

## The Last Enemy (1 Corinthians 15:1–4, 12–28)

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### Introduction

1. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul identified another problem in the Corinthian church: some did not believe in the resurrection of the body (v. 12).
  - a. This denial affected the gospel itself.
  - b. For this reason, Paul now addressed this great truth by first emphasizing the gospel.
  - c. After setting forth the gospel, Paul explained why the resurrection is necessary.
    - 1) If there is no resurrection, Christ is not raised.
    - 2) If Christ is not raised, saving faith is futile.
    - 3) If faith is futile, sinners are still lost, and gospel preaching is false.
2. This is the day we traditionally celebrate Christ's resurrection.
  - a. It is fitting to remind ourselves of the "good news" that constitutes the gospel.
  - b. We should also beware that the god of this world loves to corrupt this truth and distract our attention from the worship and praise owed to our risen Redeemer.
3. That this truth is vitally important is seen by the care that the apostle took in the argument, unfolding it with caution and precision.
  - a. Sadly, that care is not copied in many circles, leading to serious errors and confusion.
  - b. Confusion breeds ignorance, and ignorance opens the door to the many false gospels also pressing for acceptance.

### I. The Gospel Declared

1. Paul reminded the believers at Corinth of the gospel and its effectiveness in their own experience (vv. 1, 2).
  - a. They had *received* the gospel by faith through Paul's preaching.
  - b. Having received it; they were now *standing* in it—*established* in their present faithfulness to the gospel.
  - c. In this confidence, they were *being saved* (justified, sanctified, and glorified) by it.
  - d. However, if they did not "*hold fast*" the message Paul preached but adopted the doctrine held by some among them, they might have *believed in vain* (v. 2).
    - 1) Paul was not suggesting that they were in danger of losing their salvation.
    - 2) He warned them that perseverance in the truth was the proof of genuine saving faith.
    - 3) This position is supported by the confidence Paul had in fully explaining the doctrine: "*so we preach and so you believed*" (v. 11, 1 Corinthians 15:58).
2. The gospel's "*first importance*" rested on its contents' authoritative message (vv. 3, 4).
  - a. The gospel was prophetically *rooted* in the *Scriptures* ("*according to the Scriptures,*" such as Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Psalm 22).

- b. The gospel *rested* on the finished perfect work of Christ—His substitutionary sacrifice for His people, applied to them in His resurrection (raised for their justification, 1 Peter 3:18; Romans 4:25).
  - c. The gospel was *riveted* in irrefutable eyewitness testimony of those to whom Christ appeared after His death (vv. 5–11).
3. The gospel is “*good news*” for sinners that God has provided a way (the sinless life and death of Christ) for the condemned to be forgiven and recovered to holiness.
- a. The gospel is the announcement that God sent His Son to redeem a portion of lost humanity from sin and death.
  - b. The means (regeneration, faith, and repentance) that God uses to apply the finished work of Christ to sinners, however, must not be confused with the gospel, itself, which belongs only to Christ.
  - c. The gospel is stated in three facts: (1) Christ (Messiah, Lamb of God) *died* for our sins (substitutionary sacrifice to appease divine wrath), (2) Christ was *buried* (to prove that He truly died; Isaiah 53:9), and (3) Christ was *raised* from the dead on the third day to fulfill prophecy (Matthew 17:22, 23; Isaiah 53:10; Acts 2:31, 32, commenting on Psalm 16), to prove satisfaction (Isaiah 53:10, 11), and to evidence divinity (life in Himself; Acts 2:24).

## II. The Gospel Triumphant

- 1. Our hopeless condition if there is no resurrection
  - a. The worthless end of preaching and believing what is preached (v. 14)
  - b. The criminal misrepresentation of God by His servants (v. 15)
  - c. The futile sacrifice and empty gospel announcement (vv. 16–18); living sinners are still sinners and dead saints are forever dead and gone.
- 2. On the other hand, the glorious theology of future resurrection is fully assured by Christ’s own resurrection (v. 20–28).
  - a. The fact of Christ’s resurrection *declared* (v. 20)
  - b. The success of the Second Adam *demonstrated* (vv. 21–23)
  - c. Every rule, authority, and power *defeated*, and the kingdom of God *delivered* (vv. 24–25)
  - d. The last enemy, death, permanently *destroyed* (vv. 26–28; vv. 54–56)

## What Can We Take Away?

- 1. The resurrection of Christ assures us that believers, too, will be raised in body to eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:14–17)
- 2. His resurrection and ascension established Christ’s rule over all things and also provided the power and assurance for all His people total victory over all spiritual enemies, both now and forever (Ephesians 1:18–23).
- 3. His resurrection power provides believers all that they need to live holy lives unto the Savior (1 Corinthians 15:57; Ephesians 3:14–21).