

1 Corinthians 15:1-12

Paul has labored extensively over the past three chapters to bring order and balance to the Corinthians worship - especially in regards to how each person was exercising their spiritual gifts within the Body.

Throughout this letter (remember it's a letter) Paul has addressed division within the Body, sexual immorality, idolatry, marriage, christian liberty, roles of men and women within the church, and the Lord's supper (or communion) along with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In all of these Paul offers instruction and correction.

These are all common topics that the church teaches on today in various formats. Not surprisingly, by studying the Bible verse by verse we have covered all of them.

Having covered all of these necessary topics (turns out Paul did topicals) — we come to a pivotal section here in Chapter 15.

V.1 Moreover...more than anything else! The gospel. The good news. Let this be our primary focus - the gospel. Not marriage, not speaking in tongues, not idolatry, not debating christian liberty, not baptism. Those things are needful but they can never supplant the gospel as our primary focus.

The gospel is over all of those and by the gospel we properly frame our understanding of any other topic. Apart from the gospel we are at risk of

skewing the rest of these topics - we will rely on our own imperfect logic, emotions, and knowledge and come away with a mutant practical application in all of these other matters.

This precious gospel came to the Corinthians by Paul's preaching - his declaration, and obedience to God's call on his life.

It was received by them as the Holy Spirit came alongside them and convicted them of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8).

By God's grace through faith they stand, they are established, they are a party to the covenant that is the gospel.

v.2 Since they received the gospel of grace by faith - they are saved. In Christian circle we intuitively understand this term - but it bears reminding that people need saving. "Saved from what?" the hearer might ask. Saved from eternal condemnation and separation from God because of a life of imperfection. Remember the standard isn't goodness - it's perfection. And we all have missed the mark - so much so that it's a cliché - nobody's perfect.

Then we come to the conditional statement IF you hold fast...Unless you believed in vain - we find that it is possible to be a nominal christian, one who has received the gospel in vain (what does in vain mean?) -- without purpose, without cause, without success or effort, void of result -- failure.

This should be terrifying to us but instead this type of relationship with Christ, with the gospel, is accompanied by apathy. Lord keep us from this.

V.3-4 I delivered to you first of all - a message of the highest priority, before anything else. This is foundational - it holds the whole house of truth up AND it is the mortar between the stones - holding everything together.

that which I also received - Paul received this truth and serves as a great example of faithfulness in his passing it on. We can see how this truth impacted Paul greatly, as he will elaborate on shortly. Are we passing this on? If not, why not? Have we believed in vain? I pray not.

So what is this priority one message that Paul delivered? What is the thing that we are established in, we are saved by, that holds the house of the faithful together?

The simple gospel: "Christ died for OUR sins (it was our imperfection that demanded a blood payment to be made right with God).

ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES - the entirety of scripture.

Contemporarily, in Paul's day the OT, prophetically the fulfilled canon of the NT; all of it cries out this truth, it all points toward the messiah, it declares God's redeeming plan for humanity which is that since there is a blood payment demanded to reconcile humanity with God - that He himself will fulfill the entire punishment in His own Body. God made sin, and punished on our behalf, that we might be made right with Him!

and that He was buried - Charles Dickens wrote in A Christmas Carol, “**Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.** Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail. I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the dearest piece of ironmongery in the trade. But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile; and my unhallowed hands shall not disturb it, or the Country's done for. You will therefore permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was as dead as a door-nail.”

There was no doubt regarding his very public death - Jesus Christ was dead as a door nail.

and that He rose again the third day ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES - the scriptures point to the resurrection.

[Psa 16:10 NLT] 10 For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your holy one to rot in the grave.

This is the message that we stand in, by which we are saved.

Can we paraphrase this? If somebody asked us what we believe where would we start? The temptation of Christ? Baptism? Prophecy? Progressive sanctification? Calvinism? Freewill? Charity? Caring for the poor? The nature of love?

What about here?

First of all, over everything else - this. Learn it. Know it. Deliver this message to others because it is the message preached to us, which we received, in which we stand, by which we are saved if we hold fast to this word - unless we believe in vain.

v.5 And that He was SEEN...”

The fact of the resurrection then is carefully established by a vast multitude of eye witnesses - people who had also seen the bodily resurrected Jesus Christ and could testify of their experience.

Cephas - this is Peter. Peter's encounter with the risen Christ is of tremendous importance and is more than just cursory or incidentally having seen Jesus but involves restoration and forgiveness and instruction on caring for the God's flock.

The twelve - the apostles, less Judas, but still collectively referred to as the twelve. These guys were all on the run, in hiding - they had abandoned Jesus but after seeing the resurrection their faith flourished and they became the greatest champions of the gospel.

Then over 500 brethren at once - an enormous crowd saw Him. This deals with the idea of a carefully crafted conspiracy orchestrated and executed by a handful of deceivers. Most of these eyewitnesses were still alive and able to attest to their experience, but some had passed away.

After that - James - why after that? The brother of Christ who certainly didn't support Jesus' ministry early on became a central figure at the church in Jerusalem!

This timeline would also suggest that the multitude and the apostles saw the resurrected Christ very quickly after His resurrection.

Then by ALL the apostles - there were more than 12, Paul was an additional apostle, so was Barnabas, potentially Apollos.

This supports the thought that Apostles ought to have seen the risen Christ - they all did. What is an apostle? One who is sent out. Do we send people out? Yes. What do we call them? Missionaries, church planters, evangelists, pastors.

V.8-9 Last of all, me too - ektroma (used 1x in the Bible, here) - abortion, miscarry, to wound - an untimely or abortive birth. In point of time inferior to the rest of the Apostles, as an immature birth comes short of a mature one.

Least of the apostles - Paul counted himself as the lowest on the totem pole (that shouldn't have existed but did - we know the apostles under Christ's tutelage argued about who was the greatest among them). Paul took himself out of the running.

Paul persecuted the church - he was responsible for the arrest, imprisonment, and execution of those dear saints who believed in Jesus. ADD CONTEXT and History.

He states truthfully, without any guise of hyperbole, that he is not worthy to be called an apostle.

Paul's past weighed heavily on his conscience. This is authentic, transparent humility. I'm not worthy to be in ministry AT ALL because this is what I did. No pulled punches, no glorifying past sin, no white washing the past for the sake of tact.

Oh that this would be the heart of the men who serve Christ's church today - rather than the "of course I'm worthy, of course I'm qualified," let us cry out "God have mercy on me a sinner - I am not worthy."

V.10 Paul, with great simplicity, summarizes how he came to be in the position that he is in. Paul's station in ministry was unwanted, unasked for, He was SNATCHED into ministry by God.

This is one of those moments where we see the sovereignty of God overruling one man's will for evil, which Paul certainly demonstrated. It was by God's grace alone. Just like salvation.

Here we see the depth and breadth and abundance of God's grace towards the saints. He puts us into ministry when we are not worthy. Some men may climb into ministry some other way, but God's called servants

are put into ministry - like a burning in their bones - by the grace of God alone.

His grace towards me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all - the lazy steward is real! Put into ministry by God's grace, with that fire in our bones, and yet lulled to sleep by the grind of daily washing the feet of the saints - and deciding to take a day off, that turns into two days, that turns into a week, that turns into a lifetime!

HUGHES QUOTE HERE

To whom much is given, much is required! This truth was not lost on Paul - who looking back with contrition at his past life, labored more than anybody. And turns his labor back to God - declaring that his work is only by God's grace. He doesn't even take credit for it but gives God the glory. It was God's grace that compelled him to labor - isn't that interesting. Some take God's grace as a license for laziness. God's grace was the engine that powered Paul's work.

V.11 No matter who preaches - the message goes forth, and people believe. We have to grasp the truth in this statement. God's word will not return to him void. Perhaps if we more fully internalized this truth we would be less hesitant to share this with others as Jesus commands. Because when the message is preached people will believe. Not all of the people, all of the time; but not none of the people, ever either. Be sensitive to the guiding of the Holy Spirit and pass this truth on.

Paul says, this was the case for the Corinthians - they heard the message because somebody was willing to open their mouth.

V.12 Amazingly there is tremendous unity in the gospel that is declared by so many different people! That's a miracle in itself. And since that message declares that the resurrection is fundamental...why are there those who argue against that?

This is our jumping off point for the rest of chapter 15 where Paul carefully instructs on the importance and certainty of the resurrection - the event.