

1 Corinthians 15

Christianity: Jesus, the Gospel and the Resurrection

Lesson Objective:

1. Exhort 1 Corinthians 15:1-11
2. For the church to be exhorted on the centrality of the promised resurrection of Christ for Christian believers according to 1 Corinthians 15

1 Corinthians is an epistle or the first letter of Paul to the church of Corinth where many scholars believe that the makeup of the church are converts from the pagan world of the Greek city. They were addressed by Paul as true Christians but their struggles identified them to be immature and carnal. If you read through the whole letter, you will be able to see a very important theme and as we study our passage, this theme actually accentuates the importance of Chapter 15. If you have your bibles, I want you to visualize the outline of 1 Corinthians in this manner:

PROBLEMS REPORTED BY THE HOUSE OF CHLOE (1Cr 1:10-6:20)

FACTIONS IN THE CHURCH (1Cr 1:1-4:21)

SEXUAL IMMORALITY (1Cr 5:1-13)

LAWSUITS AMONG BRETHREN (1Cr 6:1-11)

MORAL DEFILEMENTS (1Cr 6:12-20)

PROBLEMS MENTIONED IN THE LETTER FROM CORINTH (1Cr 7:1-16:9)

MARRIAGE & CELIBACY (1Cr 7:1-40)

EATING MEATS SACRIFICED TO IDOLS (1Cr 8:1-11:1)

WOMEN PRAYING AND PROPHECYING WITH HEADS UNCOVERED (1Cr 11:2-16)

THE LORD'S SUPPER (1Cr 11:17-34)

SPIRITUAL GIFTS (1Cr 12:1-14:40)

RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD (1Cr 15:1-58)

COLLECTION FOR THE SAINTS (1Cr 16:1-4)

Generally speaking, what we will consistently see is Paul's appeal that 1) the Gospel should be central for them, the church and 2) they should mature in their faith - this includes the pursuit of holiness in their life in Christ.

His message is the Gospel: 1 Corinthians 2 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the [a]testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of [b]human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

He is a steward and servant for the Gospel 1 Cor. 4

He even disciplines in reference to the Gospel: 1 Cor 4:14 I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. 15 For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

Now as Paul addresses the question of the church about the resurrection, where did he start off as he teaches the truth of this subject? Again, the Gospel.

Book

What is the proof that there is a resurrection? The Gospel that declares that Jesus resurrected from the dead.

1. (1-2) What is the Gospel for a Christian?

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

a. The gospel which I preached to you: In verses three and four, Paul will describe the content of the gospel.

b. By which you are also saved, if you hold fast that word I preached to you

c. Unless you believed in vain

2. (3-4) The content of the gospel Paul preached.

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

a. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received:

i. One of the things that you might miss in the nkjv translation as compared to the original Greek manuscript is PROTOIS - wherein it is translated in other translations as CHIEF, PRIMARY, AS OF FIRST IMPORTANCE. This was simply translated as first of all.

ii. "Notice that the preacher does not make the gospel. If he makes it, it is not worth your having. Originality in preaching, if it be originality in the statement of doctrine, is falsehood. We are not makers and inventors; we are repeaters, we tell the message we have received." (Spurgeon)

iii. "Our religion is not based upon opinions, but upon facts. We hear persons sometimes saying, 'Those are your views, and these are ours.' Whatever your 'views' may be, is a small matter; what are the facts of the case?" (Spurgeon)

c. Christ died:

i. However, we never speak of the physical sufferings of Jesus to make us feel sorry for Jesus, as if He needed our pity. In fact, His death represent beyond what happened physically, but is best described by His utterance - About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why **have you forsaken me?** The wrath of God was poured out to Him for our justification. But again, that is not a reason for us to pity Him because He accomplished it according to God's purpose and He said with an emphatic statement, it is finished. So let us not be sorry about Jesus on what happened to Him at the cross but instead for those who reject the complete work of Jesus on the cross at Calvary, and let us be sorry for those preachers who do not have the heart of Paul in 1

Corinthians 1:23, when he proclaimed the center of the Christian message: we preach Christ crucified.

d. for our sins:

i. We should not pity Christ for He suffered for our sake. Instead we should be encouraged to endure the race set before us like Christ did because He also called us to carry our cross - Hebrews 12 "Therefore, since we also have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let's rid ourselves of every obstacle and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let's run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking only at Jesus, the [a]originator and perfecter of the faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary [b]and lose heart.". For Christ, it is His joy to submit Himself to God and save us.

f. He was buried: We don't often think of the burial of Jesus as part of the gospel, but it is. The burial of Jesus is important for several reasons.

i. It is proof positive that He really died, because you don't bury someone unless they are really dead, and Jesus' death was confirmed at the cross before He was taken down to be buried (John 19:31-37).

ii. Jesus' burial is also important because it fulfilled the Scriptures which declared, And they made His grave with the wicked; but with the rich at His death (Isaiah 53:9). Jesus was buried in the tomb of a rich man (Matthew 27:57-60).

g. He rose again: This truth is essential to the gospel. If Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins and remove our guilt, then why is the resurrection of Jesus so important?

i. Although Jesus bore the full wrath of God on the cross, as if He were a guilty sinner, guilty of all our sin, even being made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21), He Himself did not become a sinner. Even the act of taking our sin was an act of holy, giving love for us – so that Jesus Himself did not become a sinner, even though He bore the full guilt of our sin. This is the gospel message! That Jesus took our punishment for sin on the cross, and remained a perfect Savior through the whole ordeal – proved by His resurrection.

ii. Therefore, the resurrection of Jesus is not some "add on" to a "more important" work on the cross. If the cross is the payment for our sins, the empty tomb is the receipt, showing that the perfect Son of God made perfect payment for our sins. (Guzik) The payment itself is of little good without the receipt! This is why the resurrection of Jesus was such a prominent theme in the evangelistic preaching of the early church (Acts 2:24, Acts 3:15, Acts 4:10, Acts 13:30-39).

h. According to the Scriptures

3. (5-8) Concrete evidence of Jesus' resurrection. (Vantage Point of Paul's discourse)

And that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

a. And that He was seen by Cephas:

i. Many people saw the resurrected Jesus. Paul now calls forth these witnesses to the resurrection, to establish beyond all controversy that Jesus was raised from the dead in a resurrection body.

ii. Jesus commanded the disciples to be His witnesses of this act of God. The resurrection reveals the essential truth about God and our life in Him. Again, I say this is essential because it is. The Bible says so. The truth about the resurrection of Christ and our resurrection should shape our life as Christians. Think about this deeply, how does the truth of Biblical resurrection shape your life?

b. Then by the twelve: Mark 16:14, Luke 24:36-43, and John 20:19-25

c. Over five hundred brethren at once

i. Paul is anchoring his evidence of the resurrection of Christ through the 500 witnesses. Are these people deluded? Or are there literally hundreds who saw the resurrected Jesus with their own eyes. They know for sure Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. They attested to it even to the point of persecution and death- It's as if he is telling the church to ask these witnesses for proof and this was actually the context.

ii. We know He lives because the historical evidence demands we believe in the resurrection of Jesus. If we can believe anything in history, we can believe the reliable, confirmed testimony of these eyewitnesses. Jesus rose from the dead.

d. He was seen by James

e. By all the apostles: John 20:26-31, John 21:1-25, Matthew 28:16-20, and Luke 24:44-49

f. Last of all He was seen by me also:

i. Paul used the ancient Greek term *ektroma* meaning, "abortion, stillbirth, miscarriage" – it speaks of an untimely birth with "freakish" associations. Some think Paul used this striking word because the Corinthian Christians so consistently depreciated his stature as an apostle. They considered him truly a *paulus* ("little") apostle, but Paul will glory in his weakness.

g. Seen by me also: Paul is self testifying that Jesus indeed resurrected. It is an oxymoron to believe Paul's teaching without believing his testimony about Christ. He had repeated his Damascus road testimony to people (common, magistrates, king)

4. (9-11) Paul's testimony of grace.

For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy 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; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

a. For I am the least of the apostles:

i. Paul felt – rightly so – that his sins were worse because he was responsible for the death, imprisonment, and suffering of Christians, whom he persecuted before his life was changed by Jesus (Acts 8:3, Acts 9:1-2, Galatians 1:13, Philippians 3:6, and 1 Timothy 1:15).

ii. Paul is the first one who will probably doubt his testimony and persecute himself. Who would believe Paul if he knows in his heart that without Jesus appearing to him at Damascus, he will remain a persecutor of the saints.

b. But by the grace of God I am what I am:

i. The grace that saves us also changes us. Grace changed Paul, so it will for us.

ii. "By the grace of God we not only are what we are, but we also remain what we are. We should long ago have ruined ourselves, and damned ourselves, if Christ had not kept us by his almighty grace." (Spurgeon)

c. His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all:

i. Conceivably, if Paul had not worked as hard as he did, the grace of God would still have been given to him, but our response to this grace shows our understanding of our undeserved grace. The grace of God should draw us to God. "We love Him because He first loved us" - John here was not suggesting that we should love God but we are indeed now loving Him because of His initiative to love us. John in his discourse in 1 John 4 says that love is now our identity "everyone that love is born of God and knows God!"

ii. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul described the fruits/subject of faith, love and hope (these three working as genitive nouns) in our Lord Jesus Christ. These three virtues are manifestations of our true Christian identity because God is indeed at work in us (1 Thes 1:4). So, faith bears work, hope bears perseverance, Love bears labor (1 Thes 1:2-3).

iii. This is what Paul was saying here, he is indeed saved, the grace of God in him was not in vain - "rather/but" - Alla - he labored abundantly than they all, yet not him but the grace of God, which was with him!

d. I labored more abundantly than they all:

e. Yet not it, but the grace of God which was with me: Paul was honest enough to know and to say that he worked hard. He was also humble enough to know that even his hard work was the work of God's grace in him. The love of God was propelling him! So should it be with us! Why do you wake up in the morning everyday, do everything for the glory of God, day after day? Why do we wake up early every Sunday and go to church and worship God? Isn't it because our life is now not our own and we now live in love for Christ? So shall it be! Don't be lazy Union Community Bible Church and don't allow Satan to lull us to sleep :) Let us be passionate to serve and labor in love for God and His people.

f. Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed: Whether Paul or one of the other apostles brought the message, the result was the same. They preached the resurrection of Jesus, and the early Christians believed the resurrection of Jesus. The Resurrection of Christ is an essential truth for us Christians.

So what?

Conclusion:

The message of God for us today is only the preamble of the discourse of Paul for 1 Corinthians 15, so it will take a while to preach everything in detail. But allow me to guide (15 minutes) you to look at the rest of 1 Corinthians 15 and leave a week-worth meditation to you as we celebrate Easter week full of reverence and love for God:

The first rhetorical question of Paul is:

12 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? < Why are there Christians doubting this? Maybe not with their oral confession but their action. < Bro. June and I were talking last Thursday as we walked around their neighborhood and observed how people handle death. It is actually not only reflected when you are already at the point of death but how you are already living.

Consider what the author of Ecclesiastes said in chapter 2:

20 Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun. 21 For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his [h]eritage to a man who has not labored for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. 22 For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? 23 For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity.

So what is this man's solution?:

24 Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. 25 For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, [i]more than I?

< Have you seen this conclusion somewhere?? Yes! I hope you already did! Luke 12, it was the rich fool who concluded this way! BUT How can you eat, drink and be merry if God will not even give you that opportunity!? So Christ actually illuminates the minds of His people by teaching us not to waste our treasure and time in this world, rather we lay up treasures in heaven and live a contented life in God - Luke 12:21/Matthew 6:19-20

Paul gave us a conditional statement for this sub-discourse: 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, **we are of all men the most pitiable**. BROTHERS and SISTERS our hope in Christ should go beyond this life, our hope should be even up to the life He has prepared for us when He returns - So our souls utter with John, Come Lord Jesus.

The second rhetorical question that I hope you meditate for this week is this question:

29 Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? 30 And why do we stand in [e]jeopardy every hour? < How can you not believe in the resurrection if our life in Christ compels us to die for Him and His glory everyday. 2 Cor 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

BROTHERS AND SISTERS, Do not waste your life on vain things of this world rather let us not hesitate to submit to the will of God and do not hesitate to obey knowing that our resurrection in Christ is at hand. As Christ prayed, with the contradiction of His real struggle at that point of prayer: Father, not My will but Your will be done.

Third question:

35 But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?" < Our physical body should be sown in corruption so that it is raised in incorruption (v.42). So we are ought to die physically so we shall live in our glorified state. ALL, BECAUSE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Let me conclude our Word for today by the words of Paul:

56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

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