



Beginning in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul comes to the final issue in Corinth that needs to be addressed. It's the only doctrinal issue and it's regarding the resurrection. A little later in the chapter, Paul says that some are saying there's no resurrection from the dead. Paul's writings in this chapter emphasize to us that the doctrine of the resurrection isn't an issue upon which Christians can graciously disagree. This is an essential doctrine. Over the next few weeks, we'll discover why that's the case. Before we jump into these verses this morning, I want to say a couple preliminary things.

First, please don't think of the doctrine of the resurrection as only "head knowledge." Sometimes people teach doctrine as though you're good as long as you get it in your gray-matter. That's not how Paul (or the rest of Scriptures) teaches doctrine. Doctrine ought to always lead to our entire being responding in worship and obedience to God. In fact, in this chapter on resurrection, note how many times Paul brings up the word "vain" and also the idea of how the resurrection leads to radically transformed, zealous living for God's glory. The resurrection is important because Jesus really did raise from the dead, and because Jesus' resurrection creates renewed people who will live out God's freedom for all eternity.

Second, I want to ask you something. When you hear that we're looking at the resurrection, what's your response? Joy? Anticipation? Frustration? Apathy? I can't help but wonder if many of us today fall into the same trap as some in Corinth. I mean, you believe the resurrection happened and that it's essential, but your heart doesn't sing to God or worship him at the knowledge that Jesus rose from the dead. In all practicality, you live as though the resurrection really didn't happen. I know how it goes. I gather with the church on Sunday, and then by Wednesday I'm focused on bills, children, exhaustion. What does the resurrection have to do with this? And, maybe we can even say things like, "God, I know Jesus rose from the dead, but I really need x, y or z right now."

I dare say that many of us have probably lost sight of the glory and practicality of the resurrection – and as a result we've lost sight of how good the good news is! Oh, how humanity needs good news, right? This word for gospel, in the Greek, referred to the announcement someone made when they entered a city to reveal to the citizens that their King won the battle against the enemies. Can you imagine the relief and the joy citizens would feel? When you think of the gospel, do you experience that hope, relief and joy?

If not, my simple admonition today is that **if your heart isn't filled with thankfulness knowing Jesus rose from the dead, please plead with the Lord now to begin working in you, by the Spirit's grace, so that you would repent of any sins in your life that have hindered your vision of the gospel and that you would have greater confidence and satisfaction in Christ.** So, please take a moment to pray now.

As we move forward in this message, let me give you what I think is the main idea: **A Christian's life is one of holding fast to Christ and his gospel.** This has been Paul's point throughout the letter as he's addressed everything. Here he emphasizes that this gospel includes the resurrection! As I move forward in these verses, I'm going to skip verses 1-2 and save those for the end, and I'm going to start in verse 3. We'll start with this question:

1. What is the gospel? (vv. 3-8)

Let's read verses 3-8 again together: ³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.¹

The word "For" in verse 3 refers back to verse 2 where Paul talks about the Corinthians receiving the gospel. Now, what was the gospel they received? In verse 3, Paul says it's the same gospel he received. By the way, this means that the gospel is primarily a message that is declared and one that people are called to receive. This doesn't simply mean that you know the details. I can know that Kim Jong-Un is the Supreme Leader of North Korea, but knowing those details and even emphasizing those details to people who may disagree doesn't mean I've received and embraced Kim Jong-Un as my Supreme Leader. What I mean is this: some people think that simply knowing the details of Jesus and mentally assenting to what Paul says here means that they are Christians. No. To receive means that your heart (not simply emotions), but your entire being welcomes Jesus as your Savior and your Gracious King. Have you experienced this in your life? Paul did. The Corinthians did. And they received Jesus because of what Jesus has done. What he has done is truly *good news!* What is this good news?

Jesus literally died, was buried, and rose again. To say he died implies that he was alive. Most people today believe Jesus lived on this earth, but there are many people who reject his resurrection. There are even certain so-called Christians who say that Jesus' resurrection is simply a symbolic resurrection, and that we shouldn't look for a physical resurrection. Yet, this error is similar to what Paul is refuting here (2,000 years ago)! The good news is that King Jesus conquered our greatest enemies on the battlefield of the cross and the grave. His literal resurrection proves this.

Paul moves on in verses 5-8 that this resurrection was indeed literal. Jesus appeared to Cephas (which was Peter's other name). He appeared to the other twelve. He also appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time! Jesus' appearance wasn't a one-time, isolated, potential sighting. Jesus appeared to many people on various occasions. Jesus really rose from the dead! And, if the Corinthians question this, they could probably get on a boat, go to Jerusalem and talk to the many eyewitnesses. There's still many even though some have "fallen asleep." Meaning, they've died, but I also think this phrase alludes to their bodies being resurrected someday. Their bodies are just "asleep" for now. Paul goes on to mention James, Jesus' brother, as having seen him. Here's one who was an unbeliever before Jesus died and rose, but then became an apostle and leader of the church in Jerusalem. We have all these people to testify that Jesus literally rose from the dead!

But, at this point, you might wonder why this is exciting and how does this affect "my" life? I love five words that Paul states twice in verses 3-4: "in accordance with the Scriptures." The Scriptures Paul is referring to is the Old Testament's prophecies regarding Jesus and what he was to accomplish. Think of Genesis 3:15, when God says, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."² Or, ponder Psalm 22's words: my strength is dried up. . .and my tongue sticks to my jaws. . .¹⁷I can count all my bones— they stare and

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:3–8.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 3:15.

gloat over me; ¹⁸ they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. ³ What about Psalm 16:10: “For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.”⁴ These are just a few prophecies of the Scriptures regarding Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. But, the most clear comes in Isaiah 53. I have this on the slides, but if you have your own Bible, please turn there and read with me. As I read, know that when Paul says “in accordance with the Scriptures,” he’s not only saying that Jesus was prophesied to die, be buried and rise again, but that Jesus accomplished all that our Triune God intended through his death, burial and resurrection. Please, I beg you, listen to what Jesus endured and what he accomplished for people like us!

*Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds 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. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. 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? 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. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.*⁵

These words are only beautiful to those who God has revealed his awesome, holy, perfect Majesty and our utter sinfulness. When you know that you are not simply a mess, but you’ve made a mess of your life and you’ve rebelled against God and that God is perfect and glorious in all his ways – you know you can’t make yourself right with God. But then you see in Jesus, on the cross, that he was stricken in your place, for your sins. Then you read that the Lord, in love, willingly came to be crushed so that you and I could be healed. And that healing means that you are made righteous. If you receive Jesus, you are made right with God and you are declared righteous *and* you are promised to grow in living in right, godly ways.

Jesus grants forgiveness, reconciliation with God and the gift of righteousness. You have been and are eternally loved. Isaiah even says here that even though this servant dies, he will be given a portion with the many and will divide spoil! What? He’s dead? How can he divide spoil? Because he definitively rose from the dead. And in his resurrection, he dispenses all the glorious wonders of being made right with

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 22:15a, 17-18.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 16:10.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Is 53.

God! As a result of these words, Isaiah 54 begins with, “Sing, O barren one. . .” Sing! Rejoice. Ventura, rejoice!

I love a succinct way of talking about Jesus’ victory in the cross and resurrection. Jesus gave us victory over the penalty, power, and presence of sin. All are born sinners. We’re born wanting to glorify self and not trust God. We reveal that through various actions. Through our morality, we want to make deals with God. Through immorality, we reveal we just want what we want. All sin is against the Infinitely Holy God, and unless we turn to him for life, we who are eternal beings, will experience eternal death in Hell. You cannot have life and turn from life. The Bible, in Revelation, even reveals that sinners will still sin in Hell. Thus, the justice of God in punishing goes forever in Hell. Yet, the Bible says that Jesus took the punishment sinners deserved – on the cross – and he satisfied God’s wrath. The penalty of sin is gone for you, if you have received Christ. The power of sin is dealt a decisive blow, too! Romans 8 states that for all who have looked to Christ for salvation, now have the Spirit who fulfills righteousness through us. We’re reconciled to God and therefore, we don’t *have* to sin. In Romans 6, we’re even told that we’ll progressively grow in righteousness until someday we are completely set free from sin’s presence. Jesus’ resurrection guarantees that there will be a day when sin will be *no more*. Your battles with sin will be gone. Can you imagine? How glorious to know that until that day, the Spirit works in us, giving us power to fight and persevere. How glorious that God loves us and reminds us over and over again that we are secure in Christ. Praise our Lord. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ – if you have received Christ. Do you embrace this as the good news that it is? Have you ever trusted in Christ? If you have not, will you right now call to him? There’s nothing you can do. He’s done all!

Ventura, may we daily, hourly, ponder the glories of what Jesus has done and rejoice. If your heart doesn’t move with the good news, plead with the Lord that he would reawaken your soul. For a Christian to not rejoice in the gospel is to experience heart failure. This is the concern of Paul for the Corinthians, and this is my concern for us as a church family.

Even in these first 11 verses of chapter 15, Paul talks about the potential of the Corinthian church believing in vain. Then in verse 10, he speaks of God’s grace not being in vain toward him. At the end of this chapter, the very last verse, Paul says that “in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” Paul is extremely concerned that we don’t live a vain life. Vain refers to a pointless existence. Every human wonders, “What’s the point of my life? What’s the point of my existence? Why do I do the same thing every day?” Many people like to have a passion for a while and then change passions every once in a while because we realize that nothing in this life can give us the *point* that God created for us. And what’s the point? God himself! He’s all the eternal glory we need. And we receive this glory in Christ and by his gospel! Paul says that if you’ve received Christ, your life is *not* vain. Don’t you want that kind of life?

Now Paul uses himself as an example of the non-vain life, revealing what it means to “hold fast to the gospel.” Remember, the big idea is that a Christian’s life is one of holding fast to Christ and his gospel. We’ve focused on what the gospel is. Now we’re moving to

2. What does it mean to hold fast to Christ and his gospel? (vv. 8-10, 1-2)

Let’s look at verses 8-10 now: ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by

the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.⁶

Paul sets himself forward as an example of one who holds fast to the gospel. By the way, I say this because when speaking to the Corinthians, in verse 2, he says “if you hold fast to the word I preached to you. . . .” Part of the idea in Paul bringing up the others and also himself, I believe, is to emphasize that they all have, and are, continuing to hold fast to the gospel message. Paul uses himself specifically because he will show how the resurrection changed his life – and how the resurrection will continue to transform the Corinthians. That means, us knowing and embracing our resurrected Savior changes us, too!

Paul begins verse 8 with an illustration. When he says “last of all,” he’s meaning he’s the last apostle. So, by the way, when you hear people saying they’re apostles today, they’re wrong. Paul was last. Now, the illustration comes in the phrase “untimely born.” Many translations prefer this translation; however, in historic Greek writings, this phrase referred to either an aborted child or a stillborn child. I know there are many women here who have had a stillbirth. There are other women here who think back to the day when they endured an abortion, and they mourn that circumstance. Why would Paul use this illustration? In Hebrew writings, think of Job. He endures so much suffering and he says that it would have been better off if he were a stillbirth. The idea is that he doesn’t see a point in the suffering. The pain was so great. If this is all to life, he should have been dead at birth. We recognize the hopelessness and sorrow of a statement. A stillbirth and miscarriage are a cause for weeping. And this is what Paul says about his life when Jesus appeared to him.

Paul’s life was pointless when Jesus appeared to him. Paul thought he was doing right. He was religious. He was a Pharisee of Pharisees! He was climbing the ladder of Jewish success. He thought he was being zealous for God’s glory! But his life was as sad as a stillbirth. He was dead in his sinfulness. He was self-deceived in his self-righteousness.

But, look at Paul’s words. Jesus still appeared to him! His mounting sins didn’t keep Jesus from coming to him! No! Jesus came to save sinners! He came to save Paul. As the “least of the apostles” and “unworthy to be called apostle,” I think this emphasizes that Paul wasn’t involved in Jesus’ earthly ministry. Nor, was he in any of the aforementioned groups of appearances. To add to this, he persecuted the church of God. Paul was following Satan’s plan. Like Satan, Paul was devoted to crushing the body of Christ. But since Jesus crushed Satan, he wouldn’t crush Paul. Instead, Jesus appeared to Paul, opened Paul’s eyes, and rescued him.

Paul then goes on and says “by the grace of God I am what I am.” Ventura, we see in these verses that holding fast to the gospel means we always understand and **confess our sinfulness and God’s greater grace**. We do not boast in our works as though they are actions that we did on our own – or think those actions gain God’s acceptance. Instead, we live in wonder that God would love and grace us so much! Grace means we did not merit. But look even closer to the text. Paul says the grace isn’t in vain. In fact, Paul labored harder than all the other apostles.

But Paul is quick to qualify that – which gives another result of holding fast to the gospel: **we live zealously, boasting in God**. God’s grace is what Paul delights in. Look at your life. Is God’s grace in vain in your life? Do you think grace only means forgiveness? Do you also know that the resurrection means God’s given grace to you to labor for his glory in this world? Also, where do you direct your boasting? One

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:8–10.

song we sing here prays that we may live so all may see the strength to follow God's commands would never come from us. But is that where your heart is? When you obey, do you hope that others will acknowledge you and at least give you some credit? When you hear someone say they see the Spirit working in you, do you think, "Oh, that feels so good because I really worked hard!" Or, do you think, "Oh Lord, thank you! That's an evidence that you are working in me! Praise your name!" Maybe you don't think that at all. Maybe instead, the focus of your boasting and joy is in money, power, affirmation from people. Please don't live your life in vain. Living for your glory or the glory of things in this world is the stillborn life that Paul once lived. But God's grace isn't in vain. God's grace enlivens you to know the greatest boast is boasting in God and his grace! His grace isn't in vain! So, rejoice in his forgiving grace and his grace to give you obedience!

Have you received Jesus and his gospel? In verse 11, Paul says, ¹¹"Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. ⁷ Why does he say this? He's basically saying, **"Corinthians, I and the apostles haven't changed the message, and you believed and received that message. Therefore, don't swerve from that message. Hold fast to the gospel and see Jesus continue to transform your life."**

I know this is what he's saying because this is essentially what he says in verses 1-2. Let's read those verses now: Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ²and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ⁸ In verse 11, Paul says they believed, which I think emphasizes that Paul doesn't believe they really believed in vain. So, if they believed, they follow in the footsteps of the apostles and believers before them. And they too get to hold fast to Jesus and the gospel.

3. What are the results of holding fast? (vv. 1-2)

Verse 2 says to us that if we've received Jesus, we stand! I picture a person in the midst of battle. The fog rises. Everything seems destroyed. You can't see anything, but then the fog lifts and there's someone standing. Christians, we are in a battle for God's glory to be known in this world. We stand, but that's not all Paul says. We don't just stand. He says God's grace has a present reality to it. By grace, **we are being saved**. Paul says here that as we hold fast to the gospel, God will shape us continually to be more like Jesus in our desires and actions.

Christian, *you are* being saved. God's grace isn't in vain. Truly embracing the gospel affects us. But I wonder, have you forgotten the gospel? Have you been focused on this world and are you content that your heart isn't moved by Jesus? Jesus has appeared to give so much more! Don't live a vain life. Hold fast to the gospel. By his grace, continue to preach the gospel to yourself, continue to pray the Lord would open your eyes to the glories of Jesus and the gospel, continue to immerse yourself in God's glorious Word. Hold fast. Hold fast. Hold fast. Why? Because then your life isn't in vain. Because God is all-glorious. Because you need him. Because he is the satisfying Savior. Because he will work his righteousness in and through you.

A Christian's life is one of holding fast to Christ and his gospel. Take time to pray that your heart would only ever be gripped with Christ and his gospel and that you would, like Paul, determine to know nothing but our risen Jesus Christ and him crucified.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:11.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:1–2.

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