

Series: *Special Programs*

Title: "According to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:1-8)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 4/20/2014

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I am preaching this message at the time of the year when we especially remember the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And so I am going to deviate today from our current series of messages on Biblical separation, and focus instead upon this the greatest of all events in world history.

And so I invite you to turn with me in your copy of God's Word, if you are able, to the opening verses of First Corinthians chapter 15. I want to begin by reading the first eight verses of First Corinthians chapter 15. The Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote these words:

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.

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, 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

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last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. (1  
Corinthians 15:1-8)

### **Christianity: Faith Founded On Facts**

The words that we have just read tell us about historical events. They tell us about facts. The incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ is a fact. His presence on this earth in a human body for 33 years is a fact. His literal death on the cross is a fact. The burial of His dead body in a tomb is a fact. His bodily resurrection from the dead is a fact.

And all of that sequence of events is attested to by the fact that hundreds of people saw and met with the resurrected Christ after He came out of the tomb, and before He ascended to the right hand of the Father in glory 40 days later.

Dear friends, the Christian faith, true saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, is a faith that is founded upon facts. It is founded upon historical events. And as the Apostle Paul twice emphasizes in the verses we just read in First Corinthians chapter 15, these facts are "according to the Scriptures."

That is the central issue that every human being must face: If you want to understand who the Lord Jesus Christ is, you must come to Scripture. If you want to understand what the Lord Jesus Christ did, you must come to Scripture. And if you want to understand the Gospel, if you want to understand why Jesus came, and why He did what He did, and how it applies to you – you must come

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to Scripture.

It is all "according to the Scriptures." The facts of the life and death and burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ are matters of revealed truth – revealed truth that is attested to by eyewitnesses. There is only one Gospel, and this is it: "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, and that He was seen..."

### **The Social "Gospel"**

Now there are many other gospels today. There is in our time, the social gospel – the idea that improving man's social, or physical, or moral condition in this life will lead to blessedness in the next life. I recently came across a book by a Roman Catholic theologian – and by the way, this Roman Catholic theologian, a Roman Catholic priest, is a professor at a Methodist university. Such is the state of the liberal church today.

But this particular Catholic professor who teaches in a Methodist university wrote a book in which he said "without a social mission there is no Church." And that is, and has been through many running centuries, the position of the Roman Catholic Church, and it has also become the position of the liberal mainline churches and even many of the nominally evangelical churches in our time.

The position is that the mission of the church is to improve the condition of

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man here on earth by various methods and means. But the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ has no true place, certainly no central place, in the teaching and the thinking of these people.

And so they are doing things that can perhaps improve man's conditions on earth, perhaps can improve his health, perhaps can help people to find employment, can help man to better himself, can help society to perhaps improve in certain ways. But because these are the things that they are emphasizing, they are neglecting and excluding from their thinking and their teaching this central fact: That these people whose lives they are seeking to improve in the here-and-now are going to be lost and condemned for eternity in Hell. That is the tragic fallacy of the social "gospel".

### **The Works "Gospel"**

We also have in our time, as we have had in the running history of the church for many centuries, what we may call the works gospel. This is the false gospel that says, "I am doing the best I can. I live my life by the Sermon on the Mount, or by some other moral code, and that will lead to blessedness in the next life. That will earn me a place in Heaven."

But the Word of God makes it absolutely clear that it is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by God's mercy entirely that He saves a wretched sinner (Titus 3:4-7). Many who say that they live their lives by the Sermon on the Mount don't recognize the main purpose of the Sermon on the

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Mount. Our Lord's first purpose in preaching the Sermon on the Mount was to show to those who were relying upon their works that they were relying upon that which cannot possibly save their souls. Those people, the Israelites to whom Jesus was preaching, thought that by outwardly keeping the commandments that they could gain entry into eternal life.

But in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus demolished that kind of thinking. He said, You don't understand that it is not merely a matter of the external, but it is in a far greater way a matter of the internal.

It is not a matter of the fact that you have not outwardly committed adultery or committed murder. If you have even thought about committing adultery, in the eyes of God you have committed adultery and you are condemned.

If you have even had a single thought of hatred toward your brother, it is the same as if you had committed murder in the eyes of God, and therefore even that thought condemns you to a lost eternity.

The gospel of salvation by works, or the gospel of salvation by faith plus works, the idea that I add something to the person and work of Christ – these thoughts, these teachings, are damnable falsehoods. To think that we can earn salvation by our works, or to think that we must add anything, or can add anything, to the death burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ is to believe in the worst fraud and the worst falsehood imaginable.

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## **The False Gospel of Humanism**

And then there is also the false gospel of humanism – the false gospel which says that man is his own god, and that this life is all there is, and that we just need to make the best of it, and it doesn't really matter whether we choose to spend our time in hedonistic pleasures or in a frantic striving for human achievement and human improvement.

There's nothing after this, humanism says, so be your own god, be your own standard of truth, because this life is all there is. But the Word of God says that it is "appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Every human being is on his way to judgment. You will face the Lord of the universe. You will face the risen Lord Jesus Christ either as your loving Savior for all eternity, or as your condemning Judge who will say, "I never knew you; depart from Me..."(Matthew 7:23).

The Word of God calls the humanist a fool. In Luke chapter 12, the Lord Jesus Christ spoke a parable about a man who followed after this kind of philosophy. This man accumulated great wealth, more than he could handle, and he said, I'm going to eat and drink and be merry. But, Luke chapter 12 verse 20, "God said to him, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee...' " That is the fact that every humanist will face.

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## **The False Gospel of Syncretism**

There is also the false gospel of syncretism. This is the false gospel that says that all roads, all religions, or any combination of them, all lead to God. This is the false teaching that says to someone who is in the bondage of paganism, that all you need to do is add Christianity to your paganism and all will be well. You don't need to forsake your paganism. You don't need to throw yourself upon the mercies of Christ completely. All you need to do is add the outward trappings of Christianity to all the other things that you are already doing.

And that is often what is taught not only to an animist or a devil worshiper in Africa or in Asia or some other part of the world. That is also effectively what is taught in what are called evangelical churches in many places today. People are being taught that you do not need to forsake and separate yourself from the evils of this present world. You don't need to give up your idolatries. Just add the trappings of organized religion to your existing thinking, your existing way of life, your existing doings, and that will be enough.

But our Lord Jesus Himself, in Matthew chapter 7 beginning at verse 13, made it absolutely clear that such thinking is a soul-destroying falsehood. Jesus said: That is the broad way that leads to destruction. You must enter by the narrow way. Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" – John 14:6 – "No one comes to the Father except through Me."

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## **The False Gospel of Universalism**

And then there is also the false gospel of universalism. Universalism says that all will be saved, somehow, because a loving God would never condemn anyone to Hell. But our Lord Jesus made it very clear to Nicodemus in John chapter 3 that this also is a falsehood. In John chapter 3, beginning at verse 18, Jesus said this:

He who believes in Him [that is, in Jesus] is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Dear friend, here is what Jesus is saying: It is not salvation that is universal. It is condemnation that is universal. And everyone who has not believed on the Lord Jesus Christ is "condemned already." Condemned already, because the human being in his natural state has not believed the truth according to Scripture about the Lord Jesus Christ – about His death and burial and resurrection.

### **Many Will Not Believe the Facts**

You must believe the Gospel as it is presented in Scripture in order to be freed from your condemnation, in order to be freed from your bondage to sin, in order to be saved from the wrath to come, and to have eternal life with the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Heavens and New Earth. That is why the Apostle Paul emphasizes the point in First Corinthians chapter 15, that it is belief "according



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to the Scriptures" – belief of what Scripture actually says – that takes one through the narrow gate that leads to eternal life.

For I delivered to you [the Apostle Paul declares in First Corinthians 15 beginning at verse 3] that which I also received [the revelation that I received from Jesus]: 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, and that He was seen...

Now in our time, there are many people who will not believe those facts at all. And that is simply because they deny the supernatural entirely. They deny the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ because it involves the supernatural. They deny the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ because it involves the supernatural.

And they deny that Christ died for their sins, because at the heart of it, that also involves the supernatural: It involves admitting that there is a holy God that man has offended, and that He is the one who is offended in all offenses, and that He is the creator God, and that He has the right to be obeyed.

And so there are those who simply deny what the Apostle Paul is declaring to us in First Corinthians 15 because they cannot accept the supernatural – because to do so would place them in a position in which they must acknowledge that they are sinners who stand condemned before a holy God. It is not so much that

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these people *do not* believe but that they *will not* believe. They are in denial of the facts.

### **Many Twist the Facts**

But then also there are many people who twist the facts in various ways. They will read the opening verses of First Corinthians chapter 15, and similar passages throughout the Word of God, and they will say, "Oh yes, I believe that there was a man named Jesus who lived on this earth. I believe that He died on a cross. I even believe that He rose again literally and bodily from the dead."

But they don't believe that He did it because I am a condemned sinner on the way to Hell. They won't go that far. They won't let this get personal.

I know a number of men who are like this, and one in particular that I'm thinking of right now is an Anglican bishop named N. T. Wright. N. T. Wright is a well-known defender of the literal death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And many evangelicals have even been taken in by the fact that he is a defender of that much of what we find in First Corinthians chapter 15.

But N. T. Wright and many other men like him in our time deny that it was because "Christ died for our sins." He and many others in our time who would defend the literal death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ do not believe that you need Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.

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They believe and they teach a false gospel of faith plus works. They teach sacramentalism. They teach that water baptism saves, they teach that partaking of the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper maintains your salvation. All these things are falsehoods. All these things are twisting the Gospel.

### **Many Believe the Facts But Will Not Submit to Them**

And then there are those, and I have known many of them, who believe the facts as they are stated in First Corinthians chapter 15. They will even say that they believe that "Christ died for our sins." But they do not believe what Scripture says about the need for personal faith in what the Lord Jesus Christ has done in order to be delivered from your sins.

The Apostle Paul says in First Corinthians 15 verse 2 that there is such a thing as "believing in vain." You can believe the facts without understanding the sinfulness of sin. These people do not understand the extent of the curse that has fallen upon this world and upon they themselves because of sin. And so they may give a "nod of the head," so to speak, to the facts as we find them declared to us in First Corinthians chapter 15. But they will not *submit* to the facts.

### **Only Those Who Submit to the Facts Are Saved**

And that leads us to the last category of individuals. That category of individuals is made up of those who not only *believe* the facts as they are presented in First Corinthians chapter 15, but they *submit* to the facts.

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Only those who submit to the facts are saved. What does it mean to submit to the facts? What does it mean to truly submit to the declaration of Scripture, 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, and that He was seen...?"

What does it mean to submit to those facts? Our Lord Jesus Himself explained that to us in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke chapter 18 beginning at verse nine.

He said that the Pharisee in his self-righteousness "stood and prayed... 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men.'" I'm glad that I'm not a sinner like they are. I'm glad that I have merit in and of myself before You because of the good deeds that I do and the good way that I live outwardly.

But Jesus said that the tax collector, in contrast, "beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'" And Jesus said that it was this man who was justified before God. The man who said, "God be merciful to me a sinner." The man who said, "I understand that I am condemned before God and that my only hope is to throw myself upon God's mercy."

### **In Which Category Are You?**

Dear friend, in which category do you fall? Do you deny the words of Scripture about Christ? Do you twist the words of Scripture about Christ? Do

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you deny that these things apply to you personally? Do you deny your state of condemnation as a sinner before God?

If any of that is true of you, I hope and I pray that even now God the Holy Spirit will change your heart. I hope and I pray that even now you will understand that there is only one way to be freed from the bondage of sin and to have eternal life, and that is through faith in the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ as your only – and personal – Redeemer from the wrath to come.

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