

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 The Stabilized Church Falls Ch. AM 7/14/2024

Throughout the letter of 1 Corinthians, Paul had written about a sequence of serious difficulties in the church in Corinth, such as how wisdom is defined, chapter 1, what preaching is, chapter 2, what to do about divisions in the church, chapter 3, what gospel ministry is, chapter 4, the church's dealings with immorality in chapter 5, legal matters in chapter 6, marriage and singleness in chapter 7, idolatry and personal rights in chapters 8-10, worship services and The Lord's Supper in chapter 11, and love, spiritual gifts and how to view speaking in tongues in chapters 12-14. Now here in chapter 15, the bigger issue was doubting that the resurrection of Jesus guarantees the resurrection of believers.

We learn that this is the issue in chapter 15, verse 12, where Paul wrote "...*how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*" All of the other previous difficulties in Corinth about which Paul had already written were not as vital as this bigger issue. It seems that Paul has kept the most significant matter to the end of the letter.

The resurrection is an indispensable part of the gospel, that stabilizes our lives!

This chapter is as relevant to us as it was in the turmoil of ancient city of Corinth. Today we face the same issues - there are wars abroad, and a string of violent instances in our country, there are moral confusions in our society, there are racial tensions, political tensions, economic struggles, and various church denominations declining in their commitments to The Bible. The resurrection is the stabilizer for our lives today, just as it was in the lives of believers in Corinth.

1. The fact and impact of the resurrection is indispensable to gospel preaching. (v.1)

In verse 1, Paul introduced his teaching on the resurrection of the dead with the words, "*Now I would remind you, brothers...*" addressed to the church there.

This teaching about the resurrection was not breaking news. Paul was proclaiming what they had already heard and what they already knew.

Consider the contrast with what Paul wrote in Chapter 12:1, "*Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.*"

The teaching on spiritual gifts seemed new to the church in Corinth.

But the teaching on the resurrection was not new.

Corinth had heard Paul preach on it many times.

In fact, Paul would never preach without preaching the resurrection.

Look at verse 1, Paul wrote, "*the gospel I preached to you, which you received...*" The church was not opposed to the resurrection. They had previously received the gospel of the resurrection.

Look at the last four words of verse 1 – "*in which you stand.*" They currently were already standing in the gospel of the resurrection. This is the stabilizing of

the believer, and the stabilizing of the church. They were standing in grace. They were standing in the truth. They were standing in the gospel of the resurrection. It was their foundation. It was their surrounding walls and existence. Standing on the resurrection is essential to being a Christian church. Christ arose! And now they are being reminded of the gospel of the resurrection.

2. Receiving the truth of the resurrection is indispensable to being saved. (v.2)

The gospel is that by which we have been saved – past tense.

But it is also current, present tense. The gospel is that through which we are being saved.

Verse 2, “...and by which you are being saved.” Paul here emphasized the present tense form of this verb, because this aspect of the gospel tells us a lot. It tells us that salvation is both an accomplished fact, and a continuing process. The Savior is right now actively saving us! Christ is on the move in His church. That fact comforts us. That fact stabilizes us.

This is the important thing to grasp – Paul is showing not just that Jesus rose again in the past tense on that first Resurrection Sunday, but also that Jesus continues to live in His church in the present, today, right now.

Paul added more in verse 2. What Paul added was protecting shepherding care for the souls of the believers in Corinth. Since the resurrection was under attack by some in Corinth, Paul was concerned that others not fall away from their faith. This concern was exactly why Paul wrote in verse 2, “if you hold fast to the word I preached to you – unless you believed in vain.”

Paul wrote this because based on the reports of their behaviors, and based on the questions that they had about the faith, Paul had become concerned that they may not be holding fast to what they had initially believed! Drifting away from the gospel was always a matter of perpetual concern for the church, and here Paul was seeking to stabilize them, to strengthen them in basic, non-negotiable truths. This was later echoed by the writer to the Hebrews, who also wrote to a church in a time of difficulty in Hebrews 2:1, “Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.” The best thing for churches to do in a time of difficulty, is to come back to the Word, hold fast to it, and be strengthened in the basics. Again, listen to Paul’s concern here in our passage in verse 2, “hold fast to the Word I preached to you...”

Here Paul was urging them, with respect to Christ’s current work to continue to save them in the present day, to hold tenaciously and purposefully to the truth of the resurrection of Christ, meaning that Jesus rose physically from the dead. It was necessary and essential. They could not go forward and continue to be considered to be saved persons, if they ever stopped believing in the physical resurrection of Jesus.

3. Holding to the physical resurrection is indispensable to our living Biblical

and stabilized lives. (v.3-4)

Verse 3, “*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received...*”

When and where and from whom did Paul receive the news about the resurrection? Paul had an altercation with the Risen Lord Jesus Himself! Acts 9:3, “...suddenly a light from heaven shone around [Saul/Paul]. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And [Saul] said, ‘Who are you, Lord’” and He said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” When and where and from whom did Paul receive the news about the resurrection? When Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus. In Acts 9, the conversion story of Paul shows that Paul was given by Ananias the form of the gospel that Paul now wrote here in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul started preaching Jesus right away. Later, Paul visited Corinth and spent a year and a half preaching there.

Now 5 years later, Paul was writing this letter to them. There were 2 reasons that Paul knew exactly what Paul had preached to them 5 years earlier: 1) this was the same form of the summary of the gospel that Paul had been initially taught to memorize, and 2) Paul described it with the significant words “*I delivered to you...*” which was a technical phrase for a rabbi officially entrusting his disciples a prescribed set of teaching. It was like a course. It was a whole set of teaching about Jesus. All of Paul’s hearers who heard Paul preach it and teach it, had it memorized! It went like this, contained again now in verses 3-4

“*that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,*
that He was buried,

that He was raised on the 3rd day in accordance with the Scriptures...”

and it also included what we will look at next time from verse 5, “*that He appeared to Cephas (another name for Peter), then to the twelve.*”

Each of the four phrases began with the word “*that.*” Like today formal statements say, ‘Be it resolved that...and further let it be resolved that...’

The grammar here in verses 3-4 showed that Christ was the foundation and center of the stabilized church. Christ died, Christ was buried, Christ was raised, Christ appeared to people.

Two of the phrases had an additional phrase, “*in accordance with the Scriptures.*” Verse 3, Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures. Verse 4, Christ was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

Jesus was buried in the tomb of a powerful man. The urgent task of burying Jesus before the evening when the Sabbath started was a task that fell to a man named Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish Council. He was a secret follower of Jesus. The disciples of Jesus had already run away, as the Bible told us. Joseph completed this task, with the help of a man named Nicodemus.

The burial of Jesus was not a burial in the way we modern people often think

of burial into a 6-foot-deep hole in the ground. No, not that sort of burial. Instead, the burial of Jesus was into a vault that had been cut into a cliff or wall of rock. After the burial of Jesus, the door of that vault was then closed by the process of rolling a huge round stone shaped like a wheel in front of the door to close the doorway and to seal the dead body inside. Here in verse 4, Paul's Greek word "buried" was a word close to the Greek word for "tomb." The closest way to render that in English is that Jesus was entombed in a tomb, where His body was encased in rock, including the stone blocking the doorway. All this was understood and meant by Paul's three words "He was buried." The impact was that no one could steal His body away, and everyone knew that. It was important that the church in Corinth remember this truth, understood in its historical context.

Jesus was buried in the tomb of an eminent member of the Sanhedrin, the religious ruling council, and the placing of His body into the tomb was witnessed by several identifiable persons – Mary Magdalene, Mary, mother of Jesus, and a woman named Joanna, the wife of a high official named Chusa, the chief of staff in the reign of King Herod Antipas, who had the royal title of Tetrach of Galilee. The reason that God in the Bible through the Gospel writers and through Paul here gave all of this information to the church in Corinth was that the burial of Jesus was a well-attested historical fact, not a legend. God knew that people in Corinth, and later people in America would start to question the facts.

The Bible provided us not only with the names of the women who witnessed the burial of Jesus in Joseph's tomb, but the Bible also provided us with the names of the women who came to the tomb early on the morning of the first day of the week, Sunday, as the first witnesses to the fact of the resurrection.

A ruckus ensued. Let me read Matthew 28:11-15, "*... some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, 'Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.'*" So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day."

Do you see why God informed us of this in the Bible? Even the opponents agreed that the tomb was empty. Since both the supporters and the opponents of Jesus agreed that the tomb was empty, it was even further verified as being true.

Because Jesus' burial was verified, His resurrection was also necessarily verified. John 10:18, Jesus said, "*I have authority to lay down [My life], and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from My Father.*"

Before His body had time to decay, Jesus was raised by God the Father. Jesus had died of His own volition, when He gave up His spirit, but Jesus was raised by God the Father, as well as by the power of The Son of God Himself to rise again.

Conclusion:

What sees us through our personal failures, our disappointments in ourselves or one another, our struggle with anger, fear or lust? What carries us through the disillusionment of seeing humanity's evil? What can you hold onto through a marriage fight, a sibling fight, stress at work or at home, violence in our nation, plus personal loneliness and loss and grief? If we hold on tight to the wrong thing, we won't have any stability at all. We can hold fast to Christ who rose, because He is holding fast to us.

The gospel is intended to be the central power around which our lives revolve. The resources of the gospel are sufficient to meet every challenge we face. The resurrection is our stabilizer for our lives. The centrality of the resurrection brings balance to a sinner's life.

The gospel is something outside of us, what we call objective truth. Our relationship to God does not depend upon how we feel about ourselves, nor on our sense of our progress in the Christian life at this moment or at any given moment.

The gospel does not depend on how sorry we are for what we have done, or how sure we are that we are not guilty of what we have not done.

Let's take a serious case as an example. How about Paul our author? He used to kill Christians, before he became an apostle. How was he supposed to overcome that true guilt? Listen as Paul wrote about how the objective truth of the gospel was directly relevant in helping Paul overcome his own guilt in 1 Timothy 1, starting with verse 13, "...formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."

By the gospel, the risen Christ Himself becomes our functional identity. Without our own accomplishment, our own effort or our own working at it, we are all-at-once placed into a perfectly stable relationship to God. Not by our own contribution, we gain, for free, a precious access to all the benefits of a stabilized union with Christ.

The resurrection is indispensable. The resurrection cannot be left out, disregarded, or neglected.