

GETTING THE GOSPEL RIGHT

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. 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, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 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. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

INTRODUCTION

1. What happens when we die? What happens to our bodies? Are they finished or do they have a future? And if so, honestly what possible good might they be to us if we are already in heaven? And if they play a part in our future, when will that happen and how will that happen and why will that happen? Those are a few of the many questions the Corinthians wondered about. And Paul will take up some of those questions in this amazing chapter. But in order to talk about the resurrection of our physical bodies, it was necessary to talk about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
2. The resurrection of our bodies is tied to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. And His resurrection from the dead is an important element in our own salvation. So to answer the questions concerning resurrection and future life with Christ, Paul will begin with a review of the Gospel that he preached to the Corinthians when he first met them. What he has to say is vitally important for us to understand.
3. If everything in our future depends on the Gospel of Christ and our response to it – and it does, then we better get it right. To get the gospel wrong will result in a very costly, eternal mistake! Let's listen as Paul begins to show how to get the Gospel right! He starts by discussing the...

I. **COMMUNICATION OF THE GOSPEL (1-2) - Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.**

A. You heard the Gospel

1. According to Acts 18, Paul made his way into the city of Corinth (18:8-11 - ⁸ **Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. ⁹ And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” ¹¹ And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.** That is the record of the beginning of the church at Corinth.

2. Paul had brought them the Gospel and they had come to believe through his message. He was, in effect, their spiritual father in the faith. So he is talking to these believers about their experience of believing the Gospel. They first heard it from Paul. He says, not only did you hear the Gospel, but also...

B. You received the Gospel

1. They heard Paul speaking and the Holy Spirit of God drove the message home in their hearts and they received the Gospel.

2. To receive the Gospel is to believe the truth that God has revealed about our sin and our need for a Savior and to place our entire hope and confidence in Him alone to forgive our sin and to clothe us in God's righteousness; in other words to make us acceptable to God. Paul would write to the Roman church, **For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.**" The Corinthians heard the Gospel and received the Gospel and were saved by the Gospel. Paul further describes their encounter with the Gospel when he declared...

C. You stand in the Gospel

1. The reason the Corinthians were able to stand before God was because they belonged to God through the Gospel. We are dead in sin, but when God saves us we are able to stand before God, forgiven, clean!

2. The picture of being down or of falling is prominent in the Bible, but those who are victorious are described as being able to stand. (Ephesians 6 is a great example - **take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore**). That, Paul says was true of the Corinthians. They could stand in the Gospel They could stand because they had believed the Gospel and received the Gospel.
3. Paul does speak of salvation here in the present tense – **“by which you are being saved...”** You have heard this many times before but it is a good review. We have been saved (**past tense**) from the **penalty** of sin. What is the penalty of sin? It is death. We have been saved from the penalty of death in that we have been given eternal life. One day we will be saved (**future tense**) from the very **presence** of sin. That will be true when we are in the presence of the holy Savior in a holy environment in the state of perfected holiness! But that is not true now. We still battle with sin. So Paul reminded the Corinthians that they were in the process of *being saved* (**present tense**) from the **power** of sin. We are making progress. As the song writer said, “He breaks the power of cancelled sin; he sets the prisoner free...”, but sin’s power has not been completely cut off yet. We continue to do battle with sin – but from that we are being saved! And that was true of them (and of us) because...

D. You hold fast to the Gospel

1. I understand that this sounds like a contingency. It may seem a bit unsettling if we assume that our ultimate salvation is determined by our ability to hold on? Here is what I think Paul is saying and the way he wrote this would support such an interpretation.
2. The explanation goes something like this...” **if you hold fast to the word I preached to you...**(and true believers will; for one of the marks of genuine faith is perseverance) **unless you believed in vain** (in which case your response to Christ was not real; it was empty, phony, a mere profession but not a possession of the Gospel. It was a claim to have known Christ, but not to have been known by Him). No real transaction or transformation took place. Paul would later challenge these same Corinthians, **“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—**

unless indeed you fail to meet the test!" (2 Corinthians 13:5). If our faith is genuine we will hold on. If it is bogus, we won't. Paul had communicated all of this before when he brought them the Gospel. But what is the Gospel? What is the content of this good news? Verses 3-8 help us to answer that question.

II. CONTENT OF THE GOSPEL (3-8) (There are really two basic elements supported by evidence marking those elements as true).

A. **Christ died** and was buried (3 -4a)

1. Before the gospel accounts were written, Paul declared that he received these things from God concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus. **"Christ died for our sins."** We know that to be true because it is part of the revelation of Scripture (OT). Paul does not give book, chapter or verse but surely he could have quoted from Psalm 22 or Psalm 16 or Isaiah 53. Consider the following from Isaiah: **"Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities...the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."**

Does that not teach that Christ "died for our sins"?

2. The evidence of His death was in the fact of His burial. As you know from the NT accounts, the soldiers came to break Jesus' legs while He was hanging on the cross, but these seasoned executioners saw that Jesus was already dead, so they thrust a spear in his side, probably piercing His heart. His body was taken by two secret disciples, washed, prepared with spices and wrapped and placed in a new tomb and a large stone was rolled across the entrance. Even as all of this was happening, it was a fulfillment of the OT Scriptures- **And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death.** He died between two thieves ("with the wicked") and the rich man no doubt was reference to Joseph of Arimathea – the one who requested the body of Jesus. Jesus was then placed in the tomb, buried, because He was dead. But it would not remain so...

B. **Christ arose** and appeared (4b-8) – "Up from the grave He arose with a mighty triumph o'er His foes. He arose a victor from the dark domain and He lives forever with His saints to reign. He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!" In accord with the Scriptures, Jesus was raised from the dead! The Psalmist had written, **"For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption"** and that certainly was fulfilled. Jesus would say of Himself in Revelation 1:17b-18 - **"Fear not, I am the first and the**

last... and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. But how do we know that He rose from the dead? The answer includes the testimony of many witnesses as they were the recipients of various post-resurrection appearances of the Lord Jesus. Paul identifies the following people...

1. To Cephas (and the twelve) – Cephas (or Peter) was among the first to see Jesus – certainly the first of the Apostles. Likely Jesus sought out Peter because Peter was the leader of the disciples and he had denied the Lord. We know from the record that Jesus appeared on resurrection day in the Upper Room where 10 of the 12 had gathered. They are the “twelve” referred to here. Keep in mind that they were not looking for Jesus and they were frightened when He appeared.
2. To five hundred at one time – We are not told the occasion, but somewhere during the 40 days Jesus was on the earth between His resurrection and ascension He appeared to 500 believers who were together at the time. It was not a group hallucination. It was an actual appearance. And when this text was written, many of those 500 were still alive and could give verbal testimony to that appearance of Christ.
3. To James (and all the apostles) – This James was probably Jesus’ half-brother who would become the leader in the Jerusalem church and who would later write the epistle that bears his name. “All the apostles” may have included an expanded number of followers of Jesus beyond the original twelve.
4. To Paul – And finally, Paul mentioned himself. The Lord’s appearance to Paul was much later than these that have been mentioned, taking place long after Jesus had ascended into heaven, but certainly no less significant. For Paul had a personal, literal encounter with the risen Christ who had saved him and assigned him the work of making Christ known throughout the whole world!

III. CALL OF THE GOSPEL (9-11) The call of the Gospel may come to anyone, but here it is illustrated in the conversion of the great Apostle Paul. What is said of him could and should be said of us. The Gospel comes...

A. To the most unworthy

1. Paul saw himself not only as the least of the apostles, but also one who was absolutely unworthy to be called an apostle. His reasoning is not based on false humility.

2. Paul was unworthy to be called by the Gospel because he had been actively trying to destroy the Gospel. He persecuted those who had been called by the Gospel. Paul in some measure was responsible for the death of more than one of the followers of the way.
3. Absolutely unworthy to be called by the Gospel, but nevertheless God called him – because of grace! “By the grace of God I am what I am.” And that is also true of each of us who are in Christ Jesus – it is all of grace! Sin separates us from God and we have no power to span that separation. But He can by grace.

B. To the most unable

1. God's grace is efficacious. It is effective. It is not in vain. It was not in vain toward Paul and it is not in vain for all who receive the Gospel!
2. Paul mentions his response after having received the Gospel – one of hard work. Note verse 10 –“ ***I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.***” Remember what he said to the Ephesians (2:8-10)?
⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.
3. Not only did God prepare them beforehand, but also He provides His power to do them as well – all by His grace! The call of the Gospel is a call of grace. Grace to the most unworthy, grace to the most unable, and grace...

C. To the most unlikely

1. How unlikely was it for the chief persecutor of the church to become her most effective promoter?
2. How unlikely is it for us to be the ones proclaiming the wonderful grace of Jesus? But that is the call of the Gospel. They preached so we believed. Now we proclaim so they will believe! That is the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ Jesus!

Conclusion

1. So do you belong to Christ? Have you received the Gospel of Christ? Do you understand the Gospel of Christ? And if you have received the Gospel of Christ are you walking with Christ? Are you obeying Christ? Have you identified with Him in baptism? Are you declaring Him among those with whom you encounter?

2. The same Christ who called you by His grace to salvation is able to provide grace so that you might be obedient to Him in your daily walk with Him. The Gospel begins and ends with Christ – the Christ who died for us and who was raised from the dead and who saves us from our sins – all by His grace!
3. I invite you to hear and receive the Gospel that you might know the living Lord Jesus Christ!