

Exhortations on the Gospel

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 15:3-6
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1 Corinthians 15 where I'm just going to call this "Exhortations or Comments on the Gospel." As the apostle is writing to the church at Corinth, he's speaking of the truths that are foundational to our faith and you'll remind yourself, he's writing to the Corinthians who were very carnal and seemed to be so prone to extrabiblical excesses, they would go beyond the Scriptures, get things out of balance, get into pride, divisions, all kinds of problems, so at this point he's bringing them back to the core, the foundation stone of what our faith is all about and he says in 1 Corinthians 15:3-6,

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep;

Have you ever heard the phrase that a half-truth is a whole lie? That, I think, pretty much applies to what you mean when you say the Gospel. Often people say, "Well, all you really need to know is the simple Gospel." Well, on one hand the Gospel is simple, Jesus died for our sins, he was buried, he was raised again, but if you tell somebody that's all you really need to know, well, that's a lie. There's a whole lot more that needs to be said. In this text, the apostle begins by saying, "Let me tell you what is of first importance." He says that in verse 3, "I delivered to you as of first importance," first in the sense that nothing else matters if this isn't settled. Nothing else matters if this is not where your faith rests, everything we're going to know and understand and walk in and build upon as believers and as a church family, and he's talking to a church family here is built on this truth, this Gospel.

Then he says in verse 3 this is something that he received. In other words, Paul is saying, "I didn't study a bunch of books. I didn't go to Jerusalem to the graduate school of theology." That's not bad. I've done that myself, but that's not where Paul said he received this. He didn't glean this from human teachers. He said, "I received this." He means, "God imparted by divine revelation these truths to me. Jesus died," verse 3, "he was buried, he was raised and he's appeared to many." I think one of the best ways to understand that simple Gospel truth is that that is the skeletal outline of the Gospel. It's

the skeletal outline. Jesus died. He was buried. I always like to pause and amplify this. I can still hear Dr. Gray Allison, my graduate school of theology, as he would say, "Be careful. Don't say Jesus died, Jesus died for our sins." The Gospel is not Jesus died. You can make that to mean just about anything, but when you put that phrase "for our sins," that clarifies everything. He didn't die just as a good example, he didn't die just as to be the emblem of a new start to the human race, he died because we're sinners. He died for our sins, was buried, and was raised again and had appeared to many.

So this is the skeletal outline of the Gospel or the good news, but let's be reminded that Gospel teaching and Gospel preaching or sometimes you can call it preaching the word or preaching the word of the cross all mean the same thing, these things are far more than just this skeleton. As we exegete the Scriptures and we go through the infinite treasury of God's truth about the Gospel, about the good news, what we're actually doing is we're putting muscles on and tendons on and ligaments on and the nerves in and we're adding the organs and the skin etc. etc. You're building on the skeleton of the Gospel, if you will.

As I said earlier, the Scripture is a treasury. It's a treasury that reveals the infinite wisdom and glories and goodness and wonders of God. You don't just need the Gospel when you're seven so that you can do some sort of hoop jump and get a free ticket into heaven. We do need to give the Gospel to seven-year-olds but you need the Gospel when you're 27 and 47 and 67 and 97 or 107. You still need to hear the Gospel. You still need to hear the treasure of all that it means and all that it's about. When we say, for example with Paul in verse 3, that Christ died for our sins, think about all that can be entailed in that. Think about all that we could discuss there. When he died for our sins, he was actually fulfilling the entire sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Every aspect of the great day of atonement, every aspect of the atoning lamb was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Every aspect of bringing guilt offerings and offerings for sin or sacrifices for sin, all of that is summed up to, all of that pointed to Jesus Christ. You could literally preach for hour upon hour upon hour of what that means, all the muscles and the tendons and the ligaments and the organs that you would add on to the simple skeletal statement, Jesus died for our sins. You could talk about the doctrine of justification because when he died, he went to the cross and became a substitution for us and also he satisfied the wrath of God, and in doing that for us when we believe on him, we are declared by the throne of God to be justified in the sight of God because the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to us the moment we believe.

So all of this is involved in the death of Jesus. You could preach for unknown hours on substitution, satisfaction, declaration or imputation, all of this is in the death of Jesus. We know when Jesus died that sin's power died. Sin's power has no effect on you as far as your eternal destiny. That's glorification. Sin's power is now wounded and has no final authority over you in daily life. That's sanctification. And then in sanctification you've got positional sanctification and you've got progressive sanctification all because Jesus died for your sins. Positionally, you are set apart and you're God's but at the same time you're still down here in this fallen humanity package and you struggle and you fall and you fail and you sin but not sin as to lose your final justification, but sin as far as walking in fullness of fellowship with God. And God forgives you. You have to come to him and

ask for that forgiveness and he forgives you but you keep progressing in sanctification. All that is possible only because Jesus died. When Jesus died, hell was defeated. The place of final holy retribution was satisfied in the sense that there's no reason for us to be placed in that place of eternal retribution against sin. That would be double jeopardy. If it was poured out on Jesus fully and satisfactorily, it can't be poured out on us.

All the doctrine of retribution and wrath and the doctrine of hell, that place of endless punishment for sin, all of that can be exhausted when you talk about Jesus died for our sins. Death was defeated. When Jesus went to the cross, he entered death's house and he didn't like death's house. He's kind of like that Gains couple on tv, they never find a house they like. They go in and renovate it completely. Well, that's what Jesus did to death's house, he goes in and completely renovates it but he did something very unique, he took the whole back wall out. So today when you die, you walk through the front door of death and immediately the Shekinah glory of God is welcoming you through that gaping hole in the back, so for you death is one quick step into the glory of God. Oh, he just rendered death powerless.

On and on we could go with this doctrine of how he has overcome death and he's been resurrected from the dead and we're going to be resurrected from the dead. Then all the weight and the depth of understanding he died for our sins; all the weight and depth of understanding the doctrine of sin; the depravity of man, that man is a law-breaker, he is a transgressor and that man is lawless; and sin includes the reality that man fails to reach the standard for which God made humankind, he fails to reach the glory of God. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We could exhaustively preach on that for hours and hours and hours. Are you seeing what I'm saying? The skeletal statement may be Jesus died for our sins but preaching the Gospel means you keep unfolding and unveiling and revealing and unpackaging the glory upon glory upon glory of what is involved in this good news, this Gospel. Some of you already feel like you've gotten a drink out of a fire hydrant since you came in here.

Well, who died for our sins? Jesus died for our sins. What about the person of Christ? He's wholly and fully God. We could preach on that for hours, days, weeks, months, years. He's wholly and fully man at the same time. He's 100% God as if he were not man at all, and 100% man as if he were not God at all. The theologians call him the God-man. Oh, the things we could preach and teach about the person of Jesus Christ, the one who died for our sins: his glory; his holiness; his obedience to the Father; that he's both prophet, priest and king. Oh, it's just endless. I hope I live to be a 150 so I can just keep preaching these things. We can't reach the bottom of it.

Now, what I'm saying this for is that you and I live in a day, a context of dumbed-down Gospel preaching. I mean, I've heard it since I started in the ministry, preachers get up, "Well, really all you need to know is simple Gospel and when you're 4, 5, 6, or 7, just know the simple Gospel, pray this prayer, you're done, and then our job as preachers from that time on is to make church environment so encouraging, so uplifting, so entertaining, so alluring that we can keep you coming for the next 50 years." Well, we're not doing that. That's wrong. There is a simple Gospel message, I know that but that's not

all the Gospel message. There's more than just that. We don't need a dumbed-down or just a simplified Gospel. We need to share the simple Gospel, sometimes that's all you've got time to share with someone, but we need to also get all of the Gospel and all of the truth and all of the treasures and all of the wonders and all of the glories that we possibly can mine out of the Scriptures. That's our job.

That's why I spend an enormous amount of my energy, I just had a pastor stay at our farm recently and he said, "You know, your message on the proper care and support of the preaching pastor at the conference changed my life and changed the life of my men. We're realizing that I can't keep burning the candles at both ends and unpack and preach with conviction and power what the people need to hear week-in and week-out because there are too many treasures here, there's too much here to leave it neglected. We need all of it."

But they'll say, "Well, just believe the simple Gospel and that's all that really matters," but that notion and it sounds so good and it sounds so pure. I remember the phrase, what was it, that you put the cookies on the lower shelf so the children can get them and what they really mean is you keep things so simple and really the goal of preaching is to really preach the same simple things over and over and over again, just keep being creative in the way you say it so that you keep people interested. Well, there's just too many different things to say to focus on one simple outline. We need to unpack all that is there. You don't try to get somebody saved by giving them the smallest amount of truth possible, you get someone saved by giving them all the truth you possibly can give to them and that's why when you study the Scriptures, especially when you get over into the epistles and you see the church, you know, things are chronological as Jesus ascended back up into heaven and then the apostles began to preach and people are converted and churches begin to be started all over the world, and the Apostle Paul and his associates basically scan all of the world and begin establishing pastors in these churches and setting up how church life is to function, how to work, and you look at these page after page after page that Paul writes to these churches and it's rich with doctrine and theology. Not just a simple two or three line statement, "Well, this is the Gospel, now let's get on to the other stuff." No, we continually need the depths.

People say, "Yeah, well, you're deep." No, I'm not deep, I'm just normal. It's just Bible preaching. I hear it all the time, "I've never heard anything like that," and I want to say, "Well, what are guys preaching out there? You mean to tell me I'm going to come up with clever stuff to tell you to amuse you when I've got this?" You do not need to leave here thinking that I'm clever or sharp or wise or creative, you need to leave here thinking, "God's wonderful. His Son is glorious beyond compare. The Gospel is marvelous." I may perish, I will perish, well not eternally but I may perish from you, but Jesus will not. God will never fail you. Pastors are just instruments for a season.

Here's some thoughts. Life's true pleasure is in God. That's why you're here tonight on Memorial Day weekend when it was flooding just a moment ago, because you are finding and striving to find full pleasure in God. You're not coming here to earn your salvation, you know better than that, but you know true pleasure is in him and we want to keep

working to overcome the addiction of the cocaine of temporal, hollow, lying, worldly pleasures and keep finding full pleasure in God. So since true pleasure is in God, I want all of him I can get. I like pleasure. I like pleasure. God gave you the capacity for pleasure, he just wants you to have the best pleasure, the pleasures of God.

Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the LORD," and that means there's a process to that, there's a continuum in that. It's not just a simple thing, just an outline thing, "Oh yea, this is God. He lives in heaven. He made everything. He sent his Son Jesus. That's about it." No, no, no, no, no. Delight yourself in all the multifaceted attributes, characteristics, wonders, glories, beauties and wisdom of who he is and what he has accomplished. In other words, when you go to a nice restaurant, don't just eat the appetizer and leave. Get it all. Get it all.

Occasionally, some nice family will give Pam and I a gift certificate to a really nice restaurant and my wife don't go anywhere but to really nice restaurants, you know, like Crystal and things like that, but we enjoy it. I really enjoy getting a good steak at a restaurant but I've never sat down and said, "Here we've got this gift certificate, \$100, whatever it is, and I'll tell you what, baby, we just need a simple maybe crab claw appetizer and we'll just leave right after that. How about that?" Nobody thinks that way, why think that way about God? I want to dig deep. I want to get all of it. God is the ultimate and infinite treasure and we want all of him that we can get. This is good news, that's what "Gospel" literally means. It's good news and if it's good news, I want all of it.

Have you ever had somebody come up to you and say, "Listen, you've got to sit down, I've got something to tell you. This is the best news you're ever gonna hear. This is unbelievable good news. There's 10 parts to it but you just only need the first one." I say, "No. Whoa, time out! I want all 10 of them." Look, we need some good news in this world, don't we? I mean, you want all the good news. Can't you just see, now I'm not picking on you ladies, I'm not belittling you but can't you just see two ladies and they've know each other a long time and they've shared their hearts and they've grown intimate over the years and there's a bond there and something wonderful, glorious, good is happening and one lady says to the other lady, "Oh, great things are happening but I'm only gonna tell you just a little bit of it." Oh, that won't work. They'll befriend you on Facebook or whatever y'all do. It's just not going to work. They want all of it, "Give me all of it." That's what we want to do in Gospel preaching. Verse by verse, phrase by phrase, word by word, then chapter after chapter, unveil for me the glory of it all. I want to drink in all the pleasures, all the goodness of this great God and this great Gospel. Can I get an amen on Memorial Day Sunday night?

The Bible commands us to love God with all of our mind. Love God with all of your mind. I'm to use all my mental capacity to progressively learn of God and all that he reveals of himself and his saving work through his Son for me in his word. Can you imagine a history teacher teaching their class and the history teacher says, "I just want you to know something, there are two Americans named George Washington and Abraham Lincoln and they're Americans and that's true and that's really all you need to know." What about the fact that they were Presidents? What about Gettysburg? What

about Valley Forge? What about the fact that they are probably our two greatest Presidents? What about their bravery? What about their faith? What about their character? What about some of their flaws and failures? There's so much more to know. So much more to know.

We have, I don't know if she's here tonight, I don't see her but she may be here hiding somewhere, but there is a senior adult lady that joined our church some time ago and she was new to our area and she said, "Pastor, I visited and visited and visited churches around the Shoals area," and there are some good brothers preaching the word, I know that, I'm not implying that at all, but she said, "Every Sunday, I would go home and I'd say, 'Where's the meat? Where's the meat?' Until I came here and I found the meat." Do you know what she's saying? She's saying, "Don't just give me that. Don't just give me a saltine cracker. I want the salad with the homemade French dressing, I want the baked potato and I want that really good sour cream and I want that real butter drizzled on it. I want the steak. I want a New York strip, bone-in, medium to medium-rare, maybe a little salt and pepper, just little spices on the top. I want it seared a little bit but I like that crunchy seared taste on the outside. I want it all. I'll skip on the wine." Don't need to go there. No reason to ruin your witness right after you've had a good meal, amen? Let's just skip on that part.

She said, "I wanted the meat." I can say this to you: you deserve the meat because you freed your pastor to go and get it and I thank you for that because do you know what? Even though I hope you've been helped by that, I've been helped by that. I've been renewed by all of that.

So as we embrace this Gospel, this good news, I'm circling the field, we're learning more and more and more and more and more of it and more and more and more about it. So we're embracing the good news and learning more and more of it. We're delighting in God and as we grow and hear more about him and more of him and more from him through his word, we're increasingly delighting in him. We're loving God with our minds and we're increasingly learning more of him and loving him even more. That's the pilgrimage we're all on. That's why Paul wrote to the church at Philippi and said, "He who begun this good work in you will keep on performing it, perfecting it until the day of Christ Jesus." You're going to keep learning until the end comes, at least the end of this temporal age.

Now let me give you two concluding thoughts and we're going to pray a closing prayer. Concluding thought 1: conversion is not what you did as much as it is about what he did. If it's what you did, it is a pretty simple short story because there ain't much to you. Amen? It's not that much about what you did, conversion is about what he did. Now if he did something, he's the Triune, holy, infinite God. You'll never exhaust him and he has revealed himself perfectly, not completely because you can't contain him in anything, but he has revealed himself perfectly in this word. So just remind yourself, "Since my conversion isn't really primarily about me, it's about him and what he did, then there is so much to learn about it."

Dive in deep. I've told you before, preaching the word of God is like every Sunday I go back into this infinite warehouse and in this warehouse is row after row after row as far as the eye can see, several stories high of treasures God has for his children. Every Sunday I go in there and I pull out two or three and I bring them in here and I open them up and unpack them and give them to you.

So concluding thought 1: remember conversion is not really about you or what you did, it's about him and we need to learn all of it we can. Secondly, conversion is not what happened to you but what's continuing to happen to you. The key word "continuing." There is a continuum. You didn't just get saved, that's true but it's terribly incomplete. You were saved and you are being saved and you are going to be saved. All of those are biblical truths. There is a continuum in conversion. As a matter of fact, the Scriptures bear out very clearly your progression in sanctification is your assurance of salvation. Like Dr. Rodgers used to say, "The faith that's faulty fizzles toward the finish, was faulty at the first." It's a continuum. It's not about what happened, conversion, salvation is about what's a continuum and continuing to happen. We continue to learn more of it and more of him. We continue to apprehend more of it and more of him. We continue to yield more fully to him. We continually are being more conformed to all he's trying to do and accomplish in our lives.

Wow, I've been, I'm not too far from 60. Some of you are really old, then. And I've been preaching for 37+ years. Do you know how many thousands of hours I've preached and studied? Like Bill Stafford used to say, I thought I'd be spiritual by now but I open the Bible, I'm rebuked again, I'm humbled again, I'm amazed again, I learn something new and God's bigger than he was before I opened it. This is a continuum. Continuum.

Well, those are some thoughts on the Gospel.