

The Resurrection of Christ is Essential to the Gospel

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

1 Corinthians 15:1-11: *"Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 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. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 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. 11 Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed."*

Background Notes

As you know, certain chapters in the New Testament are well known for their specific content. 1 Corinthians 13 is the great Love Chapter. Hebrews 11 is the great Faith Chapter. 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 are the great Christian Giving Chapters. And 1 Corinthians 15 is known as the great Resurrection Chapter in the New Testament.

The main argument in this chapter is not the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but rather the bodily resurrection of the believer. The Corinthian believers didn't doubt the resurrection of Jesus Christ - but some of them had some doubts about the bodily resurrection of the believer. Remember, the Corinthian Christians were coming out of a pagan Greek background. The Greeks did not deny the immortality of the soul. They believed in a life after death, but the *resurrection of the body* was a *new idea*. In fact, to the Greek way of thinking, the material body was a restriction and limitation for the soul. The body was the cause and source of weakness and sin. To the Greek way of thinking, the death of the body actually liberated the soul!

Greek thought influenced some of the false teachers at Corinth, and they were denying the possibility of bodily resurrection for the Christian. They were not denying life after death as a sort of "spirit being," but they were denying resurrection of the body.

In this chapter the apostle Paul refuted and corrected this incorrect teaching. He showed that the teaching on the resurrection of the body is a fact, and it is a wonderful doctrine. We should look forward to the resurrection of the body! It is an essential part of the Christian faith and hope. Obviously, in developing his argument about the bodily resurrection of the believer, the apostle Paul related a lot of truth about the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Doctrinal Points

1. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a part of the gospel.

What was the gospel - the “good news” - that the apostle Paul preached when he came to Corinth? And what was the gospel that the Corinthians had received and believed? It certainly included the resurrection of Jesus Christ, because without the resurrection of Christ, there would be no tangible proof that God was satisfied with the work of Christ on the cross. If God was not satisfied with the work of Christ, the Christian faith in Jesus as Savior would be in vain. *“...I declared 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”(v2).*

Notice that Paul did not dream up the gospel - he received it from the Lord Himself: *“I delivered to you first of all that which I also received”(v3).* In Galatians 1:11-12 Paul wrote, *“But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.”*

In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, the apostle Paul gave “the gospel in a nutshell.” If ever anyone asks you to give them a summary of the gospel from the Bible, turn them to these two verses. *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.”*

When he wrote “*according to the Scriptures,*” what Old Testament Scriptures was Paul thinking of? What about Isaiah 53, for starters? In verses 4-6 that Scripture predicts the Lord’s suffering for our sins: *“Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;*

Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities;

The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way;

And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

Verse 8 predicts His death and burial: *“For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked - but with the rich at His death...”*

And verse 10 predicts the resurrection of the Messiah: *“He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.”*

Other Old Testament Scriptures predict all the essentials of the gospel. Think, for example, of the spiritual picture of the gospel in Genesis 22, when Abraham was asked to sacrifice Isaac. Hebrews 11:19 taught that even the Lord’s resurrection was pictured in this great *type* (spiritual picture), when it says that Abraham received Isaac back as a *type*.

The resurrection of Christ is clearly predicted in Psalm 16, one of the great Messianic psalms of the Old Testament. In Psalm 16:10-11 the Messiah was speaking: *“For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”*

So all aspects of the gospel - the substitutionary death, the burial and the resurrection of Jesus Christ - are all predicted in the Old Testament, and thus these events occurred “according to the Scriptures,” as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:4.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an essential part of the gospel that we believe in order to be saved. Romans 10:9, *“If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”* The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a part of the gospel.

2. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact of history.

In verses 5-8, Paul listed a number of post-resurrection appearances of the Lord Jesus. *“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.”*

Some of the post-resurrection appearances of our Lord that are mentioned in the Gospels are not listed here - for example, His appearance to the women on Easter Sunday, and His appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Furthermore, some of the resurrection appearances recorded here are not reported in the Gospels. The Lord’s appearance to James, His half-brother, is recorded nowhere else in the New Testament.

But all of the appearances recorded here would have been well known by the early Christians. By mentioning these post-resurrection appearances, the apostle Paul’s point was to show that without a doubt, ***the bodily resurrection of Christ was a fact of history***. In fact, his point in verse 6, where he stated that most of the five hundred brethren were still alive, was somewhat of a challenge to those who had any doubts about the bodily resurrection of Christ. In other words, Paul

was saying, “If you don’t believe me, go check it out for yourself. There are several hundred eyewitnesses that you can interview. There is plenty of evidence for the bodily resurrection of Christ!”

All attempts of skeptics to dismiss or disprove the bodily resurrection of Christ have failed. In fact, many of the people who have tried to prove that the resurrection never happened have actually become believers! The resurrection of Christ is a fact of history.

Practical Application

Don’t let God’s grace toward you be in vain.

In verse 8 Paul said: *“Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.”* In point of time, Paul was different than the other apostles, who had walked with the Lord during His earthly ministry. And Paul was *“the least of the apostles... not worthy to be called an apostle”* in the sense that he had persecuted the early Christians before his conversion. *“For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God”(v9).* But by the grace of God, Paul was miraculously saved - and he was now “Exhibit A” of what God can do in saving a lost sinner!

In verse 10, Paul said that God’s grace towards him was “not in vain,” or “not without effect,” because Paul showed its effectiveness and his appreciation by “working harder than all of them” in service for the Lord. *“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not without effect. No I worked harder than all of them- yet not I but the grace of God that was with me”(v10, NIV).*

What about us? Do we treat God’s grace cheaply - or are we humbly grateful for the costly grace He has bestowed on us? Do we show appreciation to the Lord for the amazing grace and mercy that He has shown to us?

What are we doing in service for the Lord? Do we just attend church for an hour on Sunday, and feel we’ve done enough to thank the Lord? Or do we display our gratitude for God’s grace by our willing service for Him?

Don’t let God’s grace toward you be in vain.