

# The Unity of the Gospel

*1 Corinthians*

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**Bible Text:** 1 Corinthians 15:3-11

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It is good to see you this evening. If you would, please turn to the book of 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

We touched on the verses that we were going to be looking at tonight. We touched on these last Wednesday, but tonight we dig into them a bit deeper, verses three through 11. And so I want us to begin reading with verse one, but we are going to read down to verse 11.

Paul writes:

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that 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, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.<sup>1</sup>

Let's go ahead and read verse 12 also because it sort of sets the context for what Paul was dealing with.

Verse 12.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.

“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?”<sup>2</sup>

Let’s go to the Lord together in prayer.

*Lord, it is a blessing to gather together this evening with my brothers and my sisters, to gather together as your Church, to gather together around your holy and powerful, invaluable Word. We ask tonight, Lord, that you would teach us, your Spirit would instruct our hearts and minds as we declare truth and as we listen to truth. I pray that we would be active listeners tonight, that we would be thinking through the things we are hearing and that we would be thinking, Lord, about how it applies to each one of us. Lord, that we would not listen just for information, but we would listen for obedience and be ready to walk in the things that we learn this evening. I pray for anyone in our midst who doesn’t know you. Lord, I know you that you save people in a moment and in an instant. It is an miracle that you bring about in a person’s soul. And I just pray for anyone here who is dead still in trespasses and sins. My desire and my prayer is that even tonight they would be made alive together with your Son. Bless your Church. Wash us, cleanse us, instruct us, correct us. Lord, encourage us. You know what our need is. And so we look to you for all these things. We pray for this in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

Well, as we said last time the Corinthian Church is having trouble. This entire letter makes plain that there are troubles in the church and there are some identifiable reasons why there are troubles in this church.

First of all we noted that they are at odds with apostolic authority. They are not sensitive to the ministry of the apostle Paul through the influence of false teachers, through the influence of their own spiritual pride. They have gotten to the place where they were no longer responsive to him, where they thought themselves basically his equal where they could just turn a deaf ear to him if they so wished. And so they didn’t recognize that this was, in fact, God’s man sent to them, an apostle with authority given to him by Christ. They weren’t hearing him that way anymore. They are at odds with apostolic authority.

Because that is true, they are also at odds with apostolic doctrine. They are not listening to the truth. But they have an open ear and an open mind to many things going on around them in the form of their culture, in the form of human philosophy, in the form of false teaching. They are receptive to false doctrine in many cases and they are departing in some very important points from true doctrine. You see that in verse 12.

“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:12.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

So there were already some in the Corinthian Church who were denying the bodily resurrection of the saints in the future. This is amazing. And it is troubling and Paul was having to deal with it.

So they are at odds with apostolic authority. They are at odds with apostolic doctrine. And, as I said, they were at the same time embracing the wisdom of the world.

So what is Paul going to do to address this in this first letter to the Corinthians? Well, he does several things. First of all, he insists on his authority. And just because they rejected, that doesn't mean that it is not legitimate. And so he insists, just as he tells Timothy to do in 1 Timothy, he insists that they cannot disregard him, that, in fact, if need be, he will visit them in a spirit of discipline because he is not exercising his own authority anyway. It is Christ's. It is not for their harm. It is for their building up. And he is going to have to give an account to Christ for what he does in the ministry. So he insists on his authority.

He also insists on the truth that he has taught them. He insists on the truth. In fact, what he is doing right here is he is re-preaching the gospel to them. He is taking them back to what he taught them in the beginning. He is taking them back to what they heard when they were first converted. This is what he does in verse one.

He says, "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you,"<sup>4</sup> past tense, "which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word [get this] I preached to you."<sup>5</sup>

I brought you the gospel. The gospel hasn't changed and if you are still holding fast to the gospel that I brought to you in the beginning, then you give evidence that you are really saved. If you depart from that gospel, well, end of verse two, you would have believed in vain.

So last Wednesday we saw several things about the importance of the gospel. We saw that the gospel can be forgotten even by believers. This is why he is having to remind these brothers. Notice in verse one he addresses them as brothers. So he doesn't say, "I don't think you are saved." Rather he says, "I assume that you are, but, brothers, you have forgotten the gospel."

And so the gospel can be forgotten. The gospel needs to be heard. And so they need to hear the gospel again. They need to hear the gospel from this messenger. They need to open their hearts to this man whom God had sent to teach them. But just hearing the gospel is not enough, verse one. Just as they had received the gospel in the beginning, so they need to receive the gospel again. And that means to embrace it. That means to believe it. That means to hold it as a conviction in your heart. It means faith. It means you are convinced that what God has given to us in the form of the good news is the truth.

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:1.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:1-2.

So the gospel can be forgotten. It must be heard. It must be received. Where it has been received truly, you stand in a new position before God.

Notice he says they stand in the gospel, verse one. That is, if his assumption about them is right, if they have really been saved, then even right now in their poor spiritual condition, in their need for discipline and correction, even though they are not where they need to be, they still stand in the gospel if they have truly been saved. They stand in the grace of God.

It is wonderful to know, isn't, church, that on our best days we stand before God based upon the finished work of his Son and on our worst days, we stand before God on based upon the finished work of his Son. To receive the gospel, that is to trust in Christ, is to be declared righteous in the sight of God. It is to be justified. And now you have been introduced into the grace of God in which you stand.

But the gospel has an ongoing power and activity in the lives of believers.

Verse two he says, "By which, "This gospel, "you are being saved."<sup>6</sup>

And so God has designed that we never depart from the gospel. We live our lives out of the gospel. Every day, beginning the day, continuing the day, ending the day, in the knowledge of who Christ is, who we are, what he has done for us, what it means to walk with God in Jesus Christ, what it means to be justified.

And as we understand salvation and we live rightly in response to salvation, salvation is going on in our lives. We are being sanctified, conformed to the image of God's Son.

All of this proves the reality of salvation, because he says at the end of verse two, "If this is what is going on, you are saved."

If you hold fast to the gospel that is an evidence that you really are in the gospel. If you depart from the gospel, you give evidence that you have a vain belief, that is an empty faith, a non saving faith, a faith without works, a faith that is demonic, devilish, doesn't save anybody.

Now, having covered all of this, Paul is going to begin to get to a particular concern of his and he is going to do it by reminding them of the content of the gospel.

He says, "Look. I want to remind you of the gospel that I preached to you when I was there at the very beginning."

So he says, "Here it is," verses three through 11. "Here is the gospel I preached to you. Here is the gospel you must hold fast to. Here is the message that you cannot depart from."

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:2.

Notice what he says.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that 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, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.<sup>7</sup>

Now when you look down at verse 12 you recognize that they have departed from what he preached to them at the beginning at the point of belief in resurrection.

I don't think that at this point they would deny the resurrection of Jesus, but what they were denying was that the resurrection of Jesus has something to do with our future, that for the believer there is a future of bodily resurrection that one day we will be perfected, body and soul, before the Lord, that we will be glorified. They believed, no doubt, in the spiritual perfection of the saints, but they didn't believe, some of these people didn't believe in a physical perfection of the saints, a physical resurrection.

How do you solve this doctrinal problem? He says, "Well, let's just go back to the gospel. Let's just go back to what you heard at the beginning."

And as he begins this, verse three, he deals with the authority of the gospel. That is where I want us to be tonight thinking about this, the authority of the gospel. What the gospel proclaims we must believe if we are Christ followers, because it is not ours. It is God's gospel. It has come from God.

Notice how he stresses the authority of the gospel in verse three.

He says, "For I delivered to you as of first importance..."<sup>8</sup>

Now he could be saying, "This is what I delivered to you at the first." He could be using "of first importance..." It is translated "of first importance," but it could mean first in terms of order, first in terms of time.

I want to remind you of what I had preached to you at the beginning. He could be saying that.

But I actually think the ESV has it right. I think what he is saying is this. "I want to declare to you what is of first importance, what is of greatest importance."

You know, the gospel in some sense it is just as broad as the entirety of the Word of God. All of it is good news from God. But if you were to boil down the gospel to its bare bones, if you were to boil down the gospel to its irreducible minimum, all right? This is

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:3-5.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:3.

what you must believe to call yourself a Christian. This is what you must believe if, indeed, you have been saved, if, indeed, you will be saved. This is what you will believe.

Well, what is most important of all that has been delivered to us? What has first place? What has priority? What is that irreducible, essential minimum of the gospel? That is what he is talking about here.

And in saying it has first importance, he is telling us there is nothing more important than these essentials, nothing more important than this. Why is it so important what he is about to declare? Well, he tells us why. Because he says in verse three, “I delivered it to you.”

He says, “What I delivered to you is what I also received.”

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received.”<sup>9</sup>

Paul is saying, “What I preached to you didn’t come from me. I was just a delivery boy. What I preached to you, I received it. Then I delivered it to you.”<sup>6</sup>

Well, where did he receive the message from? He tells us elsewhere in the New Testament he didn’t claim he learned it from the other apostles. He claims he learned the gospel from who? Jesus. So what he is delivering...

And, by the way, the same is true of the other apostles. The message they received, it didn’t come from them, it didn’t come from men. It came from the Lord. So that Paul is saying, “This gospel, this bare bones presentation I am about to give you, this is, along with the rest of the gospel, this is God’s message. This is from heaven. It didn’t originate from us.”

In Galatians chapter one verse 11 he wrote this:

For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup>

Right? This comes from heaven.

Now, I just want to stop for a moment and I know you know this. I know I am not telling you anything you don’t know, but I believe it is important for us everyday to stop and realize what it is we hold in our hands when we have the Bible. Do you stop and remind yourself that what you have in this book, it didn’t... though God used human agency, though he brought this message to us in human language and he used human authors, do we stop and remind ourselves that what we have, what we have been given, what we have been entrusted with is the message that is come from God himself, your creator, the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Galatians 1:11-12.

creator of this universe, the only Savior that exists, that this is a word from him. Do you really think about it that way? Do you really read it that way, study it that way, listen to it that way, respond to it that way? The authority of the gospel is founding the origination of the gospel. It comes from God. It has the authority of God. What it says is true, perfectly true and must be responded to with obedience if we are to obey God because this is God's message.

So he reminds them of the authority of the gospel. What he is about to tell them, you see, they can't argue with. They can't say, "Oh, well, Paul, that is your opinion. You know, you are trying to correct us on the subject of resurrection, but do you know what? That is just your opinion."

No. No, it is not my message, he is saying. It is God's message. Listen to it.

So what did he deliver to them that came from God? Now he gets to the essence of the gospel, verse three.

...that 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, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.<sup>11</sup>

It is amazing. If you ever doubt the divine authorship of Scripture, just pay attention sometimes to how in a very short section it can be so packed full of truth, power packed verses of Scripture like this one. Here is the gospel. First of all, we preach a person, don't we? We declare the good news concerning a person. What does he begin in verse three.

"...that Christ died..."<sup>12</sup>

You see, someone died. That is the gospel. Someone died. And the person who died is Christ. Christ here is used as a name, Messiah, the anointed one. Used as a name. He is talking about Jesus.

You see, to get the gospel right you have to recognize that this historical figure, this man who lived 2000 years ago, Jesus of Nazareth, you have to recognize he was not just a good man. He was not just a moral example. He was not just a prophet. He was not just a teacher. He was and is the Christ.

So you take that name Christ or that title, you take everything the Bible declare about the Christ, Old and New Testament and that is Jesus. So when you study your Bible and you realize that the Christ is the promised Son of David, but he is also the root of David, you being to recognize this one who died is both God and man. Eternally God, the eternal second person of the triune godhead, but he became man through a virgin birth, took to

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:3-5.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:3.

himself a sinless human nature so that in this one person, Jesus of Nazareth you had God in human flesh.

This is why he uses the name Christ. He could have said Jesus died and that would have been sufficient, but he wants to emphasize the deity of Jesus. Christ died.

So to preach the gospel we preach a person, this divine, human person, Christ.

Second, we not only preach a person, but in the gospel we preach a purchase. We preach a purchase. Christ, here is what I delivered to you, he says, that Christ died for our sins, that he died in our place, that he died as our substitute, that our sins deserve and deserved the wrath of God, the everlasting holy wrath of the almighty, but that instead of us suffering for our sins for the rest of eternity, Jesus Christ died in our place, took God's wrath upon himself. God satisfied his justice through the death of his sinless, perfect Son.

That is the gospel, that there was redemption, that we were purchased for God by God in the person of his Son Jesus, bought, paid for by his own precious blood as the book of 1 Peter tells us.

So we preach not only a person, but now we have to relate that person to what happened on the cross. You see, it is not enough to say that Jesus was divine and human. Now we have to get to the cross and we have to ask what was happening there. What does the cross signify? What was accomplished there? And if we say he was just dying to show the love of God, if we say he was just dying to show what it means to triumph over the attacks of the world on truth and no matter how you try to explain the cross, if you stop short of a substitutionary atoning death, someone who died for our sins, then you don't have the gospel.

So you preach a person and you preach a purchase. There is something else you preach in the gospel. You preach a plan. You are preaching, you are declaring a plan of God. You are saying, "Listen, none of this was an accident. Christ made his appearance in the world at just the right time. And he lived his life on this earth according to a divine time clock and no one could take his life from him. He laid it down. He was never in danger. I mean, all those times that they would surround him and be ready to stone him or throw him off a cliff or kill him in one way or another, he was never truly in danger because no man takes his life. He is God in human flesh. And in an instant, in a moment he could call and myriads of angels would have delivered him from whatever men may have tried to do to him.

No, he died at just the right time in just the right way because, you see, he came into this world to accomplish a plan that was established in God from all eternity. This is why he is able to say, "What I received, what I delivered to you is in accordance with the Scriptures," end of verse three. Not just his death was in accordance with the Scriptures, but, verse four, he was buried. He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

Now what Scriptures is he talking about? He is talking about the Old Testament, isn't he? He is saying, "Listen. This was not something that was from a stand point of divine revelation this was not a surprise. God wasn't making it up as he went along. God wasn't reacting to the choices of men. Christ was foreknown as the Savior of the world. He was foreordained. This is the Lamb of God who comes to take away the sins of the world." So that he made his entrance into the world at the divine time. He lived his life according to a divine timetable. He died on the cross at exactly the right time, exactly the right way. All of this and he was raised from the dead in just the way that the Scriptures said it would happen. Born at the place the Scriptures said he would be born. Coming out of the place where the Scriptures said he would come. Being treated the way the Scriptures said he would be treated. Living the way the Scriptures said he would live. Dying the way the Scriptures said he would die and being raised in the way the Scriptures say he would be raised. All of this was found before he ever came in the Old Testament.

I want you, for just a moment, to go over to Luke chapter 24. I want to remind you of something. Keep your Bible marker in 1 Corinthians 15. We are going to come back. I want to remind you of something here. Luke 24 and look at verse 13.

Now Peter has been told about the resurrection of Jesus. And he is marveling, verse 12, at what has happened.

Verse 13.

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?"<sup>13</sup>

Now just stop and realize something. They think that this just a guy just traveling along with them on the road, just having a discussion about their conversation.

Verse 17.

And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Luke 24:13-17.

<sup>14</sup> Luke 24:17-21.

Now just stop there and ask yourself a question. Why had they hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel? Where did they ever get an idea that someone was coming to redeem Israel? Where did they get that from? From the Old Testament, right? That they were looking for the Messiah. But now they thought, apparently, that they had misjudged him.

Do you notice how they put this?

“We thought he was the one who was to come and redeem Israel.”

And notice how they see Jesus in their words as having been a victim. I mean, this is what our chief priests and rulers did to him. I mean, they have read the Old Testament. They have been looking for the Messiah, but they have not connected what they have just witnessed with what God had already revealed. They didn't get the picture right. They didn't see how these things connected.

He goes on to say, verse 21:

Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!”<sup>15</sup>

You are slow to see it. You are slow to believe it, what has already been revealed by the prophets.

Verse 26.

“Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”<sup>16</sup>

I mean, wasn't this necessary? Did you get that word? Necessary. This is a plan. This has been planned. This is not a surprise. This is God's design.

He goes on, verse 27, “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets...”<sup>17</sup>

I mean from Genesis to Malachi,

“... he [Jesus] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Luke 24:21-25.

<sup>16</sup> Luke 24:26.

<sup>17</sup> Luke 24:27.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

That was the greatest Bible study anyone ever had when Jesus taught about Jesus throughout all the Old Testament. They didn't know yet it was Jesus, by the way.

Verse 28.

Can you imagine? They must have thought, man, this guy, he knows the Bible. Where did he learn this from?

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?"<sup>19</sup>

Where is their faith?

What is Jesus doing?

Where is their faith being directed? To the Word of God, right?

And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them. Then he said to them...<sup>20</sup>

Listen, you see? He says, "Look. I told you this before, before all this happened that everything written about me where? In the law of Moses and prophets and the psalms..."

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<sup>19</sup> Luke 24:28-32.

<sup>20</sup> Luke 24:32-44.

What has he just done? That is the all the Old Testament.

Must be fulfilled. And notice he doesn't stop even then. Next statement.

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations."<sup>21</sup>

Do you get all this? It is not just the birth of Christ and the life of Christ and the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ that you find even in the Old Testament, there is also the promise that this gospel is going to be spread to the nations. I mean, this age we are living in right now, though it was not clearly seen, though it was a mystery, hidden in the Old Testament, yet as we look back on it, now we can see that even there the gospel would go the nations.

...beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."<sup>22</sup>

Look back at 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

So what do we declare? We preach a person, Christ. We preach a purchase. He died for our sins. But we also preach and declare that this is not some new invention that, in fact, everything we are preaching has already been established in the Old Testament Scriptures, that Christ is the fulfillment of everything the Scriptures promised.

But even in the way that Jesus dealt with those disciples, his own disciples, isn't it plain to us the absolute need for God himself to teach someone the Bible? I mean, you can read the Old Testament. This is why there is still a veil to this day over the minds of so many Jewish people. You can read the Old Testament, but unless the Holy Spirit of God removes the veil so that you can see Jesus on its pages, you will miss its true message. In other words, without the Holy Spirit no one gets it.

Now there is something else we preach in the gospel. This is bare bones, right, bare bones stuff. We preach Christ. We preach the purchase. We preach that all this is the plan of God. We also preach that there is proof that all of this is true. What is it? Verse four.

...that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Luke 24:45-47.

<sup>22</sup> Luke 24:47-49.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:4.

The message concerning the death of Jesus and the significance of the death of the meaning of his death is proven by the reality that he is alive. He has been raised from the dead. This is God's proof. This is how God has proven that his Son is who his Son claimed to be.

In Acts chapter 17 verse 30 the Bible says this.

Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.<sup>24</sup>

There is a judgment day coming and Jesus is going to be the judge. And God says, "I have proven that this is true by raising him from the dead."

Jesus said this was coming. John chapter two verse 18.

"So the Jews said to him, 'What sign do you show us for doing these things?'"<sup>25</sup>

Do you remember what Jesus had just done? He has just cleansed the temple. He has just driven the money changers out. What authority does he have to do this? This is what they are asking. "What sign do you give us for doing these things?"<sup>26</sup>

"Jesus answered them..."<sup>27</sup>

Here is the sign. Here is how you know he has authority. Here is how you know he is going to be the judge. Here is the sign.

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" [The Bible says this.] But he was speaking about the temple of his body.<sup>28</sup>

Crucify me. Tear down this building and in three days I will raise it up. And he did. God raised Jesus from the dead.

So you have the authority of the gospel, not from men, it is from God. You have the essence of the gospel, the things that are of first importance. We preach a person. We preach a purchase. We preach a plan. We preach its proof, the resurrection.

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<sup>24</sup> Acts 17:30-31.

<sup>25</sup> John 2:18.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> John 2:19.

<sup>28</sup> John 2:9-21.

And there is a third thing he says to them. He says, “By the way, there are eyewitnesses of the gospel.”

“He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.”<sup>29</sup>

Now I want you to realize something, folks. You have people, real people just like us, first century. They are departing from the gospel by not believing in the bodily resurrection of saints. We will tie this together, we will see this tied together next Wednesday as we go further down. But just right now think about this with me. He is talking to these people living right around the time when Christ was actually raised from the dead. And what he is doing is saying, “Look, have you forgotten that in the gospel you were taught that Jesus was raised bodily? This has something to do with you, but I want you to just know in your minds he was really raised physically.”

And, by the way, if you doubt it, there are still some people alive right now who can tell you what they saw. Isn't that amazing? I mean, Paul is saying we have eye witnesses. Look on.

Verse six.

“Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are [what?] still alive.”<sup>30</sup>

I mean, this is in essence him saying, “If you doubt me, go talk to them. I mean, most of them are still here.”

And then he goes on to say this. “...though some have fallen asleep.”<sup>31</sup> Some have already gone to be with the Lord.

Verse seven.

Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.<sup>32</sup>

Paul was saying, “This was not done in a corner.”

The gospel we preach, beloved, do you recognize? I hope you recognize 2000 years later. It is couched in history. It is historical reality. It actually happened in this world, on this planet you walk on tonight. When you walk out these doors and put your feet on the ground, it was on this planet that Jesus walked, this planet that Jesus lived, died and was raised from the dead. This is historical reality. This is not fairy tale stuff. This is not just

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<sup>29</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:5-6.

<sup>30</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:6.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:7-8.

some sort of story that has been told to have some kind of psychological effect on people. Jesus had to do what he did in history to save us from our sins.

Paul is pointing out the historical reality of the resurrection. He loved to do this. In Acts chapter 26 he is before King Agrippa and in verse 19 he says:

Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.” But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.”<sup>33</sup>

You know, when you talk about many of the cults they have a story to tell, but it is about something that supposedly happened in some corner. Some angel appears, gives them some vision, gives them some special glasses, gives them some special things they are to translate. But do you know what? None of it is historically verifiable. But when it comes to the gospel you are talking about historical fact that at the time it occurred there were living witnesses that you could look them up, talk to them, listen to them and they could tell you what they saw, what they heard, what their hands handled concerning the Word of life.

I mean, think of all the appearances that Paul lists here in 1 Corinthians 15. They didn't all happen at the same time. They didn't all happen with the same people. Five hundred at one time, but then there was James and there was the 12, there was Cephas. He doesn't even list the women who saw Christ at the tomb and heard from the angels. To think that all of these people had the same hallucination, to think that all of these people would agree to the same lie, to think that some of these people would go to their death for those lies and never recant, to think that Paul knowing it was a lie would say, “Go look these people up and ask them about it.”

No, that is not rationale. What is rational, what is true is Jesus is alive. He was raised from the dead. That is the gospel, that it is attested to by eyewitnesses.

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<sup>33</sup> Acts 26:19-26.

The last thing tonight, the fourth thing I want you to notice in the passage is he has something to say about their messenger of the gospel. That is, the messenger who brought the gospel to them, that is himself. Paul makes some powerful claims right here, verse eight.

Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.<sup>34</sup>

Think about what he is saying. First of all he claims that he himself was an eyewitness of the resurrected Jesus.

“Last of all he appeared also to me. I mean I saw him. When I asked him what about it. Ask me. I saw him.”

He also admits, though, he was an unlikely candidate for this. He says, “It was as to one untimely born.”

I told you last week that word refers to an aborted birth, but the child survives. So the idea is prematurely born sort of a violent entrance into the world. Why does he use this description for himself? Well, he could mean a couple of things. First he could be thinking about his faith in Jesus compared with the rest of the Jewish nation. Paul writes about, in the New Testament, we learn about there is a great day of salvation coming, a great national... something spoken of in the Old Testament. When Christ comes again there is going to be a great day of conversion for many Jewish people. And he could be saying that he is premature, that what has happened in his life is sort of a precursor to what is going to happen one day in the future. He could be saying that, but I don't think that is what he is saying.

Rather, I think what he is saying is that he wasn't the recipient of the same kind of birthing process, if you want to describe it that way, as the rest of the apostles were. You see, he is comparing himself to the other apostles, isn't he, at the last part of this section. It is him versus the other apostles. And he is like one that was born not in a normal way. Jesus called the other apostles. They walked with Jesus on this earth. They were trained by Jesus on this earth in a personal way. They spent three years with Jesus and here is Saul of Tarsus who was a persecutor of the Church, a hater of Christ, but in an instant, in a moment, he meets the resurrected Son of God on the road to Damascus and he is instantaneously transformed into the greatest missionary the Church has ever seen. It is different for him, isn't it?

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<sup>34</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:8-10.

He wasn't worthy of this, verse nine. He says, "I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle."<sup>35</sup>

He is not just acknowledging a true view of himself, a humble view of himself. I believe that he is saying these sorts of things because this is what the Corinthians said about him. They compared him with the other apostles and they questioned where he really was one. Due to the influence of false teachers and due to the influence of their own pride they don't want to listen to Paul anymore. So they would demean him. They would cast doubt upon his ministry and doubt upon his qualifications. And he acknowledges.

"You know what? I am not worthy to be called an apostle. If you want to say I am the least of the apostles, say it. I will say it. I am the least of the apostles. And I feel that way because I know this about myself. I persecuted the Church of God. What did I do to ever deserve such grace?"

Verse 10. This is where he insists on his authority.

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain."<sup>36</sup>

The grace he has shown me has show me has not been to no end.

"On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them."<sup>37</sup>

That is a statement, isn't it?

What is he doing? He is insisting on the fact they must hear him. He is for real. And yet even then he acknowledges something, doesn't he? End of verse 10.

"Though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me."<sup>38</sup>

You see, he is not saying these things because he is a proud man. He is saying these things because he has a ministry he must carry out to them and if they don't hear him, he can't do it.

And then he ends by saying, "By the way, we are all preaching the same thing."

Verse 11.

"Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:9.

<sup>36</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:10.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:11.

And you have no right, verse 12 and following, to depart from it. What you are believing is a departure from the gospel and to depart from the gospel is to lose your soul.

John Calvin put it well. He said this. “While I do not doubt,” speaking of Paul, “While I do not doubt that he never had the slightest hesitation about being prepared and even glad to belittle himself in order to magnify the grace of God, yet I suspect that in this verse he intended to meet false charges against him. There were people at Corinth who made it their business to undermine his authority by maliciously speaking against him. That fact we can gather from many of the preceding passages and also from a comparison that he introduces a little later one, one that he would certainly never have made if he had not been forced to by the wickedness of certain people. He might have put it like this. ‘Insult me as much as you like. I will not mind being made lower than the very dust. I will not mind if I count for nothing so that the goodness of God towards me may be all the more apparent. Let me therefore be regarded as the least of the apostles. Indeed, I know that I am not even worthy of that position. For what merits had I that would enable me to reach it? When I used to persecute the Church of God, what did I deserve then? But there is, in fact, no need for you to determine my worth for the Lord paid no attention to the kind of man I was, but by his grace made another man of me,’” close quote.

I ask you tonight. Has the Lord made another man of you? Are you a new man? Have you met the resurrected Son of God? Oh, you haven’t seen him. He is not showing himself to people. But you have heard about him. And if you have believed the gospel, in a sense, you have heard him, because it is still the Holy Spirit who opens the Scriptures to a person’s heart so that they can see the glory of Jesus on the pages of God’s Word.

Is that you? Do you delight in the thought of him being magnified in your life not by the story of your greatness, but by the story of his grace? Paul could have told a lot of stories and thought he was magnifying Jesus by telling about his greatness. But he delights, instead, to magnify Jesus by telling about his awfulness and pointing out God’s grace to him. Do you recognize there is really nothing great in your life, but what God has accomplished by grace?

Do you see that you can’t eliminate any part of the gospel without losing it? Someone could have said, “Listen, Paul. We don’t doubt the deity of Jesus. We don’t doubt his substitutional death. We don’t doubt the fact that he was raised from the death. We have just been influenced by the philosophies around us.” They wouldn’t have said this, but this is the reality. And we are just not sure we are going to be raised from the dead anymore. Is that ok?”

Oh, no, listen. You are in danger of losing the gospel all together. You can’t... when you talk about the irreducible minimum, you can’t lose any of it without losing all of it.

Paul said to the Galatians, “If you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you,” because of what the Judaizers were teaching about circumcision, that you had to believe in Jesus and keep the law of Moses. You had to believe in Jesus and be

circumcised.” And he said, “If you accept that, you have blown it. That is not the gospel at all.”

Finally, we have received it, haven't we? But I would ask. Who are we delivering it to? Paul said what he had received he had delivered. Church, we have received it. Who are we delivering it to? Who are we preaching the gospel to? When is the last time you intentionally shared God's good news, this message from heaven concerning his Son with another living soul recognizing that if they don't receive the gospel, they will perish?

I declare to you tonight if you don't know Jesus, my friend, you will die and go to hell. But God has done everything necessary to save a sinner like you if you will turn from your sins and trust in his Son. There is mercy for you. The mercy seat is Jesus himself. There is the mercy of God. Trust in him for life.

Let's bow together for prayer.

*Father, thank you for your faithfulness, your faithfulness, Lord, to fulfill your Word, your faithfulness to bring about everything that was your plan and every thing that you revealed in your Word, everything that you have promised. And I think that your promises in the gospel are as faithful as every other promise you have made, that if we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, we are saved, that is righteousness is ours as a gift from you wherever there has been true trust in him. I pray that we would examine ourselves and ask whether or not we are really in the faith, whether what we call faith is faith, whether it is something produced by your Spirit or something that is non-saving and could be explained by the flesh. I pray, Father, that we would demonstrate our faith by pursuing your Son with all our heart. Thank you for your Word. Thank you that it is true. Strengthen us, Lord, and convict us to take what we have received and to be faithful to declare it to others. We ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen.*