

09/19/10

Focusing on the Gospel -- 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

- How many of you would say that, before you buy something significant, or maybe even insignificant, that you check out the product or the company on-line?...you read customer reviews?
 - in other words, you want to know what other people are saying and you examine the testimonials or the evidence before making your decision?...
 - if the answer to that for you is yes, you are part of a growing trend in our culture...

- here's a few sentences from an article entitled:

Amazon: Turning Consumer Opinions into Gold

When Amazon.com first began letting customers post reviews of products in 1995, many people thought the Internet retailer had lost its marbles. Letting consumers rant about products in public was a recipe for retail suicide, critics thought. Now, almost 15 years later, customer reviews are as common as hyperlinks, and a retail Web site that does not have feedback loops is considered passé or irrelevant. In fact, more than 5 million consumers have posted tens of millions of reviews on Amazon.com, says the Seattle company.

Amazon's review program reflects a new reality for the way consumers shop in the Digital Age: The Internet has become the world's greatest research tool, and consumers hardly buy anything anymore without first getting the skinny online. Some 70% of Americans say they consult product reviews or consumer ratings before making a purchase, according to an October 2008 survey by Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates, a research and consulting firm. Amazon has played a central role in the change in consumer behavior by being the first successful Web retailer to embrace consumers' views. "What we try to spend our time on is harnessing customer passion," says Russell Dicker, Amazon.com's senior manager of community.

- one of the sentences that ought to stand out to us is the one that says..."consumers hardly buy anything anymore without first getting the skinny online."
- and that's one of the great things about the internet—you can find out all kinds of information about what other people have already experienced...
- it's the power and reliability of an eyewitness...of someone who has already been there ahead of you...
- now let me ask you this – how many individuals would have to tell you the same thing before you would say – you know, I'm convinced now that that's true...
- let's say you're going to buy a car, and you start talking to other people who already have one...how many would have to say the same thing, good or bad, before you would say – that's probably true?...
- what if 2 people said the same thing?...would that be enough?...
- what about 10?...what about 100?...what if 500 people told you the exact same thing about something...
 - here's what I saw...here's what I experienced...
 - how many would it take before you would say...that's got to be right...
- now let me ask you this...

- when it comes to what you believe about the things that matter most...
 - about your eternal destiny...about what you believe about God...about what you're trusting for what happens after you die...
 - can you Google anyone on the internet for advice?...
 - does eyewitness testimony have anything to do with it?...
 - and if it did, what would the implications of that be to the sincerity of your belief and the way you chose to walk out that belief each and every day?...
- let me invite you to open your Bible now to 1 Corinthians chapter 15...page 138 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- our theme this year has been **Taking the Next Step...with Joy**
 - this is just a verse by verse exposition of the book of 1 Corinthians...
 - this morning we're entering chapter 15...which is the great resurrection chapter in the Bible...
 - now, I realize that you might say – well, PV, if you were trying to time that in a way that this portion of the study corresponded to Easter...you mis-figured...
 - I am aware of that...and that's on purpose...
 - of course we love talking about the resurrection at Easter time...it is the most important date on the calendar for a follower of Christ...no question about that...
 - but in the church, there is a sense in which every Sunday is resurrection Sunday...
 - it would be very unusual for a Lord's Day to go by here without us mentioning this concept in some way, shape, or form...
- and more to the point...for a Christian, it is a subject for every day...literally...
 - so maybe there is a widow who was missing her spouse this week...loneliness is real, isn't it...and there is nothing wrong with being open and honest about how much you might miss someone...
 - but then that person may have reminded herself (or, himself) of the resurrection...and be encouraged that some day, and maybe some day soon...she will see her loved one again in eternity because Jesus conquered death and the grave...
 - and that may not have completely removed the pain---but it certainly mitigated it...we sorrow, but not as those who have no hope...for that person it was Resurrection Sunday on Tuesday...
 - or maybe there was a teenager who was struggling with some sort of temptation and almost gave in...but then thought – I have died to sin, and I have been resurrected to a new way of living...I don't have to fall for that again...I'm free...
 - or a parent who is growing weary because he/she is not seeing the changes they would like to see in their child...and it's hard to continue to teach, and continue to love, and continue to be patient...
 - but because Jesus is alive, He offers us the strength and the ability to do hard things...
- I'm saying – it's good to study the resurrection in September...or any month for that matter...
 - but let's face it – not only is this doctrine one of the most important truths to believe...it's also one of most difficult to believe...
 - that Jesus Christ literally arose from the dead...
 - do you know what would be really great?...if we could go on-line and talk to some people who actually witnessed what occurred...
 - that's what 1 Corinthians 15 is all about...

- read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11...
- we're talking this morning about **Focusing on the Gospel**...and with the time we have remaining, let's think about **4 kinds of evidence that Jesus is alive**.

I. The Testimony of the Church

- you know, Paul has dealt with a lot of different problems with this group of people...
- without a doubt, this is one of the most immature audiences that Paul addresses in all of his letters...
- but the fact that he takes the amount of time that he does to talk about these issues is at least in one sense a compliment...
 - he really believes they can get to a better place or he wouldn't have taken the time to lay all of this on the table...
 - and now we start to see why...he really believes...

A. They were part of the family.

- he calls them his...**v. 1 – brethren**
- he's not mad at them or disgusted or fed up...
- they are his brothers and sisters in Christ...

B. They had received the gospel.

- **v. 1 - ...the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received...**
- now that raises a very important point that every person here needs to understand...
- sometimes I'll talk to someone who says something like, "I've always been a Christian..." or "I was raised a Christian"...as if it's just always been that way...
- that is not what the Scripture teaches...
 - here's a couple of clear verses about that...
 - **Romans 3:23 - for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**
 - we were all born on the wrong side of the tracks...and that doesn't mean that you or I were as bad as we could possibly be...
 - but because God is holy...even one sin would separate us from Him...that's why we would read a verse like...
 - **Isaiah 59:2 - But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God...(That's true of all of us...)**
 - the Bible refers to that condition as being spiritually dead...
 - **Romans 6:23 - For the wages of sin is death...**
 - that is why life apart from Christ seems so empty or unfulfilling...we're dead men walking...and we need someone who is willing and able to pay for our sin and take charge of our lives...
 - that is why the other half of this verse is so crucial...
 - **Romans 6:23 - For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**
 - but see, that gift has to be received...a person has to have a definite time in his/her life where they admit their sin, and repent (turn around) and then receive the good news of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ as their only hope of being reconciled to God...
 - that's what John meant when he said... **John 1:11-12 - He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,**

- and Paul is saying – that's what happened to you...and the fact that it is genuine is proven on the part of many because...

C. They were continuing to stand.

v. 1 - ...which also you received, in which also you stand.

- it's not some decision you half-heartedly made but didn't really believe...
- at least, for many in this church...it was the real thing...
- **1 Corinthians 15:2 - by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.**

- now, there's consolation there, but there's also a warning, isn't there?...
- let's take it in reverse order...what's the warning?...
 - there's a kind of "belief" that is not the real thing...that's the only conclusion you can draw from that passage...
 - and we have plenty of other Scripture to back that up...
 - **James 2:19 - You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.**
 - it's possible to believe a set of facts without embracing them as your personal faith and hope...(cf. believing in communism...)
 - that's why James said in the previous verses... **James 2:14-17 - What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself.**
 - Jesus said it this way -- **Matthew 7:21-23 – "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'**
 - that's why Peter said... **2 Peter 1:10 - Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you...**
- and one of the questions for everyone here is this – is there evidence that you really have believed the gospel?... **2 Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.**
- has that change occurred?...is it obvious that you are standing in the gospel?...that you are holding fast to the Word that was preached to you?...
- see, this is something you can know for sure... **1 John 5:13 - These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.**
- but I repeat my question – is there evidence that you have really believed the gospel?...
- and I realize someone might say – but PV, you're going to make some people who genuinely know the Lord question/doubt their salvation – that's not my intent...but I would rather do that, then have a bunch of men and women coming to this church who aren't really believers but are never given any solid reasons to

question it...if you really believe the gospel, you really believe that Jesus is alive...it will impact the way you live every day...

- now let's go back to the main point...Paul could say with joy for many of the Corinthians that that was true of them...
- and the way they were living, their testimony, was part of the evidence that Jesus truly was alive...
- that's why it's so great to read a passage like this... **1 Corinthians 6:9-11 - Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; either fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.**
- and that change in their life, the fact that they were "standing in the gospel" and "holding fast the Word which had been preached to them" was part of the evidence that Jesus was alive...
- and one of the questions for us is – as men and women in this community goggle us, do they see evidence that would cause them to conclude...it's obvious that Jesus is alive...

II. The Testimony of the Scriptures.

- what we read about in verses 3-4 can be of tremendous help to us...because it reminds us that the resurrection is a historical fact that was promised and prophesied hundreds of years before it occurred...
- many people refer to this passage as...

A. The gospel in a nutshell.

- **1 Corinthians 15:3-4 - For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,**
- it doesn't get any clearer than that...
- but one of the key phrases is emphasized twice, isn't it..."according to the Scriptures..."
- meaning, one of the strongest reasons to believe the gospel is the fact that God foretold these events hundreds of years in advance...
- think about how unbelievable that is...
- if I had told you 5 years ago that we would be facing the economic difficulties we're currently experiencing in our country and our world, you would have looked at me like I had just come from the moon...and that's 5 years...
 - what about someone who could predict the future 50 years in advance...or 500 years...

- let me ask you this – does the fact that the Bible is so incredibly reliable impact the way you live for God every day?...
- does it impact the way you tell others about Him?

B. Illustrated in the ministry of Christ.

- do you remember this story...right after the resurrection of Christ?...
- **Luke 24:13-24 - And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place. While**

they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and *began* traveling with them.

But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. And He said to them, “What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?” And they stood still, looking sad. One of *them*, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, “Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?” And He said to them, “What things?” And they said to Him, “The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. “But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. “But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. “Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see.”

- what happened next?...

- **Luke 24:25-27** - And He said to them, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

- is there anyone here who would say...you know, I would like it if Jesus would say I was foolish and slow of heart because I wouldn't believe what He said in the Scriptures?...

- but the other side of that is – there's another great reason to believe in the truth of the resurrection...because it is rooted in the eternal truth of God's Word...

C. Illustrated in the ministry of Peter.

- that's why (for example), when Peter finally believed that Jesus was alive...we see him preaching on the day of Pentecost...and what's the message about?...the resurrection...

- and you have to believe he was thinking back in part to Matthew 16...when he made that great profession that Jesus was the Christ...

- then Jesus said – blessed are you...flesh and blood has not revealed...I will build my church...

- then Jesus explained what would have to have to happen so the church could be built...

- Matthew 16:21 - From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

- what did Peter think of that?...(not so Lord...)

- but after the death, burial and resurrection...after the denials and the forgiveness he received at the seashore...his message was all about the resurrection...

- **Acts 2:23-32** - this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. “But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. “For David says of Him, ‘I SAW THE LORD ALWAYS IN MY PRESENCE; FOR HE IS AT MY RIGHT HAND, SO THAT I

WILL NOT BE SHAKEN. ‘THEREFORE MY HEART WAS GLAD AND MY TONGUE EXULTED; MOREOVER MY FLESH ALSO WILL LIVE IN HOPE; BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES, NOR ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY. ‘YOU HAVE MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE; YOU WILL MAKE ME FULL OF GLADNESS WITH YOUR PRESENCE.’ “Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. “And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT *one* OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. “This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.

- see, what did Peter just do?...
- he joyfully proclaimed the resurrection because it was rooted in OT Scripture...
- that’s why he later said...**2 Peter 1:16-21 - For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased”— and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. So we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.**
- so when someone asks you---how could you possibly believe in the truth of the resurrection...the best response is, how could you possibly not believe it?...you have to ignore clearly revealed Scripture not to be impacted by this message...
- and you can go on to say – by the way...that’s also why I try to live by everything I learn in the Word of God...
 - why am I trying to be this kind of husband?...because it’s according to the Scripture...
 - why do I handle money the way I do...because it’s according to the Scripture...

- now, what do we see in verses 5-7?...

III. The Testimony of the Eyewitnesses.

A. To Peter

- v. 5 – then he appeared to Cephas

B. To the 12 disciples

- v. 5 – then to the twelve

C. To more than 500 brethren at one time

- 1 Corinthians 15:6 - After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep;

D. To James and then all the apostles.

- 1 Corinthians 15:7 - then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles;

- now please notice carefully the phrase at the end of verse 6 – “most of whom remain unto now”...what does that mean?...
- it means – most of them are still alive—just go ask them...
- now, let’s take that all the way back to the way we started this morning...
- when you’re reading those product reviews, how many of them does it take before you would say...OK, I got it...you’ve convinced me...
- have you ever had to read 500 of them?...

- and think about the power in our community of an army of men and women who act like they really believe that Jesus is alive...

IV. The Testimony of Paul Himself

A. A man “untimely born” – v. 8

- **ektroma – ordinarily referred to an abortion, miscarriage, or premature birth—a life unable to sustain itself (MacArthur)**
- **you might be here and say – well, my problem is my past...my upbringing was so dysfunctional, that there is no way I can live in a way that the resurrection is truly transforming me...**
- **that excuse dies in verse 11...**

B. One who persecuted the church – v. 9

C. One who is a product of the grace of God – v. 10