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A1305 – February 3, 2013 – 1 Corinthians 15:1-5
The Gospel

We're starting a new section of 1 Corinthians today, 1 Cor 15, the central chapter on the doctrine of the resurrection in all of Scripture. So before we start I want to briefly review the two divisions of the letter.

The letter divides simply into half on the basis of the *peri de* in 1 Cor 7:1, "Now concerning the things about which you wrote..." which signals that up until that point Paul has not been addressing things about which they wrote but rather things that were reported. So the book basically divides in half. The first half is 1 Corinthians 1-6, Reported Problems, the second half is 1 Corinthians 7-16, Raised Questions. We'll modify that slightly today but basically the book can be divided into these two sections. The first half deals with Reported Problems. How do we know there were problems reported to Paul? We gather that from 1 Cor 1:11 where Paul says, "For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you." So Paul had been informed of certain problems at the church of Corinth; he's receiving second hand information. The informers are said to be Chloe's people. Who are Chloe's people? Apparently they worked for Chloe. And apparently Chloe was a wealthy woman who lived in the region of Ephesus where Paul was at the time he wrote this letter. She regularly sent some of her people to Corinth on business. Since they were believers they attended the church at Corinth and while they were there they observed several problems and reported these back to Paul. In 1 Corinthians 1-6 Paul is dealing with these problems that were reported by Chloe's people.

The second half, 1 Cor 7-16, deals with Raised Questions. How do we know there were raised questions? We pick up on that from 1 Cor 7:1 where Paul says, "Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman..."¹ And so there was a letter written to Paul by the

Corinthians that outlined certain questions or statements that needed a response. Paul starts to answer those in 1 Cor 7.

Now the slight modification I'm going to make today is that in 1 Cor 15 Paul is actually returning to a reported problem so that it fits better with chapters 1-6. The Corinthians didn't raise a question about the resurrection; Chloe's people reported that there were some at Corinth who denied the resurrection. How do we know this? We know this from 1 Cor 15:12 where Paul says, "Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" In other words, some who at first believed the gospel now denied an essential component of the gospel; the resurrection. Can that happen? Can a real believer deny an essential component of the gospel like the resurrection? It did happen and it does happen. It was reported to Paul that it did happen at Corinth with some, not all, but some of the Corinthians. So chapter 15 fits better with the other reported problems in chapters 1-6.

Now denying the resurrection is denying the gospel and we want to deal with a couple of false gospels today. If we ask why some of the Corinthians denied the resurrection then I'd suggest the reason is because of the influx of Greek philosophy from one of the ancient centers of Greek thought just 60 miles down the road. What city is that? Athens. You remember Paul had been preaching in Athens at Mars Hill to some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers just before his visit to Corinth. And when he mentioned the resurrection to those philosophers some of them began to sneer. And the basic reason was because the prevailing Greek philosophies held that the body was intrinsically evil and so the ultimate good was to escape the body, not to obtain a resurrected one. Whereas the Christian view held that the body was not intrinsically evil, that it was first created by God as perfectly good and then became evil due to the fall, so the ultimate good was to get a resurrected body.

Now I suggest this because as you see Athens was just down the road and Corinth was a very important commercial city; it was where East met West and therefore all the great ideas from East and West were discussed there. It was a cultural melting pot, something like the San Francisco of the ancient world. And if you were a believer in that city the pressure of pagan ideas and pagan culture was extremely high. The pressure to capitulate to pagan ideas

or at the very least to accommodate was a pressure they and Paul and Apollos and anyone who taught at Corinth had to deal with. It's one of the reasons the church there was so carnal, the pressures to accept carnal ideas and carnal culture were high. And therefore it should be no surprise that we now find believers denying the resurrection from the dead. Believers can go apostate and reject that which they once believed. In this case we find an essential component of the gospel being denied, the resurrection, a very grave error. And now that this has been reported to Paul, Paul begins to systematically dismantle this error by Scripture first and by reason based on Scripture second.

As far as Scripture is concerned the doctrine of the resurrection was predicted by the OT. So if Jesus is not raised then the OT is not true. As far as reason is concerned if there is no resurrection from the dead then our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins. The bottom line is that according to both Scripture and reason based on Scripture, the resurrection is a non-negotiable part of the gospel, part of the *sine qua non*, the without which not. In other words, if you take away the resurrection from the dead you take away the gospel. And so we now have believers denying essentially the gospel and so Paul has to deal with it.

And that is why in verses 1-5 Paul begins by declaring the gospel. What is the gospel? 1 Cor 15:1-5 is the *locus classicus* for answering that question. And Paul says, **Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ²by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached 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 according to the Scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.**

Now technically the gospel is verse 3 the death of Christ for our sins and verse 4 the resurrection of Christ on the third day, the burial and appearances are not part of the gospel, they are the historical evidences of the death and the resurrection. How do we know He died? Because He was buried. And how do we know He was raised? Because He appeared. But at base the gospel is Christ's death for our sin and Christ's resurrection on the

third day. That is the gospel in verse 1, the Corinthians **received** which in verse 2 and 11 is shown to be equivalent to “believed,” and which verse 10 says is by grace. So the grace gospel is the death of Christ for our sin and His resurrection which is to be believed.

Now, we will detail this message next week but this week it is important that we understand how important this message is and how it is hated by Satan and distorted by Satan and what the two most common distortions of the gospel are today. So first, how important is this message? Paul says in verse 3 it is **of first importance**. The Greek literally says, *among the foremost things*. So there is a group of things that are, let’s say, in the upper echelon of importance, and I would venture to say this is an elite group, and probably most, if not all of them are found in this passage! Things like faith, what is faith? Grace, what is grace? Sin, what is Sin? Salvation, what is salvation? Christ? Who is Christ? And of course, resurrection, what is resurrection? Those are the foremost things.

Another passage that shows the importance of the gospel message is Gal 1:6-9 so let’s turn to this one and if you don’t have it marked you should mark it. Paul writes to the Galatians, “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; ⁷which is *really* not another;” the reason being there is only one gospel, only one good news, gospel just means good news and in this context along with 35 other times in the NT, it simply refers to the message of Christ’s death and resurrection by which we are saved. And in that sense there are not multiple gospels any more than there are multiple ways of salvation, there is only one. And Paul says, “only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.” And a distorted gospel of Christ is no gospel! The gospel of Christ is a pure message that must be maintained and any distortion of it results in no gospel at all. Verse 8 and here you see the seriousness of maintaining the purity of the gospel of Christ, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! ⁹As we have said before, so I say again now,” why does Paul say it again? Because it’s so important, “if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!” Now hold your place here and turn to the gospel Paul preached to them - it’s found in Acts 13:26, this is Paul’s first missionary journey and we find the gospel Paul preached. What is it? Starting in verse 26, “Brethren,

sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent." What message? Verse 27, "For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled *these* by condemning *Him*.²⁸" "And though they found no ground for *putting Him to death*, they asked Pilate that He be executed." There's the death of Christ. Verse 29, "When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb." There's the historical evidence of the death, His burial. Verse 30, "But God raised Him from the dead;" there's the resurrection. Verse 31, "and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people." There are the appearances, the historical evidence of the resurrection. So it's the exact same gospel Paul preached in 1 Cor 15, it's precise, Christ's death evidenced by His burial and His resurrection evidenced by His appearances. Now flip back to Gal 1:8-9. How important is keeping the purity of this message? Paul says "even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" Now that sounds pretty tough, but what does it mean accursed? What would it look like to accurse someone?

Well, the Greek word for "accursed" is *anathema* and the background of this word is Josh 7:12. Joshua 7:12 has to do with the rules for holy war. There were two kinds of war in OT Israel; one was just *regular war* and the procedures for regular war were used for foreigners outside the Promised Land. The second kind of war was *holy war* and the procedures for holy war were used for foreigners occupying the Promised Land. And Joshua 7 is concerned with the rules for holy war. The rules in Holy War were that everything that was conquered in battle belonged to God; men, women, children, animals, they all belonged to God. They were said to be under the *herem* or the *ban*. In fact the word *herem* or *ban* is the same word we know as harem. Ancient kings would have their harem and we all know what that means; the girls in the harem were off limits, they belonged to the king and you didn't touch them. And that's what the rules of holy war were all about, those people and animals and war booty were off limits, you didn't have anything to do with them. So when Paul says that anyone with a false gospel

is to be accursed he means he is to be avoided, he is off limits, you shouldn't have anything to do with that person, they are under the ban. The gospel is so important that if someone mars the gospel you should not have contact with them, you should not have anything to do with their ministry, you certainly shouldn't give them money or wish them a good day. You are to me, anathema!

Now do you see how important the gospel is? Why is it so important? Because people can't get saved by a false gospel. People can't get saved by a truncated gospel. People can't get saved by an elongated gospel. People can't get saved by a changed gospel. I've read people that think that the Holy Spirit can use a false gospel to save people. There are a couple of problems with that. First, the Holy Spirit only works in accordance with truth, so to say that He works in accordance with a false gospel is to say that He is working in accordance with error. Second, to say that the Holy Spirit saves people through a false gospel is not found in Scripture anywhere. You find people preaching the gospel with false motives at Philippi but the gospel they were preaching was the true gospel, not a false one. So I don't hold that the Holy Spirit uses false gospels. The Holy Spirit only works in accordance with His word which is truth. It is therefore critical to preach the true gospel.

Now because the precision gospel is so critical to the salvation of people it's been the focal point of Satan's attacks down through church history. Satan doesn't want people to believe the true gospel; he wants people to believe false gospels. Why is he so anti-gospel? Because everyone who believes the true gospel has defected out of his army and joined Christ's army. Therefore Satan has devised a strategy to blind the minds of the unbelieving. 2 Cor 4:4 describes his strategy this way, Satan "has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Satan's strategy is one of blinding the mind. The mind is where you think. Now this is a complex strategy that we don't have time to go into great detail right now, we have other lessons in Acts 17 that do that and will aid you significantly in strategizing to evangelize unbelievers. But basically Satan's strategy to block the effectiveness of the gospel is to distort the categories of thought in a person's mind such that the gospel is not understood. Paul faced this at Athens when he preached Jesus. What did the Athenians do when Paul first preached Jesus? They re-interpreted Jesus in terms of their pagan categories of thought. The gospel

never got heard because they never really understood who Jesus was. Their minds had been blinded by Satan. Paul's counter strategy was to go back and re-define the categories of thought according to Scripture, reminding them who God is and who man is, because Jesus is God and man, and to re-define what sin is and how we are all under sin because we don't need Jesus until we realize we are under sin. This was the only way Paul could get a clear gospel hearing. So we have the fact that gospel purity is extremely important, it's of the foremost things and if anyone preaches another gospel they are to be to you accursed and Satan is actively trying to malign the gospel by distorting the categories of the gospel so it isn't understood. Putting all this together there are a myriad of false gospels that he has spawned, and not a one of them will save.

Because of this we need to know what some of the false gospels are in our day. It's critical to know there is a war over the gospel right now. And it is critical to know how to detect these false gospels. A hint to detect false gospels is to understand they are fooling around with the terms of the gospel. Rome fools around with grace by turning it into God's enablement to keep the sacraments in the process of salvation; Lordship Salvation fools around with faith by overloading it with ideas foreign to faith like submission to God's sovereignty, commitment of life, discipleship and obedience; Mormonism fools around with Christ by making Christ less than God. They're fooling around with the terms, distorting them. We're not going to go through all of them. If you want to do that go listen to the 20 lesson series *The Terms of Salvation* from back in 2005, I cover them all in that class. Today I just want to highlight two false gospels. First, Lordship Salvation and second the Crossless Gospel. Both of these you will hear in our own day.

The first one, the Lordship Salvation controversy that erupted in the 1980's is a controversy fundamentally over the meaning of faith. I would classify this as a controversy over the term faith. What does faith mean? If we both say salvation is through faith but I mean something different by faith than you mean then we don't agree. So my bottom line analysis of this controversy is it's over the meaning of the word faith. So what is Lordship Salvation? Lordship Salvation says that there are different kinds of faith and the way you know you have the right one is to persevere in good works to the end of your life. So the fundamental premise of Lordship Salvation is that there are different kinds of faith. The way they support this is by turning to a passage

like James 2:14-26 and quoting the verse where it says, “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe.” And so they say, see, demons believe but they don’t have true belief and so that shows there are different kinds of faith. The only problem there is James is quoting a hypothetical opponent. James says, someone may well say and then goes on to call him a foolish fellow. So it’s not James’ doctrine, it’s an opponent to James’ doctrine. Or they point out Heb 6:4-6 where the author says, “For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶and *then* have fallen away,” they say this is a person who had temporal faith not true faith, they believed for awhile and fell away. The problem is that in the context the author is saying they should be teachers now and they need to press on to maturity and bear fruit. He’s not saying they only had a temporal faith and were really unbelievers. Suffice it to say, they do this to four or five passages, they try to justify the basic premise that there are different kinds of faith.

Now the true faith they say includes obedience to Christ, submission to God’s sovereign authority, repentance from sin, surrender of life and a supernatural longing to obey. They load all of this into faith. And if you doubt me, here’s John MacArthur himself, the most vocal proponent. “Those who teach that obedience and submission are extraneous to saving faith are forced to make a firm but unbiblical distinction between salvation and discipleship. This dichotomy, like that of the carnal/spiritual Christian, sets up two classes of Christians: believers only and true disciples.” Further he says, “Saving faith is more than just understanding the facts and mentally acquiescing. It is inseparable from repentance, surrender, and a supernatural longing to obey...Misunderstanding on that key point is at the heart of the error of those who reject lordship salvation. They assume that because Scripture contrasts faith and works, faith must be incompatible with works. They set faith in opposition to submission, yieldedness, or turning from sin, and they categorize all the practical fruits of salvation as human works. They stumble over the twin truths that salvation is a gift, yet it costs everything.” (GATJ, 37). No, you stumble John MacArthur in saying that a gift costs. A gift by definition is free and costs nothing and salvation is a gift, it costs nothing. But the important point I wanted to show you was that he loads the term faith with all of these extraneous ideas. They are extraneous. Faith in the Scripture simply means “trust, reliance or confidence” in someone or

something. As Charles Ryrie says, “Faith means “confidence, trust, holding something as true.” (SGS, 118) I couldn’t agree more because that’s all the word means. Zane Hodges defined faith this way in 1989, “What faith really is, in biblical language, is receiving the testimony of God. It is the inward conviction that what God says to us in the gospel is true. That—and that alone—is saving faith.” (AF, 31). But if you preach this the Lordship Salvation people will say you are teaching “easy believism” or “cheap grace.” But on the flipside it means they are teaching “hard believism” and “expensive grace.” So just turn the tables on them when they start the name calling. Oh, so you believe in hard believism and expensive grace. Hmm...that’s interesting. Whatever happened to “come, take of the free waters of life?”

Alright, what are the dangerous consequences of this false gospel for those who think they may be saved? They are left wondering whether they had the right kind of faith or not, maybe they only had the temporal kind. They even point out that the Holy Spirit even gives a temporal kind of faith that produces good works for awhile but then fades away. So now we have the Holy Spirit giving a kind of faith that produces good works but it’s not the real thing, it just looks like the real thing. And if that’s the case how do you find out if you had the right kind of faith? You have to persevere to the very end of your life in good works. The result of this kind of thinking is that you can never have true assurance. When MacArthur was asked by my good friend Thomas Ice, “How certain are you that if you died to day you would go to heaven?” MacArthur responded, “I’m 99% sure.” Why only 99%? Why not 100%? Because in Lordship Salvation there is always a chance that he only had the gift of temporary faith and before he dies it may go away and that will show he was never truly saved to begin with. So ultimately MacArthur and proponents of this view don’t have the kind of assurance Jesus said we could have, “Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.”

Alright, I’ve taken you through some basics of Lordship Salvation, it’s an error on the meaning of faith, they’ve packed it full of many other things without any biblical precedent and I hope you see that by doing that this Lordship Salvation is a false gospel. Paul would say, let him and all lordship salvation teachers be to you accursed, they are under the ban, off limits, don’t have anything to do with them.

The second controversy is called the Crossless Gospel and that's a name given to it by the opponents. The opponents recognize that the proponents say you don't have to preach the cross of Christ to an unbeliever, so the opponents called it the Crossless Gospel. But it could just as easily be called the Resurrectionless Gospel or the Deityless Gospel because they say you don't have to preach the resurrection of Christ or the deity of Christ. They say all you have to preach is believe in Jesus for eternal life. So the debate is over the content that must be believed in order to be saved. What must a person believe to go to heaven? Coming from the mouth of Crossless Gospel proponent Jeremy Myers, "If we want to know what a person must believe to receive everlasting life, we should not ask the question, "What is the gospel?" but rather "What is the message of life?" When asked that way, the answer becomes crystal clear...You do not have to believe the gospel to receive everlasting life, you only have to believe in Jesus for everlasting life." Now that may sound really strange to you. You may be wondering why he would ever say a thing like that. Why would he distinguish between the gospel and the message of life? What's the difference? Well, there is none in reality but they've contrived one. Let me explain. Basically, they're committing a fallacy in the way they do word studies. They study the words for "gospel" which are *euaggelion* and *euaggelizomai* and basically mean "good news" or "to proclaim good news," and they find that there are many different "good news" in the NT. For example, the angel Gabriel announces good news to Elizabeth concerning her son John the Baptist. Jesus preaches the good news of the kingdom. Timothy reports back to Paul good news concerning the believers at Philippi. An angel is said to preach the everlasting good news in the Tribulation. Paul preached the good news of the death, burial, resurrection and appearances of Jesus Christ. The Crossless Gospel people say that if you add up all the good news announcements in the NT there are something like 50 things in the gospel. And surely they say a person does not have to believe all 50 things to go to heaven. So since the gospel is all 50 things then a person does not have to believe the gospel to receive everlasting life, they only have to believe the message of life, which is Jesus, to receive everlasting life. See how they contrive the arbitrary distinction between the gospel and the message of life? They take all the uses of gospel and add them up into this broad definition of the gospel and then say it's absurd to say an unbeliever has to believe all 50 things to be saved, you only have to believe in Jesus for eternal life, that's all. Now that's not enough. Who's Jesus? What did Jesus

do? You haven't told me anything about Him? They say, well, you don't have to explain that because John's Gospel is the only gospel that was written for evangelistic purposes and it doesn't say that. John just says believe in Jesus for eternal life. The problem with that is that the eight miracles John records Jesus did are all creation miracles, they are all proving that Jesus is God! So how do you say we don't have to preach that Jesus is God? You can't pull verses out of John and use them in isolation. That's a baloney methodology! The Crossless, Resurrectionless Gospel is a truncated gospel, it's a false gospel.

And they're not doing word studies correctly; you don't take a word like "gospel" and add up all the ways it's used in different contexts and come out with 50 different parts of the gospel. The word gospel is never used in any context to refer to those 50 things, there's not one usage that corresponds to the way they're using it. And the reason is because that's not how you do word studies, you see what gospel is in view in context. And when you do that you see there are several gospels in the NT and they are all different. There is the gospel of the kingdom; that message is the good news of the kingdoms near arrival. It was preached whenever the kingdom was near. Since the kingdom is not near today that is not the content of the present day gospel. There was also the gospel to Elizabeth announcing John the Baptist's birth. It was good news. But that's not the good news we preach today for eternal salvation. Obviously, the context tells you that. And so on and so forth.

The bottom line is you let the context indicate what gospel is being referred to. And when you do that you will find that the gospel that results in eternal salvation became referred to simply as "the gospel," with the definite article, much like the way the Greek doesn't say Lord, it says THE Lord and the Greek doesn't say God it says THE God. That's what Wallace in his Greek Grammar called the article *par excellence* and when you used it everyone knew exactly who you were referring to. In the same way the Greek doesn't say gospel, it says THE gospel and everyone knew exactly what that meant; it meant Christ had died for our sins and Christ had risen on the third day. That was the message of life and to believe that was to be saved. There is no other gospel.

ⁱ Chapter 7 is a major break in the letter because it begins with *peri de*, "Now concerning," and *peri de* is the way Paul indicates he is turning to a new subject. So from here on out he's going to use *peri de* each time he addresses a new question (7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 15:1, *de* only; 16:1).

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