

1CO 15:1 "Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain."

Up to this point in Paul's letter he has addressed a variety of problems, from immorality to divisiveness. He has tried to help them see that to live for Christ is to love as Christ loved, be it in the way we treat other brothers and sisters in Christ, or in the way we reach out to a lost and dying world with the love and gospel of Christ.

As we come to chapter 15, we see that Paul will devote almost an entire section just on doctrine. In other words, he is about to deal with a specific teaching which is essential to the Christian faith, a doctrine which is non-negotiable in regards to the church accepting it, and that is the bodily resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

I believe part of the reason Paul moves down this path is to help these Corinthian believers to appreciate why they should love Christ and why they should not take their salvation lightly, and why they can be confident that the choice they've made in accepting Christ as Lord and Savior was the best one.

And as we come to verse one he is going to set the stage and the foundation on which we place our eternal destiny.

1CO 15:1 "Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand."

Notice, that despite all of the craziness that was apparently going on in Corinth with this church, Paul still calls them brothers, and again this would include the sisters in Christ as well.

He still identifies them as family since they are part of the same household of faith in Christ. But he does something very interesting here and that is he begins this section by reminding them of something they already knew.

"I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you."

Why would Paul want to remind them of the gospel he preached to them? Why would there be a need to remind any believer of the

gospel since it is something they already embrace and believe?
What would be the advantage of reminding them of such a thing?

I've heard it said that there's no need to rehash old ground. Once the truth of the gospel has been accepted it's time to move on to other teachings which are deeper and more intriguing.

"We know what the gospel is, and we praise God for it, but if you're going to teach us more about the gospel, you're only preaching to the choir, we already believe."

Paul doesn't take that attitude. And the reason he doesn't take that attitude is because we can never over appreciate the very teaching which has delivered us from the darkness of sin and an eternal separation from God, into the light of the life found in Christ.

This doesn't mean we don't teach other things, but it certainly means we don't neglect or forget or push to the side the depths and the delights of the very truth of who Christ is and what He accomplished on our behalf to bring us into His forever family.

It's exciting to look into the truths and the doctrines regarding other aspects of our faith, from eschatology, which is the teaching about the last days until Christ returns, to pneumatology, which is the teachings of the Holy Spirit and His ministry in our lives and the life of the church, and everything in between.

But it is soteriology, the study and the doctrine of Christ's salvation for us, which makes all of those other aspects possible. Without the foundation of our salvation in Christ, it would make no sense to teach on the Spirit's work in our lives, it would make no sense to expect a Savior to return to this earth if we didn't understand that the Savior was here the first time and why.

Why do you think we're instructed by Jesus Christ Himself to celebrate the Lord's Supper until He returns? He never wants us to forget what it was that allowed us to come into a personal relationship with the living God; to be reconciled to the Father of lights, and to have the promise of the hope that awaits us.

It is this promise of hope that should make our hearts soar as we look forward to that day when Paradise is restored as will found in the new heavens and new earth where resurrected believers will reside on a restored earth amongst a restored universe.

In fact, this actually places eschatology in a very prominent place in the hope of our future kingdom with Christ as it looks back to

that promise given to Adam and Eve of this future Edenic restoration.

G.K. Beale in his book, A New Testament Biblical Theology, sums very well the premise of Adam's forward looking to a future new-creational reign.

"That all the doctrines or notions of salvation/redemption are thematically subordinate to God's new-creational reign through an earthly representative is evident from recalling that *eschatology precedes soteriology in Gen.1-3*. That is, had Adam been faithful in ruling over the first creation, he would have received subsequent escalated blessings, which would have been none other than eternal end-time blessings, with the result of God's glory filling the whole earth."

Paul will spend a great deal of time explaining how this eschatological hope is realized in the resurrection, but he has no problem reminding these believers in Corinth about the gospel he has already preached to them the first time he met them many years before, which they have received and on which they have taken their stand.

In doing this he also reminds them that they have received this good news and they must continue to stand on it. There's always the temptation to become complacent in our walk with Christ. It's very easy to think that since I have this teaching down pat that I don't need to go back and study it anymore, or that I don't need to consciously consider what Christ did on my behalf.

Just think about the times you've driven past a church where the marquis out in front reads something like, "Come learn tonight about the Anti-christ, or the end times, or the rapture." Christians will usually come out of the woodwork to learn about these things, and they should.

But put out on that same marquis, "Come out tonight to learn more about your salvation", how many Christians would give up Sunday night football, The X-Files, or, Who wants to be a millionaire?

I understand this, but may we never think that our salvation and how Jesus Christ accomplished it on our behalf is somehow, Ho-hum. Paul is trying to stir up their faith and to stir up their appreciation and zeal for Christ.

1CO 15:2 "By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain."

Paul is not opening the door here for the possibility that a true believer could lose their salvation. He's not suggesting that your salvation depends on you holding on to Christ. The fact of the matter is that you hold on to Christ only because He has a hold on you.

JOH 10:27-30 "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

Our God has a grip on us that will never allow us to be lost.

JOH 6:39 "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day."

This is a part of our salvation which we should rejoice in every day. This is the hope that we can be assured of, and that is that despite how we may mess up, we are still children of our heavenly Father and He will never allow us to be lost. He will bring us all the way home.

Now, none of this should give us the impression that it makes no difference how we live for the Lord. In fact, how we live for the Lord shows how much we appreciate His free gift to us. But never should we use our status with our heavenly Father as an excuse to sin, knowing that He'll forgive us.

But Paul does give a warning in verse two. He does say, "by this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain."

What he means by this is that if you have not firmly held to the word, if you have not firmly believed, if you are not walking in that faith, then you really didn't believe and all your talk about believing will net you nothing. That's what he means by, you believed in vain. He doesn't mean a saving faith, but a faith which is caught up in the moment.

This is not unlike what Jesus taught when He gave the parable of the sower and the seed.

MAT 13:18-23 "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away

what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. 20 The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. 22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. 23 But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

The fact that someone receives the word to the extent that they consider it for their lives, and yet this life gets in the way of that choice, and they reject it, proves that they never really believed. They only poked it with a stick until it was uncomfortable or unfashionable to really persevere.

And this is the true test of those who have placed their faith in Christ; will they persevere to the end? They will as Christ perseveres in them which He promises to do with all His people. After all, if we are His sheep we will listen to His voice. We may stray or choose a path which might be harmful, but when Christ calls to us to rejoin the flock we will listen.

And yet, even in those times where we hear His voice and still decide to play along the cliffs, thinking I'll rejoin you Lord when I have had my fill of looking over the precipice, it is often during those times when our Great Shepherd doesn't wait for us to come prancing back to the flock. He will often come get us and carry us on His shoulders.

That's what you and I mean to our Savior who went to the cross to pay our debt and buy us back. He has no intention of losing even one, and will not.

But for those who play the game at believing or want to be identified simply with the outward appearances of being a Christian, Paul's warning should strike a chord to get serious about truly believing on the Lord. Any other belief outside of a saving faith is in vain. It accomplishes nothing, they are still in their sin.

But now, starting in verse three Paul begins to recount what this gospel message is all about.

1CO 15:3-4 "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures..."

Now, this is very interesting. Notice that Paul begins with the statement, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance..."

At no time does Paul ever give the impression that he makes up his own message. He got his message from Christ Himself, which was confirmed in the other apostles, which they received from Christ.

In other words, this message of salvation comes from the One who gave us this salvation. It makes the message a heavenly one, not an earthly one. This is a similar statement that Paul had given to these same Corinthians regarding the Lord's Supper.

1CO 11:23-24 "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

Again, Paul takes no credit for this. He's only a messenger. He's not the author. But he's a messenger of the living God who has words of life and hope in Christ. And then he says that this is of first importance.

In other words, 'what I'm about to share with you takes precedence and is vital to coming into this relationship with God. If this is not believed, if this is not adhered to by faith, then your very eternal existence is at stake. This message is most important and to deviate from it will only bring God's wrath.'

This is what Paul meant when writing to the Galatians.

GAL 1:8-9 "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! [Anathema] 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" [Anathema]

This gospel message is of first importance and to alter or add to it in any way, is to be out of accord with the plain teaching of Scripture. And this is another source which verifies what Paul received from the Lord Jesus Christ.

1CO 15:-4 "... Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according
to the Scriptures..."

In one simple statement Paul expresses all of what it means for Christ to have atoned for our sins. And notice that he uses the term Christ instead of Jesus. The idea here is that the Christ or the Messiah has accomplished this; the same Messiah who was promised in the O.T. Scriptures.

By using the term Christ Paul is pointing out the role of the Son of God coming into the world. He came as Messiah, Redeemer and Savior. And He did this in fulfillment of the promise He had given to the prophets. This is what Paul means when he says, according to the Scriptures.

In other words, the Scriptures explicitly spoke of the role of the promised Messiah. One of those roles was to take our sin and then pay our debt because of that sin. The prophet Isaiah makes this clear.

ISA 53:5-6, 8-9 "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth."

And so, it's clear that the Messiah would be cut off according to the Scriptures. And yet, Israel missed this most important aspect of what the Messiah must do for us so that we might have eternal life. They were without excuse when Jesus Christ walked among them.

They rejected Him outright because they felt their Redeemer would deliver them from Rome in the same way He delivered them from Egypt. They could not accept the fact that their sin is what kept them from a proper relationship with their Father in heaven and that the debt must be canceled first by this promised Messiah.

They missed the prophecies about this suffering servant Messiah even as it unfolded before their very eyes, as in the case at the

cross when Jesus was stripped of his clothing and the soldiers cast lots for His outer garment, all according to the Scriptures.

PSA 22:16-18 "Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. 17 I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. 18 They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing."

The O.T. Scriptures clearly speak of the death of Christ. And Paul is delivering this message as it was given to him. The ministry and death of Jesus Christ is indisputable. There were myriad's of eye witnesses. And so, it's not as though Paul is making this up. But then he goes on to add another element of this saving act on Christ's part.

It's true that He died according to what the O.T. Scriptures said must happen to Him, but He would also be buried and then raised from the dead, also according to the Scriptures.

The reason Paul adds that Christ was buried is that this lifts any doubt that He actually died. There are those who have tried to put forth the notion that Jesus Christ did not die on the cross. And the reason they promote this is to discount the resurrection of our Lord.

Here's how one theory goes, which is called the swoon theory. After Jesus spent an entire night with His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, He became so distressed that He actually sweat drops of blood, a medical condition known as hematidrosis. This rare condition usually leads to comma and death.

But then Jesus was taken captive by the Jews and was treated cruelly as he was beaten, and spit upon and delivered up to the Sanhedrin to be convicted as a result of false witnesses. This mock trial by the Sanhedrin would then lead to Jesus being delivered over to Pilate.

Keep in mind this is well into the next day and He has not slept, and probably hasn't eaten. After being delivered over to Pilate He is then scourged and has a crown of thorns embedded into His skull. All this time His body is undergoing excruciating pain and has lost a great deal of blood. He would have been very weak.

But now He has to carry His own cross to Golgatha. So weak has He become that someone has to be forced to carry the cross the rest of the way. Upon being delivered up to the place of a skull, Jesus

is now attached to the cross by having large spikes driven through his wrists and feet.

From about 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM, six hours, our Lord hung on that cross as the life ebbed out of his body. When it became apparent that He was dead, as trained soldiers made this determination, they drove a spear through His chest near His heart.

If He wasn't dead before that time, He was now. Now keep in mind that those who subscribe to this swoon theory believe that Jesus never died on the cross, He simply swooned or passed out. Their explanation for the resurrection is that after He was taken down from the cross and after He was wrapped in linen, that the cool of the tomb revived Him three days later.

In His extremely weakened condition He then pushed away this huge stone in front of the tomb, over took the soldiers who were guarding the tomb and then found His disciples, now claiming that He victoriously rose from the dead, all the while knowing that He did not. By the way the normal amount of guards in that situation would have been from four to sixteen armed trained soldiers.

This is how some scoffers of the resurrection explain this phenomenon. And we're accused of having a blind faith. Paul testifies to the truth of what actually happened that Sunday morning after Jesus had been laid in the tomb three days prior.

His burial also had been according to the Scriptures. It was Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, who had taken the body of Jesus and laid Him in his own expensive grave site. This too the Jews would have known had they read and believed their own Scriptures.

ISA 53:9 "He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth."

But it didn't end there, because according to the Scriptures He would be raised from the dead the third day.

The Scriptures make it clear that the Messiah would be raised bodily from the dead. We need only go back to Isaiah.

ISA 53:10-12 "Yet it was the LORD'S will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. 11 After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my

righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

Regarding the three days in the grave the Scriptures point to this as well. Hosea alludes to this as Israel is used as an example of how the Messiah will restore them.

HOS 6:1-2 "Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. 2 After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.

Even Jesus made it clear that He would spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, which suggests that something must happen at the end of that three day period where He will no longer be dead in the earth.

MAT 12:38-40 "Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you." 39 He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Of course Jesus was referring to the Scriptures found in the book of Jonah.

JON 1:17 "But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights."

Jesus makes a direct connection to Him being in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. But just as Jonah would come out of the fish or whale, Jesus would come out of the tomb victorious over death and the grave.

He's alive. In fact, the Greek language uses terms to differentiate between a one-time event and a one-time event which has continuing significance. According to Dr. Kistemaker, when the Scriptures speak of the death of Christ it uses a verb tense to describe a single action in the past for Jesus' death and burial.

But when it comes to His resurrection it uses what is called a perfect tense to indicate an action that occurred in the past but has lasting relevance for the present. In other words, the life Christ gained on the third day still is vibrant today and allows us to have life in Him, as well as giving us the hope of a future life with Him.

All of this was promised in the Scriptures. He was faithful to fulfill His promises and He continues to be faithful to His promises, not the least of which is that He will soon return for His people.

Our salvation began with a promise from God in the Garden of Eden after the fall of man, it found its fulfillment in the Garden of Gethsemane and beyond in the God/man taking that penalty for sin which was explained to Adam and Eve.

"In the day that you eat of the fruit you shall surely die." Christ died in our place. We don't need to be separated from Him forever. We have been given the hope of life through His resurrection and as Paul continues in our text we'll see how Christ's resurrection secures our resurrection from the dead as well.

These are some of the reasons we need to be reminded of what Christ did on our behalf as Paul reminds these Corinthians. I don't know about you, but when I hear of how Jesus took my sin and how He has given me life, it excites me to want to live for Him and be used by Him to bring others this good news. I hope that's what it does for you.

Peter put it aptly in the book of Acts.

ACT 4:10-12 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. 11 He is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' 12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

If we believe this then may we take it to heart every moment of our lives as we show the world and tell the world that we have been delivered from death to life; and they may also, as they believe that Christ died for their sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. Praise God!

