There's way more to it. This is the message to us today.

Because, let me tell you something. Well, it's not looking good. In the past 100 years or so, I don't know if you're aware of how many churches and denominations have moved away from a biblical stance on the gospel.

I did a search last night. I often do this. You know I do all of my preparation on my laptop, so the internet's right there, which, of course, can be a great distraction. But it's also very convenient when I'm just thinking. I was thinking about standing for the gospel. I just simply put in the search parameters, stand for the gospel.

And I had this letter come up from this individual who was asking for prayer for a particular denomination. I won't say which one. Oh, okay. It was the Episcopal church. And I mean, but the heart of this guy was really genuine. He was. he was sincerely burdened. I mean heartbroken. He's like, pray...

Well first he quoted a call for prayer that he had asked. The letter was written in 2007. He would, he quoted first of all a call to prayer because, apparently the denomination was going to get together and talk about some various things which had been called into question from a biblical perspective.

And then the guy was now writing a follow-up and he was saying, we prayed that they would set aside the unbiblical decisions and actions." And then he said, but they haven't. And instead, they've decided to put these things on pause rather than to repent of them.

And he, you could just tell, as he's writing this thing, this wasn't a troublemaker, because there are those too. But this was a guy, who's heart was broken because the denomination, the beloved denomination of his probably childhood and perhaps even his adult life was veering away. It was no longer standing with the message of the simple gospel of Jesus Christ.

They were no longer holding to it. They were veering away from it. They were beginning to add things and so forth. And I didn't tell you that story to throw stones or anything. Please don't write me a nasty gram.

I'm just telling you what I saw online as this is something going on, you guys. That's the point. This is going on. And I believe, well, I think there's a very real possibility that a time is coming and perhaps maybe soon when you and I may be faced with the decision of whether or not we're going to stand or whether or not we're going to compromise the simple gospel of Jesus Christ and what it means that Jesus died to save sinners.

And that may sound like, well, who in the world would give us any trouble with that? That's good news. Yeah, but not everybody sees it that way. And some people see it as an affront. And the reason they do is because in order to accept

the good news, you got to get past the bad news. And the bad news is you're a sinner who needs to be saved.

And we're primed and cocked in our culture today for people to consider that not only offensive, but we're now bordering on the idea that to simply tell someone they are a sinner is to be considered hate speech. You and I both know, listen, nobody's pulling our chain on this one. We know we see it happening every day. Free speech is going away.

A lot of the incredible freedoms that we've enjoyed as a nation for over 200 years, they're going away. We see it happening. Nobody's kidding us. And we need to be prepared as Christians who are, who say that I am a follower of Jesus Christ. We've got to be prepared to be able to say, I'm going to stand. What would happen, ask yourself, what would happen if you were facing, maybe a monetary fine or public humiliation or jail time, for example, for simply saying on a blog or somewhere in some public forum, that Jesus Christ came to save sinners?

And what would you do, what would you do if you were, if somebody wrote you a letter and said, "You take that down, take that information down, or you're going to be subject to fine or, or worse. Take it down." You know, what would you do? You've got to think about it. What would you do?

Well, Paul wrote to the Corinthians and said, I want to remind you "*of the gospel... in which you stand.*"

Here's what Jesus told us is going to happen in the last days. He said,

Matthew 24:12 (ESV)

And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.

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"... *the love of many will grow cold.*" Love for God, love for His Word, love for one another? I don't know, maybe all those things.

Notice the next thing Paul says about the gospel in verse 2. He says,

"and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preach to you, unless you believed in vain."

The Corinthian believers had done well in that they received the gospel, and they were doing well in that they were standing in the gospel, meaning that they weren't being moved from the message of the gospel.

But Paul said they had to continue to do well, or if you will, to hold fast the gospel that had been preached to them. And of course, to hold fast means to continue to stand, continue standing in the gospel, the truth of it, not to stray from it, not to alter it in any way.

Why do people alter the gospel? Why would somebody alter what's in the Bible? Well, I suppose there's lots of different reasons. Pride might be part of it. Fear might be another element of it. But notice the warning that is caught up in these verses, or in this verse 3. He says,

“unless,” that's very important, *“unless you believed in vain.”*

And that's Paul's way of saying that any variation of the simple gospel produces a gospel that cannot save.

And so, if you change the gospel, what do you end up with? You end up with nothing. That's what Paul said to the Galatian church. Do you remember? He says, I'm surprised you're turning to a different gospel so soon, which he says, which is no gospel at all. There is no good news when you change it. You take the good news out of it when you actually change the gospel. (Galatians 1:6-7)

And there is no salvation. There's no saving power in a different gospel, in a varied gospel. So Paul says, to believe in such a thing as to believe in vain. Vain means empty. It's an empty belief. And there are people today who have very empty beliefs in that they believe it with all their heart, but it's empty. There's nothing there. There's nothing really to hang on to.

That's why the Bible says *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”* Right? (Proverbs 14:12) You can believe, and you can believe very sincerely about something. There are people today who believe things very sincerely. I mean, you cannot fault them for sincerity. They believe it with all of their heart. But there are just as lost as the day is long because what they believe in is empty.

Paul says, you take the gospel and you vary it. You stop standing in it. And suddenly now, you believe in vain. You believe an empty thing. And then looking now at verse 3 and 4, Paul says, *“For I delivered to you as of first importance.”* Notice those words.

That's where the gospel needs to stay, you guys. First importance. “...*as of first importance.*” Okay? “...*what I also received.*” Paul didn't make up the gospel and he wanted to make it very clear to the people who he was writing to. This wasn't something that I just came up with. And this is something that we received. And so he says, here it is,

“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.”

So here's Paul just simply giving the simple gospel message. So, what is the gospel? Let me put it up on the screen here for you.

The Gospel is...

- Christ died for our sins
- He was buried
- He was raised on the third day

(According to the Scriptures)

The Gospel is Christ died for our sins. He was buried. He was raised on the third day. Okay?

And all that according to the scriptures. Now, that's a very important statement, according to the scriptures.

Now, remember, Paul was writing at a time when the New Testament was literally being written. He was writing the majority of it. So, when he says, “according to the scriptures,” he's not talking about the New Testament. He's talking about the Old Testament. He said, all those things right there are mentioned in the Old Testament.

So you ask yourself the question, “does the Old Testament speak of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ?” Oh yeah, absolutely. 100%. You want to see? First of all, the death of Jesus.

Death of Jesus

...he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. Isaiah 53:8 (ESV)

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Isaiah chapter 53. He was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. Poetic language to describe death. And then, the burial of Jesus. Same chapter, verse 9.

Burial of Jesus

And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Isaiah 53:9 (ESV)

And they made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death. Although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. And the resurrection of Jesus. Psalm 16.

Resurrection of Jesus

...you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. Psalm 16:10 (NIV84)

You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

Right there, you have it three passages. And that's not the only three, obviously. But three Old Testament passages that speak prophetically of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The simple gospel. Let's keep it simple. Let's keep it clear. You know, this *"is of first importance."*

Now, before we get into communion, I want to focus on what are most likely the five most important and perhaps most beautiful words in all of scripture from verse three.

In fact, let me put them up on the screen for you. These five words are so beautiful and so important.

1 Corinthians 15:3 (ESV)

Christ died for our sins

Christ died for our sins.

But before we get into communion, I want to ask the simple question, what does that mean? What exactly does it mean?

I mean, a lot of people have died over the centuries and many of those deaths have been for very good causes. So when Paul says that Jesus died for our sins, we should want to ask, how does the death of Jesus do anything for my sins? Well, here's the answer to that question. At some point before Jesus cried out, "*it is finished*," a transaction took place. That none of us could actually see. We weren't there to see it anyway.

But the fact of the matter is, even those who were there that day, who were standing around the cross, or within eye view of the cross, there was something that happened there at the cross that no one saw with their physical eyes. But at some particular point, a spiritual transaction took place where God the Father laid on God the Son all the guilt and wrath that you and I deserved.

And by the way, that was the part that Jesus didn't want to deal with. I mean, he dreaded, there's no question about the cross, the fact that Jesus dreaded the cross. I mean, he suffered greatly even in anticipation of the cross. And in prayer, you know that he prayed, "Lord, if there's any other way, let this cup pass." (Matthew 26:39)

Well, what was the cup? Was it physical death? No, many people have died physical deaths. Well, obviously, anybody who's ever lived and died so far has died a physical death. But what I meant to say is that many people have died a horrific physical death. Many people have died a physical death for others or for a cause. And did it joyfully.

Many of the disciples went joyfully to their martyrdom. Why didn't they pray and say, may this cup pass from me if possible? Many of them joyfully gave up their lives. What was different? What was it that caused Jesus to be so filled with dread that he would actually pray and say, if it's possible, let this cup pass from me?

Listen, it was the spiritual transaction that was going to take place on that cross. That spiritual transaction that was encompassed when Jesus looked up to heaven and cried out, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Matthew 27:46)

And what happened at that particular point in time is that the entire wrath of God was placed upon the Son in such a way that there was a separation when the Father turned His face away from the Son for the first time in eternity and the Son could not abide it and cried out in pain and horror. Christians, don't ever forget that Jesus was forsaken on that cross so that you and I would never have to be.

And because He bore that experience of separation from the Father You and I will never bear that experience. We will never face that experience for those who are in Christ. That's good news.

700 years before Jesus was born on the face of the earth the Prophet Isaiah wrote these words,

Isaiah 53:4-5 (ESV)

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds, we are healed.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds, we are healed.

The apostle Paul would say, “*I would remind you... of the gospel... which you received, in which you*” take your “*stand.*” There is no other stance to take because without standing on this gospel, we “*believe in vain.*”