

**Telling the Gospel Series**  
**Gospel Understanding: 1 Corinthians 15:1-4**  
*Pastor Tim Nixon*

This chapter has been classified by some as one of the most important and crucial chapters in the Bible. If you would select 10 of the greatest chapters of the Bible you would find that 1 Corinthians 15 will be on your list. It is so important that it actually answers the first heresy of the church, which was the denial of the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The glory of the Christian faith is that it never views life as ending with death. This life is not all there is. The Christian faith always looks beyond the sunset to the sunrise.

This is the great resurrection chapter of the Bible. And this chapter begins specifically dealing with the gospel. It shows that the most important part of the gospel is the resurrection of Christ. Frankly, without that, everything else – even the death of Christ – is meaningless.

After becoming a Christian, the greatest thing you can do for another person is to help them know Christ. As you remember what life was like for you without Christ, compassion motivates you to share your faith. Romans 10:13,14 says, “Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how shall they ask Him to save them unless they believe in Him? And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard about Him? And how can they hear about Him unless someone tells them?”

But what do you say, and where do you start?

A Christian was walking through an art gallery in Glasgow, Scotland and he came upon a small boy gazing at a particular painting of the crucifixion. He stood and watched the little fellow for a moment and then he walked up and laid his hand on his shoulder and he said, "Son, what is that a picture of?" "Why, Sir," said the lad, "don't you know? That's our Lord dying on a cross and bearing our sin." The man patted the boy on the shoulder and said, "Thank you, Son." And then he walked on and continued to look at the remaining pictures in the gallery. Suddenly he felt a little tug at his sleeve and he looked down and there was the same little fellow. The boy looked up and said, "Pardon me, Sir, I forget to tell you one thing. He's not dead anymore, He arose."

And that is the message of the gospel. He's not dead anymore. He arose.

And that basically is the heart of the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. And just as the heart pumps life blood to the body, so the resurrection is the very heart of the gospel pumping life into every other area of truth. The resurrection is the pivot on which all of Christianity turns. Take away the resurrection, Christianity comes out as wishful thinking and just another useless human philosophy. Christians down through the ages have banked their destiny, have banked their life, have banked their hope on the fact that the shameful death of Jesus Christ was not the last word,

but that He arose and triumphed over death and that when He said, "Because I live, you shall live also," He granted to anyone who comes to Him by faith the same resurrection hope.<sup>1</sup>

Paul states that the resurrection is part of the gospel; in fact, there is no gospel without the resurrection. Christianity does not rest on a set of ideas or creeds, but on facts. The gospel is not the 10 Commandments or the sermon on the Mount. The gospel is a series of facts concerning a person and that person is Jesus Christ. Listen to how Paul states it:

The structure of this section is simple: hold fast to what I delivered to you. And what I delivered to you is this...

- Don't forget it.
- Understand it.
- Don't make it more difficult than it truly is.

SCARCELY had the good seed of the Gospel been sown in the world, before Satan, by his agents, scattered tares, which in the earlier stages of their growth could not easily be distinguished from them, and from which the field will never be wholly freed until the harvest. The resurrection itself, that most fundamental doctrine of Christianity, on which every other doctrine rests, was denied by many.<sup>2</sup>

### **What is the Gospel?**

The Gospel is good news. The gospel does not tell us something that we must do. The gospel tells us what Jesus Christ has already done for us. He died for our sins according to the Scriptures, he was buried, he rose again the third day.

Why must we have class after class after class on how to share it and explain it? It must be very difficult, detailed, and complex since we have such a hard time simply explaining what it is. Even seasoned Christians in membership interviews here at the Chapel have a difficult time verbalizing or writing down the truths of the gospel.

And so here we are again, walking through the gospel together for just a few minutes this evening.

But just as Paul wrote to the Philippians, "...to write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you." (Philippians 3:1) and Peter also wrote, "Therefore, I intend always to remind you of these qualities, do you know them and are established in the truths that you have. I think it is right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder..." (2 Peter 1:12-13).

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *The Evidence for Resurrection, Part 1*, Preached September 11, 1977, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, CA.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Simeon, *Horae Homileticae: 1 and 2 Corinthians*, vol. 16 (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1833), 345-346.

Here Paul makes it very clear that Christ had both died and risen according to the Scriptures. And this simple truth he calls the gospel.

And once Paul states clearly the simple, understandable, and rememberable gospel, he goes on in these short versus to explain it in a way that we can do the same.

The Corinthians had received the gospel into their hearts and were standing in it.

They had received it by faith.  
They had received it as true.

They were standing fast in that truth. And we must do the same. We cannot allow suffering, persecutions, and the circumstances of life to turn us away from this truth, and our faith.

Why? Because this simple and understandable and repeatable gospel is how we have been saved. And so, what we read here is suitable for us to share with those who are lost. And what we read here is sufficient for our and their salvation.

I am not going to spend any time this evening working through historical and literal proofs for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This becomes wrangling of words when we discuss sharing our faith.

Sometimes we feel like we must prove to the unbeliever that the things we are saying are true. In a sense, that is what Paul is doing at the end of this text and the beginning of the next as he talks about the witnesses to the resurrection. In fact, any lawyer today would love to have as many witnesses for his position as Paul lists here as proofs of the resurrection.

In our day and culture, the reality is that you cannot prove anything to anyone. They are going to believe what they want to believe. Our current political and scientific society has proven that.

**And this is a mystery to us because in our culture we must explain and persuade and beg and plead to make our case, to prove our point.**

But the great mystery of God's Word is that it is powerful and alive and sufficient for even this task. And so, as we share the gospel nothing need be added. To this truth however we must be completely convinced, of what we say, or we will be afraid and unsure.

Paul's qualifying phrase—if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain—does not teach that true believers are in danger of losing their salvation, but it is a warning against non-saving faith. So, another way of saying this might be, "... if you hold fast what I preached to you, unless your faith is worthless or unless you believed without result." The Corinthians' holding fast to what Paul had preached (see 11:2) was the result of and an evidence of their genuine salvation, just as their salvation and new life were an evidence of the power of Christ's resurrection.

A professing Christian who holds to orthodox doctrine and living and then fully rejects it proves that his salvation was never real. He is able to let go of the things of God because **he** is doing the holding. He does not belong to God and therefore God's power cannot keep him. Such a person does not hold fast the word because his faith is in vain. It was never real. **He cannot hold fast because he is not held fast.**<sup>3</sup>

In verse three, then, Paul restates to them the very heart of the gospel that he apparently preached to them when he was with them.

Part of his reminder here is that the truth of the gospel that he had delivered to them was of primary, or preeminent importance. The gospel is the main thing, and Paul makes it clear in these verses that he is majoring on the majors and not focusing on trivial things.

“What I also received” is the language of what scholars call “traditioning”: Jewish teachers would pass on their teachings to their students, who would in turn pass them on to their own students. The students could take notes, but they delighted especially in oral memorization and became quite skilled at it; memorization was a central feature of ancient education. In the first generation, the tradition would be very accurate; this tradition may even be a verbatim citation in 15:3–5 or 15:3–7. That Jesus died for our sins “in accordance to the Scriptures” may refer especially to Isaiah 53:4–6, 8, 11–12.<sup>4</sup>

In a sense, this is what I am doing tonight. I am delivering to you what I received. In this case, what I received includes two things:

1. University training, reading, and study of this text.
2. But more importantly, preeminently, of first importance, is the truth of Christ's dying, his burial, and his resurrection.

And why have I spent the time training, reading, and studying this text? So that you may learn and be convinced and deliver to your family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors, that which is a first importance; what you have received from me tonight.

And this you and I will do, not because I have convinced you, but because, as Paul says twice - this has happened in accordance with the Scriptures. The living, breathing, wonderful Word of God is the witness of truth for these facts.

Christ's dying, his burial, and his resurrection belong together. Paul's “statement” is not mere history, it is gospel, because it is done for our sins. Jesus Christ died and was buried. The facts and evidence must begin with death and burial. Here, however, Paul connects his burial more closely with his resurrection than with his death.

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<sup>3</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., 1 Corinthians, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 399.

<sup>4</sup> Craig S. Keener, The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 1 Co 15:3.

The fact that Jesus rose again the third day according to the Scriptures was established when He was seen by Cephas (Simon Peter), then by the twelve (with Matthias taking the place of Judas Iscariot). Afterwards the Lord was seen by over five hundred brethren at once. This appearance to the five hundred plus is not recorded in the Gospels. Nevertheless, it could be confirmed because the greater part of this number remained at the time of Paul's writing.

One evening, Dwight Moody noticed a man leaning against a lamppost and asked him if he was a Christian. The man snorted back, "Mind your own business!" Moody responded, "I'm sorry if I've offended you, but this is my business."

### **Is sharing your faith your business?**

#### **Reflect and Respond: How to Share the World's Greatest News**

**You must love people more than you fear them.**

**Be Authentic.** Relax and be honest. You might try saying something like, "You know, Christ has become really important to me and I would like to talk about it." Explain what God has done in your life but try not to sound perfect. Christians love sports, hate paying bills and end up with unmatched socks, just like everyone else.

Authenticity also means that your life confirms your message. People grow tired of phoniness. The apostle Paul said to the Thessalonians that they not only heard his message, but they saw how his life was further proof of the truth of his message (1 Thessalonians 1:5, 2:8). The message of his life did not contradict the message of his mouth.

Confirming your witness through your life doesn't replace your verbal witnessing, though. Both are needed. You cannot just live a Christian life and hope that others will notice; they may notice that you live a good life, but they won't know why. Jesus lived a perfect life and he was constantly proclaiming the gospel. Jesus' command is to witness by word and deed.

**Leave the Results to the Holy Spirit.** Relying on the power of the Holy Spirit in witnessing means believing that He will lead your conversation even as you use your mental and verbal skills in presenting the gospel to others. The results are up to God. Don't get confused about whose job it is to save people! Saving people is God's responsibility; your responsibility is to present the gospel.

**Be a Listener.** Sharing your faith involves asking questions and listening. It is a conversation. You want to know what the people you are talking with think. So you may ask, "How do you think a person becomes a Christian?" or "What do you think it takes to get to heaven?" or even, "have you ever heard the Gospel?" We will examine this more over the next two weeks.

**Stick With Them.** As much as possible, sharing the Gospel includes one very important quality: a commitment to stick with the people you witness to. Of course there will be times when you will have only a few minutes with a stranger, such as on an airplane or in a grocery store. But most witnessing will occur in the context of relationships.

**Expect God to Use You.** This may be the number one hindrance to our willingness to share the gospel with others. We simply don't expect that God will use our mumbling speech, and bumbling approach for his kingdom and for his glory.

Many people in your world may get to hear about Christ because of you! As you communicate your faith in Christ to others, don't be surprised at how God is able to use you!<sup>5</sup>

As the Apostle Paul wrote to his dear friend Philemon, I share this hope with you,

“I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.” (Philemon 4-6).

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<sup>5</sup> Steven L. Pogue, Sharing Your Faith, <https://www.startingwithgod.com/serving-others/sharing/>