

## 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, An All-Consuming Gospel

Lately I've been having some battery issues on my phone, so it got me digging around in the settings, and I was able to get to a certain screen that showed me the amount of battery life that went where. It listed all the apps that I have, and next to each app was a percentage of battery life, to give me an overview of where I'm spending my phone's energy. Calling, text message, internet, email, music, social media, it was all there. It showed exactly where energy was going, with no question about it.

Now I wonder, what if God was able to get into the settings of our heart, and pull up the battery usage. What would He find? Where would our energy consumption be? What would we be spending ourselves on?

We chase so many things. money, security, comfort, sex, family, building our careers, reputations, or we get into political or social causes, or chase hobbies, sports, exercise. It's not that any of these are bad in themselves, but when they are ultimate they become idols. There's a million things in this world that tempt us to set out hope on. And they all will fail us.

The problem with so many of us is that we make the gospel just another app among many. When the gospel is just one other app, not only does the gospel malfunction, but every other app does as well.

Paul in chapter 15 to the Corinthians is going to hold out to us the one thing that should consume us, and the one thing that is worthy of consuming us—the gospel.

For Paul, the gospel was not another app, it was the operating system. It is the gospel that filters, organizes, and empowers the phone and every app in it.

You see the Corinthians, just like us, were prone to drift off course. They may have started well, but they are no longer keeping the main thing the main thing. They've drifted away from the gospel, away from love, and into divisions, immorality, abuses of spiritual gifts, and as we'll see today, even distortion of the core gospel message.

The text for today is the foundation that Paul will be laying for his argument in the rest of the chapter. The two main objectives that he has is to remind them of the true gospel that includes the bodily resurrection and to affirm his own authority.

**15:1 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.**

Let's pray.

### The content of the gospel

**15:1 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.**

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I'm going to start here at v. 3. He's talking about this gospel that he gave them. Gospel is a word that simply means "good news". as Paul holds out the core of the gospel message—Christ's death and resurrection.

There are more references to the wrath, anger, and fury God in the Bible than there are to His love. The Bible has no problem talking about the wrath of God. And what have we done, we have stripped the Bible of the wrath of God. We have done all we can to make it say something it does not say, which, to take out the wrath of God, is to undue the very foundation of the gospel, and on a true analysis, although people are trying to clean God up and make Him better, if that were even possible, by hoping to present Him in only loving attributes, well that is to empty Him of His love.

You can't make sense of the depth of God's love if you are not willing to face the depths of His wrath.

What the gospel aims at is sin. Christ died for our sins. Sin is our problem. We don't have another problem. Don't let yourself think for a moment that you have a greater problem or more pressing problem than your sin.

Why?

Listen to Paul's argument in the beginning of Romans...

**Romans 1:18**

**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...**

**Romans 2:5**

**But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.**

**Romans 2:8**

**but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth . . . there will be wrath and fury.**

This is the beginning of Paul's argument in Romans as he lays out the glorious truth of the gospel, a truth and a good news that only fits against this backdrop of judgment.

There is coming a day, he is saying, when the store of God's wrath against your disobedience will be poured out onto your head, your back will be broken, you will be cast into outer darkness, and worms will eat you, and the worms will never die. That happens because of sin. Nothing else in the universe stores up God's wrath. objects of wrath. (Don't make this about someone else's sin, you have to own this).

The foundation of the gospel is that we have rebelled against the uncreated God, our maker, the Holy One, we've committed cosmic treason against Him, not that we have just not worshiped Him, but that we've hated Him. And this God is coming with judgement.

It's coming. And it's sure. It's the most horrific of all realities. And not one of us will be able to stand... unless we have a Savior.

And Church, in Christ Jesus, we have a Savior who saves us in a most glorious and wonderful fashion.

How does Christ save us?

**Romans 3:23-25**

**23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.**

Propitiation basically means absorbed, He absorbed the wrath of God and God's justice was satisfied. And we enter in to that transaction by faith, not by works, because we can't be justified by works, by faith. Believing. Trusting.

How does Christ save us?

In other words, Christ took our place. The righteous for the unrighteous. The innocent for the guilty. He lived the life we could never live and died the death that we all deserved.

*For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God [Gen. 3:1-7], while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man [2 Cor. 5:21]. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. -Stott*

But if it ends only at the cross, as Paul will say later in 15, we are still in our sins. Christ had to be raised from the dead.

**“(Righteousness) will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, 25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” Romans 4:22-25**

In Christ's death, He was making a sacrifice for sins. In His resurrection, He justified us. The resurrection was the historical reality that Christ's death on behalf of sinners was accepted by God the Father.

In Christ rising from the grave the sacrifice was sufficient and death was overcome.

So it's not just that we are forgiven, and back to some moral neutrality, that would be incredible enough, but all the more, we are made righteous.

This is what Martin Luther called the great exchange. We get Christ's righteousness, and He gets our sin. **“He made Him to be sin who knew no sin that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”**

So Paul here holds out Christ's death and His resurrection together, as forming the core of the gospel. The death and resurrection of Christ are the wings that the gospel plane flies with. If you take away either, the death for sins, or the bodily resurrection, the gospel is destroyed.

And the gospel is more than just a ticket to heaven, as if heaven were the most important thing. In the gospel you get God. Fellowship with God is what we call heaven.

**The centrality of the gospel**

**15:1 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:**

So Christ's death and resurrection for Paul is of first importance. Now does this mean first in time or first in priority. There are some who may say that the gospel is merely the door way into greater, more exciting truths. Not so with Paul. It doesn't get any better or more important than the gospel.

This is, as Gordon Fee says, the “bare bones” of the gospel. Or Matthew Henry, Matthew Henry affirms that “Christ’s death and resurrection are the very sum and substance of evangelical truth.”

This is what Paul received and then passed on. **“I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received.”**

If you’ve seen an olympic relay, this is the baton received and passed on.

It’s interesting that Paul would land this discussion of the core nuts and bolts of the gospel just after discussing with them about spiritual gifts. Almost like a connection can be made, pursue the spiritual gifts, and no matter how sensational or supernatural your ministry is, your ministry is not the gifts. Your ministry is first and foremost about the gospel.

He then says, **11 Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.**

He’s saying, whether it was I, or any other apostle, we all are preaching the same message. This same message about the death and resurrection of Christ.

**There’s another aspect to the centrality of the gospel that Paul had in mind that I want to point out. Look back at the first verse, the “the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved.”**

What’s he doing there? Look at how all encompassing the gospel word is to Corinthians. Which you received-past. In which you stand- present. by which you are being saved-future. The gospel is everything.

The gospel is not a foundation upon which we build other things on top of it, the gospel is the entirety of the structure. Neither is it a doorway into something better. It’s not the gospel and then something else, as in a sequence, our life is a going deeper into the gospel.

### **Application**

Church, if we have gotten bored with the gospel, we need to have our hearts checked.

At Harvest we seek to display the gospel every Sunday. If we ever begin to promote something different around here, we need to shut down.

### **The confirmation of the gospel**

Paul’s aim is to showcase the gospel in its pure form, but he wants to take it another step in his argument, especially for the bodily resurrection, proofs for the gospel.

It’s not so much that this is Paul trying to prove the resurrection as it is him trying to prove that the resurrection is a part of the gospel.

He’s got two main emphasis, the internal witness of the Scriptures, and the external witness of Christ’s appearances.

#### **1. according to the Scriptures**

He draws their attention, as a wise pastor, right back to the center of divine revelation, where it belongs. The Scriptures. They should not concern themselves with anything else that does not come from this Book. God’s Word. And he’s referring to the OT, which is awesome, and shows us that the whole of Scripture is about the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ for sinners.

Christ’s death...

**Isaiah 53, “4**

**Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 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. 6 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.”**

Christ’s resurrection...

**Psalm 16:10, “For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.”**

The Scriptures would also include sacrificial system, designed to point out their need for a sacrifice for sins. Or narratives like Jonah, being in the fish for 3 days, bearing judgement, to t, as a type of Christ to come.

## **2. resurrection appearances**

Paul then begins to list out all the appearances that Jesus gave to others, that were a confirmation of the gospel.

**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.**

6 times Paul talks about Christ appearing.

Christ appeared in bodily form.

Application: Are we building our lives on the gospel revealed in the Scriptures? Are we living as if Christ is alive?

## **The effect of the gospel**

As this gospel comes to you, and as you receive, as you embrace it, what does it do? What does it produce? As it takes root in your heart and life, what are it’s effects?

### **1. new identity**

**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,”**

The effect of the gospel on Paul was that pre-grace he zealously tried to shut down the church, and once grace gets a hold of him, he becomes an apostle.

I mean talk about grace. God chose Paul in order to highlight His grace. Who am I going to get to build my church, I’ll grab the zealous enemy. Remember, Paul’s authority as an apostle is being challenged by the Corinthians. They think he’s weak. It’s almost like Paul says, you want to call me names and put me down, okay, I can go there. You are right? I got no business being in the game. I will gladly take my spot at the end of the line, with the least. But Paul reverses their conclusion. Instead of weakness being the evidence against his apostleship, Paul flips it and says it is exactly because of his weakness that is evidence of his apostleship... it is all God’s doing! It’s not me. It’s God!

When you believe the gospel, the old is gone, the new has come. You get a new heart. As Christ has risen so you are risen to walk in newness of life. We are made new creations in Christ. Your sins, addictions, idolatries, they no longer define you. Your past no longer has power over you, you have power over your past because God has power over your past. Your past is not an occasion for guilt or shame, it's an occasion for rejoicing in the grace of God.

But the gospel keeps us humble. Our new identity does not forget where we have come from, nor does it think that we are anything special. As Paul would elsewhere say he is the chief of sinners. Our new identity humbly acknowledges ongoing sin and longs to be made finally righteous. Pride has no place in the christian life, for the only thing you contributed to your salvation is your sin.

“The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.”

Are you going to let sin/past define you or Christ?

## 2. new purpose

**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.**

Paul's mission was to now build the church that he so eagerly desired to destroy.

Paul was an apostle and he worked harder than the other apostles, yet he doesn't allow it to go to his head. He is rooted in the grace of God. He knows that everything he does has been empowered by the Spirit of God so that he can take no credit for it.

Paul's ministry is not so much the response to grace as it is the effect of grace. The difference is paramount. It has to do with origin as well as causation. If Paul's ministry was merely a response to grace, then Paul could take credit for his ministry, and the Corinthians would be tempted to view Paul as great. But if Paul's ministry is the effect of grace, then grace is the causal agent that not only converts Paul, but is what governs, empowers, and completes Paul's ministry. So that, as it is, Paul's ministry is all of grace. He can't take any credit. All credit belongs to God. The spotlight is turned to God. This is God's doing, both in Paul, and through Paul to the Corinthians.

“We have the best news in all the world: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died and rose and reigns to make the nations fully and eternally glad in the glory of God.” -Piper

**Phil 2:31, “For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good pleasure.”**

## Conclusion

For Paul the gospel was not one app among many. The gospel was the phone itself. He was consumed by the gospel. We are going to fail at this, we are not a perfect church, and neither was Paul perfect. But he kept looking toward the one that was. Jesus. Let us do likewise as we too make the gospel, which is Jesus, and His glory, central to everything that we do. Let's spend and be spent for the sake of His great name.

Let's pray.

