

The Resurrection is Good News – Hold Onto It!

I Corinthians 15:1-11

The Bible affirms both the goodness of the body, and the corruption of the body. Many of the sweet pleasures in life are physical. God has made us with the unique capacity for enjoyment. But learning how to submit our desires to our Covenant Lord and to love him more than the pleasures of this world is a life-long challenge. Our desires can lead us away from God. They can become the means by which we serve ourselves.

Because so many of our sins are connected to physical pleasures, many have come to the conclusion that life would be better without the body. They dream of an existence that is purely spiritual, without any body whatsoever.

But this is not the future that God has chosen for us. God wants us to love Him with all of our heart. And he wants to transform our bodies so that we will enjoy both spiritual and physical pleasure throughout all eternity.

What do you believe regarding the resurrection of your body?

Do you think much about your future bodily existence after death?

I know that there are many questions that remain unanswered. But is the reality that you will exist forever in a perfect body, unhindered by aging, or defects, or corrupt desires, a part of your faith? Do you believe in the resurrection of the body?

Most of us would immediately answer, “Of course I believe in the resurrection of the body.” But I think most of us would also admit that it is our present body that consumes most of our time and energy and focus. Who has time to dwell upon some future body anyway? But that is exactly what we should do: think more about our resurrected body.

As we direct our thoughts to life in our resurrected body, we will learn to see the goodness of the physical world, while not making an idol of it. We don’t actually know what has caused some of the Corinthians to question the bodily resurrection of believers.

It is possible that they could have been influenced by the teaching of the Sadducees. It is also possible that they could have been influenced by Greek philosophy. Some forms of Greek philosophy actually taught that the physical world was a corruption of the spiritual. So, redemption was breaking free from bodily existence – becoming entirely spiritual. It may have been that for some the whole concept of coming up out of the grave in a new body was just too crazy to entertain as a reality.

We just do not know what was going on in the minds of the Corinthians. What we do know is that some members of the church no longer believed in a future bodily resurrection.

We also know that those who rejected the resurrection did not see their rejection of this doctrine as a complete rejection of their faith in Jesus Christ. They wanted to continue being Christians, while rejecting this one doctrine.

And the sum of Paul’s argument in chapter 15 is that you cannot reject this one doctrine without losing the entirety of the Gospel message.

The simple fact is this: The resurrection of our body is an essential element of the Gospel message. Remove the doctrine of the resurrection of the body from our theology, and we have not only distorted the gospel message, we have destroyed it completely.

It is possible to leave the faith by living in unrepentant sin.
But it is also possible to leave the faith by denying certain doctrinal truths.

Paul will make a case for the necessity of believing the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. But, there are other doctrines that are essential to the Gospel.

The point is that the Gospel is more than simply believing in the love of God. There are objective truths that have been handed down to God's people through the Apostles, and now written on the pages of Scripture, which form the content of what we call "the Gospel".

Read I Corinthians 15:1-11.

1. You must hold fast to the doctrine of the resurrection.
 2. You have good reason to believe in the resurrection.
 3. From the resurrection flows true grace for living.
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1. You must hold fast to the doctrine of the resurrection.

Now I would remind you, brothers,
of the gospel

Literally, Paul writes that he would "make known" to them the gospel. He immediately tells them that he has already preached this gospel to them so what he is saying is certainly a reminder.

The translation "reminder" is fine, as long as you don't think that Paul is simply giving a friendly little reminder. What he is saying is of the utmost importance. In verse 3, he will speak of it as being of first importance.

And, as we go through the entirety of chapter 15, it does seem that Paul unfolding the truth of the resurrection in fuller ways.

For instance, in vv. 51-52, we learn that when the general resurrection occurs, those still alive on the earth will be transformed "in the twinkling of an eye."

As pastors, we don't really ever add to the Gospel message. But we do continually make known, the truths that are already there. This is what Paul is doing.

Paul is preaching the objective truth of the resurrection.
It is the responsibility of the Corinthians to hold fast to this truth.

... of the gospel

2

I preached to you,
which you received,
in which you stand,
and
by which you are being saved,
if you hold fast to the word I preached to you-

unless you believed in vain.

In verse 2, Paul drops the hammer on the Corinthians.

Paul had preached the Gospel message.

The Corinthians had received that Gospel.

The Corinthians were currently standing in that Gospel = continuing to believe it for themselves. And so, the Corinthians were currently in the process of being saved by this gospel.

And then the hammer falls...IF

IF you hold fast to the word I preached to you.

Paul, do you mean that if I quit believing in the resurrection of the body that I will no longer be "being saved"? Paul would respond, "That is exactly what I am saying."

Faith in the gospel message is not something you do once in your life. It is something that you continue believing in throughout the whole course of your life. And persevering in one's faith is absolutely necessary for our final salvation.

I recently went water skiing. It was great fun. I remembered enough to enjoy myself. One of the first lessons for any new skier is to let go of the rope if you fall. That may seem obvious, but I have watched skiers continue hanging onto the rope after falling. It is not a pretty sight. Eventually, they do let go, but it is only after drinking a lot of water.

In water skiing, there are times to let go.

But, when it comes to holding fast to the gospel message there are no times to let go.

The world thinks that believing in the resurrection is crazy.

The flesh whispers that you must live for the pleasures of the body now.

Sometimes, continuing to hold onto the gospel can feel like being drug through the water. But, instead of letting go, we must continue to hold on.

It is only by holding on that we have hope of being saved.

To let go is to doom ourselves to an eternal existence apart from God.

Brothers and sisters, hold fast to the gospel preached to you.

Don't let go of it. Your life depends upon it.

Paul then writes, "unless you believed in vain."

This phrase is difficult.

Paul seems to be saying that their initial belief in the gospel has been for nothing.

How has it been for nothing? Well, they have not continued believing.

This is true enough. A faith that begins but does not persevere is not true saving faith.

Remember Jesus' parable of the soils. Some plants sprung up, but then were choked out by the cares of life.

This could be Paul's meaning here. It is certainly a true doctrine. Theologians sometimes refer to it as a temporary faith. They believed for awhile but now it is looking like that initial faith has been in vain. The scary thought is that until temporary faith quits believing, it looks very much like saving faith.

But there is another way of understanding this phrase that fits the context better.

The Greek for “unless you believed in vain” can also be translated “unless you believed without just reason”. This translation places the emphasis, not on whether the faith itself was true or not, but rather on the reliability of object of the faith.

Put in other words, “Hang on tight to the gospel message, unless, of course, that message was not based on solid facts to begin with.” This is the way the New Living Translation takes Paul’s meaning.

NLT 1 Corinthians 15:2 It is this Good News that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you -- unless, of course, you believed something that was never true in the first place.

I again stress that I do believe in the concept of temporary faith. I am not denying that it is valid. But in this context, I think the second option is the better.

If you look again at vv. 3-9, Paul is making a case that the evidence for the bodily resurrection is solid because the evidence for the bodily resurrection of Jesus is solid. Instead of worrying whether or not your faith is a vain faith, Paul reinforces to the Corinthians that there is good reason to believe in the resurrection.

2. You have good reason to believe in the resurrection.

The doctrine of the bodily resurrection of Christians is grounded in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. And the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is believed with good reason.

- 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received:
that Christ died for our sins
in accordance with the Scriptures,
4 that he was buried,
that he was raised on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures,

The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is a well-attested historical event.

But before Paul goes into the many eye witness testimonies of the resurrected Jesus, he begins with explaining that the death and resurrection of the Messiah were predicted by Scripture.

They were not events that were unexpected. The OT predicted them. And if the OT predicted them, then we should accept them as reliable.

The OT predicted that the Christ would die “for” our sins.

Isaiah 53:5-6 ⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. ⁶ 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.

Isaiah 53:8-9 ⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for

the transgression of my people? ⁹ And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Does your heart leap as you hear those words? Do you recognize in them your only hope in life and death? Jesus had to die in your place in order for you to experience forgiveness and cleansing from sin. You are not condemned to an eternal death because Jesus was willing to endure that death on your behalf.

There is no other love so wonderful. If you have never really believed in his death for your own salvation, do not put it off any longer. Look to Jesus and he will save you. It is that simple. And if you already have believed in Jesus, continue to hold onto him. Don't let go. But as important as believing in the death of Jesus is to the Gospel, we must also believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

This too was predicted in the OT.

Psalm 16:9-11 ⁹ Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being¹ rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. ¹⁰ For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.¹ ¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Some of those pleasures are physical pleasures. They are pleasures that have not been corrupted by sin. And they are pleasures that have not been limited by the curse.

The resurrection filled the mind of the psalmist.

It should be a part of our hope as well. Paul also mentions that the Christ will be raised on the third day. There are not many OT references to the 3rd Day.

Hosea 6:1-2 "Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. ² After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.

And of course the foreshadow of Jonah being three days in the belly of the fish.

Why are we on good ground believing in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus?

First, because the OT Scriptures expected it.

Second, because of reliable eyewitness testimonies.

The Greek word translated appeared actually means "was seen by". I like that so I will read these verses inserting "was seen by" in the place of appeared.

5 and
 that Jesus was seen by Cephas,
 then by the twelve.

6 Then he was seen by more than five hundred brothers at one time,
 most of whom are still alive,
 though some have fallen asleep.

7 Then he was seen by James,
 then by all the apostles.
8 Last of all, as by one untimely born,
 he was seen by me.
9 For I am the least of the apostles,
 unworthy to be called an apostle,
 because I persecuted the church of God.

Why should we accept these eye-witness testimonies?

Why should we see them as reliable?

- a. There are multiple witnesses in multiple places.
 - The witnesses could be cross examined.
 - More than 500, many of whom are still alive.
 - Some may have even lived in Corinth.
- b. They were known and trustworthy individuals.
 - They were willing to make sacrifices for the truthfulness of their testimony.
 - Cephas is the Aramaic name for Peter.
- c. And these witnesses include those who denied Jesus was the Christ before the resurrection.
 - James = Jesus' half-brother.

John 7:5 ⁵ For not even his brothers believed in him.

- Paul's testimony is that of one of a former enemy of the Gospel.

What can explain the transformation of the one who had previously persecuted the Church?

Unbelievers will often accept the death of Jesus, and the burial of Jesus.

But what they will not accept is that Jesus rose from the dead, never to die again.

The truth of the matter is that the Gospel is anchored in historical events and passed down by reliable eye-witness testimony.

The early Christians did not die simply because they believed that Jesus died. Everyone dies. The early Christians were willing to suffer and die because they were holding onto the believe that Jesus had risen from the dead and was alive, now and forevermore.

Is it possible that one reason for the weakness of the Church today is that we no longer believe, for all practical purposes, in the resurrection of the body?

Christian, you have good reason to believe in the resurrection – hold onto it.

3.. From the resurrection flows true grace for living.

The death of Jesus satisfies the justice of God.

But it does not take power to die. In fact, death is the loss of power.

But it does take power to rise from the dead. A lot of power. And it is the power that was exerted in raising Jesus from the dead that flows down from him to his people.

Grace can have several applications in the Christian faith. Grace always means unmerited.

And it always means God's favor towards someone. But in this context, grace means "power for living." Paul is no longer a persecutor of the Church, but instead lives his life proclaiming the message of the Gospel.

The only true cause of this transformation in Paul is the grace that comes from the hand of God. Paul does not attribute this change to himself. All of the credit belongs to God.

¹⁰ But
by the grace of God I am what I am,

Had God's grace not been working, Paul would have gone right on persecuting the Church. The change in Paul is entirely due to the powerful working of grace.

Romans 8:11 ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

The resurrection took lots of power.

The power of the resurrection is the only sufficient source to give us life and overcome our sin.

By the grace of God, I am what I am.

Christians are not yet perfect. We have not yet experienced the fullness of that power.

Our sin continues to tenaciously cling to us.

But it is no match for the power exerted in the resurrection!

I heard this past week a great challenge:

You believe in your sin. But do you believe in the power of the resurrection?

Paul believed in the resurrection. And he believed that it was from the resurrection that grace was flowing to him.

By the grace of God, I am what I am.

"Christian humility does not consist in denying what there is of good in us; but in an abiding sense of ill-desert, and in the consciousness that what we have of good is due to the grace of God." Hodge

And faith continues to believe that the grace already given is not all there is.

Faith believes that there is more grace to be had.

And faith believe that God's grace will never fail.

Faith continues to hold onto Jesus, because the grace that Jesus provides is not empty.

and

his grace toward me was not in vain.

his grace that is to me

h` ca,rij auvtou/ h` eivj evme.

did not come to be (become) empty, (without power, without effect)

ouv kenh. evgenh,qh(

“The Greek expression kene,... signifies, “without effect,” that is, “without reaching its goal.”
Kistemaker

This is not the same word that was used in verse 2.

When God pours out saving grace into a human heart, he as a very specific purpose in mind: namely to save them and to have them bear fruit as his witnesses. What Paul is testifying to is that he has indeed become a fruitful witness for God. The grace of God was not short-circuited in me. It has had a good effect.

That is why Paul can say:

On the contrary,

Not in contrast with grace, but in contrast with the other Apostles.

I worked harder than any of them,

though it was not I,

but

the grace of God that is with me.

Sovereign grace, effectual grace, saving grace is not in opposition to human effort. It is grace that drives effort. Without grace there is no effort.

Paul does not mind admitting that he has worked hard, even harder than the other Apostles. But he does have a problem with thinking that he has any right to boast above anyone.

All the glory goes to the grace of God alone.

Paul is so balanced.

Philippians 3:8-14 ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith - ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Beautiful words of life!

Words that are grounded in the death of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Paul is not a defeatist. Woe is me. I am a sinner and this all I will ever be.

But Paul is not all victory either. I have already reached perfection in this life.

No, he strikes the right balance. I am not yet perfect. But I am pressing on.

I am pressing on because I believe that the resurrected Jesus has taken hold of me.

Brothers and sisters, I do not know where you are today. You may be tangibly experiencing the grace of God towards you. Or you may be wondering if that grace of God has been in vain in your case.

I am here to tell you that the grace of God in Jesus Christ is never in vain.

Continue to hold on.

You may feel like you are being drug through the water.

Don't let go. Grace will be given you to rise up out of your sin.

And fullness of grace will be given you at the resurrection.

And you will experience life as you have never imagined.

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