

Back to Basics

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

We are back to the book of 1 Corinthians to start the new year. We only have two chapters to go and a few more sermons. This morning we get started on Ch. 15.

I held out a long time on getting a smart phone because of how expensive it was, but I finally got one, and my first phone was a refurbished Samsung Galaxy S5 – a big upgrade from my flip phone! It could do all kinds of things: talk, text, email, take pictures, browse the internet, check weather, calculator, clock, timer, calendar, navigation, online shopping, listen to music. It was amazing!

But after a couple years I noticed it started to have problems charging the battery. I had to wiggle the end that plugged into the phone and then try not to bump it. Eventually it got bad enough that it wasn't charging at all. But then I discovered you could pull the phone apart and replace the charging port and fix the problem. So I ordered a new one, watched some videos and carefully replaced it. (Picture)

It wasn't easy! I had to heat up the screen and carefully pry it off, remove a bunch of tiny screws and other small parts, pull off the back of the phone, remove the bad part, put the new one in and put it all back together. I somehow managed to do it without breaking it, but within a day it was causing problems again. The cheap part I bought was a piece of junk, so I had to order a different one and repeat the whole process. That part worked, but after a few months it started going bad again. So I ended up buying a third one and went through the process again – a third time.

Of all the things that phone could do, the charging port did only one. So why should I even bother replacing it? Why not just use the phone with a bad charging port? Well the answer is simple: because nothing else works unless you charge the battery. A smart phone has all kinds of capabilities, but if you have a dead battery, nothing else matters... It starts with the basics and everything else goes from there. If those aren't in place, everything else is going to fall apart.

That's the same thing that happens with the basics of what we believe. There are a whole bunch of Christian beliefs that influence how we live our lives every day. But there are a few basics of the gospel where it all begins and it's critically

important that we get those right, or nothing else matters. The basics have to be in place or everything else is going to fall apart.

That's what was starting to happen with some of the Christians in Corinth. As we've seen in the past, that church had a lot of problems and today we start to look at a new problem that had to do with one of the basic Christian beliefs they were starting to turn away from. Paul devotes a whole chapter – and a very long one – to confronting and correcting them because if they got this wrong, everything else would fall apart. For us, I hope these verses will remind us why our basic beliefs are so important and need to be protected in our lives and shared with others.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-2.

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.

Paul makes some monumental statements about the importance of the gospel in these verses. He wants to remind them of the gospel he preached when he first planted the church there. He's doing so because some of them were believing a different gospel, which we'll talk about later.

Paul makes two statements to show how important the gospel was. First, at the end of verse 1 he says it is the gospel "in which you stand." What does he mean by that? There's a passage Paul wrote in Romans 5 in which he uses that phrase in a similar way. Romans 5:1-2 says, *"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God."*

So here he's talking about standing in a position of grace before God, which he describes in verse 1 as being justified by faith and having peace with God through Christ. It's a position we gain access to through faith in Christ. And it's a wonderful position to be in! That's what I think he has in mind when he uses the word "stand" back in 1 Corinthians 15 – they were standing in the gospel, which meant the gospel was putting them in a position of grace before God. They were at peace with God, forgiven, and declared righteous by him. The gospel was giving them that position, which is one way Paul shows how important it is.

The second statement he makes is that it was that same gospel “by which they were being saved.” So not only did it give them the ability to stand in a position of grace before God, but it was also the means by which God was saving them. They were being saved from sin and condemnation through faith in the gospel Paul preached. So it was extremely important!

But that gospel wouldn't do them any good if they veered away from it, and that's what he points out in verse 2. They would only stand in the gospel and be saved by the gospel *if they held fast to it*. If they veered away, like some of them were doing, they would have believed in vain – their initial faith would be useless. So the pure gospel is extremely important. It is the foundation of our faith, the foundation of our right standing before God, and the foundation of our salvation.

Paul goes on to tell them what the gospel is. He boils it down to some bare essentials in verses 3-4. These are the basics of the gospel that we must hold to if we are going to stand before God and be saved.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

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...* (and then he goes on to list those who saw Christ after the resurrection)

So Paul boils down the gospel he preached into two basic truths that are revealed in the Scriptures: Christ died on the cross for our sins and he rose from the grave on the third day. These are the basics that a person has to know and believe in order to stand before God and be saved. If you believe these things, you can be saved. If you veer away and believe something else, you can't. Like a charging port on a phone, all other beliefs are worthless if you don't have these at the foundation.

You can go into all kinds of complexities when it comes to Christian beliefs, and you can even be wrong about some of them, but you can't be wrong about these. It all starts here. Do you believe that Jesus died for your sins? Do you believe that he rose from the grave on the third day? If you do, it is this gospel by which you can stand and be saved. If you don't, and you believe something else, you have no foundation to stand on. No salvation.

So these are critically important, and the problem going on in Corinth that we'll look at more next week, is that some of the people in the church were believing a false teaching that would basically end up denying the resurrection of Christ. And if they did, Paul points out later on in the chapter, their whole faith would fall apart. It would be useless.

You can't deny the resurrection, so Paul is showing them in these verses that it's critically important to believe for salvation, which is why he finishes now by listing all the people who saw Jesus after he rose from the dead. This was proof that Jesus rose from the dead – especially back then when most of these eye witnesses were still living and could attest to it.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:5-11.

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. 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.

So Paul lists all the eyewitnesses, including himself – and he says these are the people who are going around preaching the gospel. They are preaching that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day BECAUSE THEY SAW HIM WITH THEIR OWN EYES. They saw the risen Christ and that's why they preached what they preached. That's what Paul preached and that was the message the Corinthians first believed.

The basics of the gospel are critically important for salvation. And therefore, it is critically important that we don't veer away from them and believe something else. In Corinth, some were believing a gospel message that threw out the resurrection. In our day and age it's a lot of things. Two prominent false gospels leading many astray are Atheism and a form of Universalism.

Atheism of course denies everything we believe about Christ and Christianity and holds that there is no spiritual or supernatural – everything can be explained by natural science. This is very pervasive in our schools, colleges and universities and many are abandoning Christian roots to believe in a godless universe.

Universalism is much different. It's pervasive in a lot of churches. It acknowledges the spiritual and supernatural, and assumes that when people die they go to heaven, or a better place. Yes, Jesus died and rose again, but it doesn't really matter. God is love and accepts all kinds of good people. Many are embracing this more open and tolerant view of God and salvation even though it contradicts what the Bible teaches.

So we need to guard our hearts and minds from these things and others. Anything that denies the need for us to believe that Christ died for our sins or rose from the dead is a false gospel that will dismantle everything else in the Christian faith. And those kinds of teachings are all over in our society and churches. Watch out for them, especially if you are young in the faith.

This also reminds us how critically important it is that we share the gospel with others. If knowing and believing the basics of the gospel is necessary for us to stand before God and be saved, someone has to share them with others. How will they know unless someone shows them the way? That's why Paul writes in Romans 10:14 *"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?"* Christ has called each of us to let our light shine in the world and make disciples and it begins with sharing the faith. Do you have people in your life who don't know Jesus died for their sins and rose again on the third day? We aren't responsible to convince them to believe, but we are responsible for sharing. I encourage you to pray for them and look for opportunities to share with them.