

## 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

### “The Gospel”

“Top 10 most important chapters of the Bible.” Is such a list even conceivable? How do you place the precepts/principles of scripture into a category of “greater/lesser” importance when the fact is, **“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”<sup>1</sup>** There’s no such thing as an “irrelevant” section of scripture. Because even if a particular portion’s *interpretation* may not belong to us (i.e. the Mosaic law that was given to ancient Israel under the old covenant). We’re always going to be able to mine *application* that *is relevant* to us. – Having said that, if you were to *formulate* such a list, I just don’t see how 1 Cor 15 couldn’t be on it.

It’s here that Paul systematically defines the fundamental/foundational elements of the gospel by which we are saved. He speaks at length on both the historical reality & absolute certainty of the resurrection of J.C. & what that means (necessarily) for you & me personally (as believers). It’s here that we have the fullest explanation in all of scripture of the resurrection body that we will inherit & the living hope that we all possess...

### Vs 1-2

When we read Vs 3-4 we’ll get the *content* of the gospel. For now, Paul focuses our attention upon the *benefit* of the gospel if we will *receive* it, *stand in* it & *hold fast* to it.

**& Though I have no doubt the vast majority of you know the definition of the word “gospel”, in order to remove any ambiguity or any uncertainty, allow me to reiterate it for you, the word “gospel” simply means, “Good news”. – In fact, in ancient times, the word “gospel” wasn’t at all limited to the scope of what Jesus accomplished for us through His death/resurrection. It could describe *any* good news. You might come home from work w/some “gospel” & inform your wife that you got a raise or some kind of promotion!**

However, over the years, Christians kind of hijacked the word because there is no *greater* news than the fact that we can be saved from the penalty, the power & eventually the very presence of our sin because of what Jesus did for us upon the cross! – Is there any *better* news? It’s no wonder that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to quote from the book of Isaiah as he wrote to the Romans, **“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!”<sup>2</sup>** How that we’ve all sinned & fall short of the glory of God. But the punishment we deserve was poured out *upon* Jesus, was paid for *by* Jesus...

<sup>1</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Mt 4:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>2</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Ro 10:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& Through faith in *Him* we are delivered from the heavy hand of God's just wrath/condemnation & are imputed (or accredited) w/Christ's righteousness & freely given the gift of everlasting life, being robed (if you will) w/salvation... For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

So Paul says, "I want to reiterate to you (declare to you), the gospel (good news) which I preached (proclaimed/brought) to you..." But what I want *you* to notice is that if the gospel is to be of any real benefit to you, 3 things need to happen. You need to #1 Receive it, #2 Stand in it, & #3 Hold fast to it... unless you believed in vain (to no avail).

1<sup>st</sup> of all (Paul says) that the Corinthian Christians *received* the gospel. What does it mean to "receive" the gospel? It means to "welcome" the message, to "take in" & embrace the message. To *receive* it is to truly *believe* it. Not just in your head (academically or historically), in your heart. As Paul told the Romans, "*For with the heart one believes unto righteousness,*"<sup>3</sup> If the word of God, (the gospel of J.C.) is to effectively work in us, we *must* receive it... When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians he said, "*For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."*<sup>4</sup>

The benefit of the gospel is found (1<sup>st</sup> of all) in *receiving* it. The Corinthians did that. & Not only did they receive it, but they also *stood in* it. So, #1 We're to *receive* the gospel. #2 We're to *stand in* the gospel.

Listen, if the word "received" takes care of an action in the past, than "in which you stand" covers what's happening in the present. — Despite all the problems that Paul was dealing with in the Corinthian congregation (divisions, carnality, immorality, weird spirituality) they had these 2 commendable things going for them. #1 They received the gospel & #2 they were standing *in* the gospel.

When you read Paul's letter to the *Galatians*, you discover that they were quickly being moved away from the gospel to *another* gospel, which in fact was *not a gospel at all!*

Such was not the case in Corinth. They had *received* the gospel. Were *standing in* the gospel (that is being true to the message of the gospel). Their *past* relationship to the gospel was good, their *present* relationship to the gospel was good... But the race wasn't over. Paul says, "You have to continue to 'hold fast' that word... unless you believed in vain."

<sup>3</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ro 10:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>4</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Th 2:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Listen, when it comes to my walk/relationship w/Christ. It's not limited to what I've done in the past or even how I'm maintaining in the present. I've got to continue to do well (that is hold fast to the gospel) in the future.

As we point out from time to time around here. Jesus never said, "Well, begun" to His servants. He said what? "Well *done*, good & faithful servant". We have to finish well. Having begun in the Spirit we're not going to be made perfect by the flesh. We have to continue to live & walk (that is maintain our relationship w/the Lord) by faith.

Listen, there are all kinds of things out there (in this world) that are competing for that position to sit upon the throne of your heart. Or that want to lead you off into religious endeavors & legalistic approaches to God. We start getting the focus off what God has done & start thinking it's about what we do (or don't do).

& Honestly, this "hold fast" principle can (to me) be one of the most subtle struggles of the committed Christian. Things have gone well in the past, you're doing great today (not to say there weren't times of temptation or seasons of struggle, but in the big picture, you're still trusting *in* the Lord, in love w/the Lord, things are good). The problem that presents itself is the future. We can begin to drift, or gravitate toward sin, or just allow a relationship w/Jesus to become routine. Ministry becomes mechanical & before we know it, we've left our 1<sup>st</sup> love. As the author of Hebrews wrote, "*Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.*"<sup>5</sup> Perhaps still going through the motions, but no real emotion or inward *devotion* to God. We have to be intentional about guarding our relationship w/Christ.

"Unless you believed in vain..." (Or to no avail, to no eternal gain). In other words, it doesn't really matter that you "used to be a believer", or that when you were young you were really on fire for Jesus if you've abandoned all that today... We're to "hold fast" that word of the gospel... Leave 1 Cor, turn to Ezekiel 18. Vs 20-24

Now: I realize there are those who are of a certain theological persuasion that if someone walks away, they were never saved to begin with. & Perhaps you have a greater understanding of such matters than I do (I don't claim to have it all figured out). Nor am I going to debate the matter. I'm just saying, the command of scripture is to "hold fast", be careful to maintain a relationship w/God that's based upon grace through faith. Jn 15. Abide in Christ...

<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Heb 2:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Salvation by grace through faith is the *benefit* of receiving, standing in & keeping hold on the truth of the gospel... Now that the benefit is clear, Paul moves to the content.

### Vs 3-4

This is what I refer to as “historical facts, prophetically foretold”. What that means (as we’re going to see) is that the death/resurrection of Jesus wasn’t an accident, or something that God had to adopt on the fly as things went terribly & tragically wrong. But rather it was part of God’s plan from eternity past, put in place before the world began.

Ladies and Gentlemen: the gospel isn’t a philosophy, an ideology, good advice or a motivational speech. It’s not a “once upon a time/happily ever after” kind of story tale. It’s an event that took place in history that contains the power to change the eternal destiny of all humanity!

That’s why Paul reminds them, “For I delivered to you 1<sup>st</sup> of all.” He says, “When I rolled up in Corinth my very 1<sup>st</sup> order of business wasn’t to socialize, mix & mingle or entertain, I delivered to *you* that which had been entrusted to *me.*” The phrase, “First of all” speaks of the priority of importance. The message of the Gospel is the most important information that we could ever deliver, ever proclaim or make known.

Listen, I understand that mentality that wants to develop a relationship & then share the gospel. But that’s not what the apostles did. When they entered a town, they had a message to deliver & didn’t wait till they made friends to do it.

What was the message? Paul says, “It wasn’t something I made up, it didn’t originate w/me, nor did I receive it from man.” Paul received the message of the gospel from Christ Himself (Gal 1:11-12)! But family, this is an important point. It’s never my desire to bring anything new to you. Perhaps you’ve heard the phrase, “If it’s new it’s not true & if it’s true it’s not new.” Pastors aren’t inventors of new/exciting doctrines, we’re repeaters who reiterate over & over again the message we’ve received...

& The message we’ve received is one based *not* upon opinions or “this view or that” (“Well that’s your view, this is mine.”) It’s not a matter of view, it’s a matter of facts. What are the facts of the case?

Fact #1 Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. The death of J.C. (the Holy One of God, the Son of God) is the center of the gospel. *Why? Because of the reason for which He died. It wasn’t because of any wrong in Him, it was for the sin that’s intrinsic w/in us. The gospel isn’t about something you need to do. It’s about what Jesus has done for you. You see, sin presents a problem. It separates us from God...*

& The bible declares, *"For the wages of sin is death,"*<sup>6</sup> & Again, *"For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul."*<sup>7</sup> Of course, the problem is that it's impossible for sinful man to atone for sinful man. That's like trying to clean your carpet by throwing dirt all over it. It doesn't help anything. & Since all have sinned & fall short of the glory of God, that creates a dilemma for us. There's nothing we can do to atone for our sin.

So, God solves the sin dilemma in becoming a Man (in the Person of J.C.). Being fully human He can stand in the gap on our behalf. Being fully God, He's w/out sin, perfectly holy & righteous. & Through the shedding of His blood atonement is made for our souls... You see if by 1 man (Adam) sin can enter the world, than through 1 Man (Christ) the sin of the world can be atoned for.

Somehow, & in some way as Christ was hanging upon that cross, an awesome spiritual transaction took place. God the Father laid upon Him the iniquity, the sin/guilt of us all & He bore the wrath that we so deserve. & He bore it in Himself perfectly, totally satisfying the righteous wrath of God in our place. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor Paul put in like this, *"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*<sup>8</sup> Christ died for our sins... "according to the Scriptures." Again, it wasn't plan B, the crucifixion didn't take God by surprise. It was prophesied centuries in advance.

Isaiah 53 speaks of how He has borne *our* griefs, carried *our* sorrows. *"... He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 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."*<sup>9</sup> Jesus didn't die for a political cause, or as an enemy of the state. Jesus died for our sins.

Fact #2, He was buried. Why is this detail important? Because it confirms His death. You don't bury someone unless they're dead. Jesus didn't just disappear. They had His body, they wrapped it in grave cloths, they carried Him to a tomb & they buried Him... Again, this was according to Scripture, *"And they made His grave with the wicked—But with the rich at His death,"*<sup>10</sup> (I should also say that there are more scriptures that testify to these things than what I'm sharing w/you. But I limit what I share for time's sake.)

<sup>6</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ro 6:23). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>7</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Le 17:11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>8</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (2 Co 5:21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>9</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Is 53:5-6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>10</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Is 53:9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Fact # 3, He rose again the 3<sup>rd</sup> day according to the Scriptures. Family, I can't stress it strongly enough. The resurrection of J.C. is an integral, indivisible, vital element of the Gospel message. For many reasons, one of which being that a dead Savior can't save anybody! Another being that it bears witness to the sinless life of Christ, assuring that He was the perfect sacrifice. (If the wages of sin is death & Jesus Himself had sin in His life, He couldn't conquer death. But if He's sinless, it's impossible that death should hold Him down, the resurrection would be inevitable.) Another, being that this is how He verifies that God the Father did indeed accept His sacrifice as sufficient to atone (or pay for) the sins of the world! Perhaps you've heard something along the lines of, "If the death of Jesus was the payment for sins, than the resurrection of Jesus is the receipt of payment in full." The resurrection shouts, "Paid in full! Payment received; debt abolished!"

(We could also point out that the resurrection underscores Jesus' credibility. Showing He's not some liar or lunatic. He said on multiple occasions that He would be crucified & on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, rise again. If He didn't, He'd be instantly dismissed as insane. (That's the primary reason the religiously leaders had His tomb guarded! To prevent any kind of tampering with His body or false allegations of a resurrection).

But it's fascinating to realize that even the *resurrection* of Jesus was foretold in scripture. Ps 16:10, "For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption."<sup>11</sup> Ps 2:7 (you can look it up) it speaks of being begotten, not from the womb, but from the tomb (Acts 13:33)!

As for the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, there are a number of pictures of that as well. Ab traveled 3 days after receiving word from God to sacrifice his only begotten son Isaac. During that time he reckoned dead in Ab's sight. But on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day he received him back alive. Jesus pointed to the 3 days/nights of Jonah in the belly of the great fish as a picture of Him being 3 days/nights in the heart of the earth. God's plan of the death/resurrection of J.C. for the sins of the world was foretold prophetically & has been shown historically...

**Vs 5-8**

Fact #4? Eyewitnesses to the resurrected Christ. This is the final piece of evidence to the case Paul is building that Jesus was raised to life bodily. He wasn't a phantom, people weren't hallucinating, Jesus had risen from the dead.

& We love the fact that after appearing to the women, He appeared to Peter 1<sup>st</sup>. One might think that He'd have appeared to Peter last, if at all! Afterall, Peter had denied Him... 3x's!

<sup>11</sup> *The New King James Version*, (1982). [Ps 16:10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But this is the love of our Lord. He would restore Peter publicly, but 1<sup>st</sup> He met w/him, restored him privately.

Then He was seen by the 12. Obviously Judas was dead & we know that Thomas was absent at that 1<sup>st</sup> meeting, “the 12” is simply a figurative term for Jesus’ inner circle of original disciples.

After that He was seen by over 500 eyewitnesses at one time! (Probably alluding to the meeting Jesus had in Matt 28, addressing all of His disciples in what we call the great commission).

Listen, how do you know that Julius Caesar ever lived? People wrote about him (assuming they didn’t make it up) & there were eyewitnesses to him. You trust the testimony (even in a court of law) of eyewitnesses. If you have 500 eyewitnesses in a court of law... it’s a wrap! The factual/historical evidence for the death/resurrection of J.C. is overwhelming! Paul says, “There are hundreds & hundreds of eyewitnesses to the resurrected Christ! Go talk to them about it! I’m not making this up...”

After that, He was seen by James. This would be James the ½ brother of Jesus (same mom, different dads ☺). But His brothers didn’t believe in Him before He rose from the dead. The prophet w/out honor in His own home. But by Acts Ch 1 His brothers are believers & James becomes *the* leader of the early church... what happened? The resurrection. Jesus appeared to him, met w/him. Then *all* the apostles saw Him.

Then, the last earthly/bodily appearance of Jesus. He appeared to Paul, as one born out of due time. Paul didn’t get that 3 yr gestation period as did the others; he came suddenly, almost freakishly when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus.

Ladies and Gentlemen: The cumulative testimony of these eyewitnesses is overwhelming. Not only did they see Jesus after His death, but they saw Him in a manner which revolutionized their faith. Many would die horribly tragic deaths because they refused to deny what they saw w/their own eyes. J.C. resurrected from the dead.

Now: Why didn’t Paul present the eyewitness testimony of the women? Honesty, it was more than likely because in that day a woman’s testimony was not received in a court of law. Even though their testimony was true, & they bore witness to the 12 that morning, the world of that day (in general) would reject that testimony, because it came from women.

**Vs 9-11**

Paul says, “Jesus appeared to me, but I barely place myself in the apostle’s company because my situation is very different.

As to where they followed Jesus, I persecuted the church of God & tried to eradicate the name of Jesus from the face of the earth.”

Underline Vs 10, “But by the grace of God I am what I am.” Paul gave the grace of God all the credit for the change in his life. He was forgiven, cleansed & filled God’s love where there used to be hate. & It wasn’t because of any work of His own, it was the work of God’s grace in his life.

Listen, the grace of God that saves your soul... will change your life. It’s impossible to *receive* God’s grace & not be *changed* by God’s grace. Of course, not every change will come at once, but saving grace goes to work in you & will change you from the inside out.

& Notice we’re not saved *by* works, but saving grace will result *in* works. & He who’s forgiven much loves much. Paul says, “His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all (yet not I but the grace of God which was w/me). When the realization of the enormity of God’s grace toward your life sets in, you can’t not serve Him. **It’s not guilt, it’s gratitude. It’s that understanding of, “After all you’ve done for me, how can I not serve & give all that I am to You?” God doesn’t desire that we should receive His grace and become passive. & Again, good works (serving, tithing, studying etc) aren’t ways in which we get God to respond to us. It’s the way we respond to Him, His goodness & His grace toward our lives.**

**Vs 11** (Close)

The vessel through whom the message comes is irrelevant. What matters is that you receive it & you believe it. It’s how salvation occurs. 1 Person shares the message, another person believes the message & God accounts the righteousness of Christ to you by grace through faith in Him.

Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, He was buried, & He rose again the 3<sup>rd</sup> day according to the Scriptures. That’s the Gospel. Where do you stand?

#### **Prayer Points:**

God, we’re so grateful for Your love & for Your grace. That You would reconcile the world to Yourself through the cross of J.C. God we believe it, we receive it, we stand in it, strengthen us to hold fast the word which was preached to us. Our reliance is not upon what we do, but upon what You’ve done for us.

**If you’ve not believed it, not received it, not made your stand upon the good news of the death/resurrection of J.C. as payment in full for your sin. I invite you to do that right here, right now. I’m not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. Believe on the Lord J.C. & you will be saved.**