

# THE GOSPEL

## 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you - unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

This past year Super Bowl 50 was won by the Denver Broncos. It was the final chapter in the storybook career of their quarterback, Peyton Manning. After the big win, Manning retired. *“He went out on top,”* as they say.

But his career might not have ended so successfully, had it not been for a decision he made four years earlier.

In 2012 Manning suffered a serious neck injury, that his previous team felt would probably end his career.

He was released by the Indianapolis Colts.

At the time, Peyton was contacted by a former coach, David Cutcliffe. *Coach Cut* had tutored Manning while he was in college at Tennessee. Cutcliffe had been watching tape (as *football coaches do*), and saw that Peyton had developed bad habits in his mechanics.

He was out of sync. His throwing motion was skewed.

Cutcliffe invited Peyton to work with him in the off season, *and go back to basics*. He helped Manning recaptured the skills that made him a great quarterback.

It was by returning to the fundamentals, that Ole #18 was able to finish his career on such a high note!

And this was what had happened in the church at Corinth. Coach Paul had noticed that the believers in Corinth had gotten away from the correct fundamentals.

It was distorting their faith, and contorting their living.

The Corinthians had such an All Star beginning. They left the darkness of paganism for the glorious light of Jesus Christ. But Paul had been watching, and he knew they were drifting from the fundamentals. False notions and wrong attitudes were creeping in. If the Corinthians wanted to *go out on top* - if they hoped to finish well - they needed to go back to the basics of their faith.

This is what Paul does at the beginning of Chapter 15.

He recounts to them the gospel - the good news he had preached, and they had believed and received.

In **verses 1-2** he stresses the gospel's **importance**.

In **verses 3-8** he lists the gospel's **ingredients**.

Then in **verses 9-11** Paul testifies to gospel's **impact** in his own life. **Its importance, its ingredients, its impact.**

God wants you to finish well. When you leave this world - and retire into eternity - God wants you to go out on top! That's why we need to go back to the basics.

Don't think a return to the fundamentals is a sign of failure - in reality, it's the path to ultimate success.

Verses 1-2 stress the gospel's **importance!** Paul writes, **"Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you."**

Paul preached the gospel. The Corinthians believed the gospel. *It saves.* And on it, Christians *take a stand*.

If you live a thousand years you'll never hear better news than *the good news* - that is, the gospel of Jesus.

Notice, it was through the gospel that the Corinthians were saved. And what does that mean... **"saved?"**

*You save money for a rainy day.*

*A friend saves you a seat or your place in line.*

*The lifeguard saves a person from drowning.*

*Early detection can save you from certain diseases. But what does it mean to be saved by the gospel?*

*First, understand the danger you're in...* God created this world perfect, but things are not the way He meant for them to be. People hurt other people. Folks are treated cruelly. Life is full of injustice. If life is to be fair, good, perfect - the evil people need to be eliminated.

And I'm sure you agree! *Wipe out all the evil people!* Here's the only problem, **we are the evil people!**

You and I are evil. There's evil in our hearts. The selfishness, and greed, and meanness, and pride I abhor in others, I harbor in my own heart. I may not act on, but even when I don't, it's there lurking. The Bible calls it "sin." And it's from sin that we need to be saved.

This is why we need the gospel... Medicine saves us from sickness. Counseling saves us from neurosis. Government saves us from anarchy (*I think*). Economics saves us from inflation. Ecology saves us from pollution. Law enforcement saves us from crime.

But all the above is the result of mankind's sin, and **the only thing that can save us from sin is the gospel!**

Only God can say with finality, "you are forgiven."

And because Jesus is God He can pardon our sin, and cleanse its stain, and relieve its guilt, and remove its shame, and redeem the damage its done. *This is the gospel... that He's made a way to do just that!*

This is what makes the gospel unique and special and vitally important. Some folks give the gospel only a casual interest, or a passing fancy, but the gospel deserves so much more! Paul says, *“you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you.”*

*Jesus is God’s Son, but the gospel is more like God’s daughter...* I have a daughter, and I knew boys would flirt with her - like her mother, she’s very pretty.

But I also knew that she deserves far more than a young man’s flirtations. Before I gave my daughter away I expected her husband-to-be to have some serious, life-long, thoroughly-committed intentions.

And this is God’s expectation for anyone who receives the gospel. Lots of people flirt with the Gospel. They tease and show an interest. They say stuff, and make promises they really don’t plan to keep.

*The gospel deserves better!* God expects you not only to believe and receive, but to hold fast to it for a lifetime. Paul says that *saving faith is a sticky faith.*

If you really believe the gospel you’ll *cling to it and continue in it.* True faith has a tight grip. You *“hold fast.”*

It reminds me of a Monday Night Football Game in 2008 where DeSean Jackson of the Eagles slipped behind the defense to catch a 61 yard bomb from Donovan McNabb. Jackson glided into the end zone, and did his TD dance. *There was only one problem...*

**Here's the video...** Touchdown!, but wait... **Let's look at it again.** Oooo... Desean drops the ball before he crosses the goal line. It negates the touchdown...

*And the moral of the story is?* Don't drop the ball before you get into the end zone. You've got to finish.

This is not only true in football, but in faith. Paul is reminding the Corinthians they need to finish the drill. It's not enough to have faith - real faith is faith that crosses the goal - that keeps the gospel to the end.

People often ask me, **"Do you believe in eternal security?"** Here's my answer, **"Of course, I believe in eternal security, as long as you are trusting Jesus you are eternally secure."** But the Corinthians were proof - *having faith today doesn't guarantee faith tomorrow.*

Hey, a right standing with God has nothing to do with our works - *the good we do or don't do.* Our status with God rests on our faith in the gospel! But a sincere faith perseveres. It **"holds fast."** This is why Paul implores the Corinthians not to fumble away the gospel...

*But what exactly is this gospel that the Corinthians believed?* The Greek word **"gospel"** means **"good news."** Before Paul coined the term, it didn't refer to any particular good news. You might consider, *Your kid making good grades, or getting a tax refund* to be good news, but it wasn't the gospel Paul received from God.

Neither was this gospel some vague hope that if we do our best - or act sincere - or try hard to be good - or go to church... one day God will usher us into heaven.

That might be a wishful, optimistic, want-to-believe gospel... a man-made gospel... even a religious-sounding gospel... it's certainly, a performance-based gospel... but it wasn't the gospel Paul received from God. That gospel was a set of real-time facts.

God's gospel says **believe in certain events and their spiritual implications; and you'll be saved from sin.** You won't be eliminated with the evil people.

Paul writes in verse 3, "**For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received...**" The good news Paul preached wasn't born of his own imagination. It wasn't his own invention. He was just the messenger. Paul passed on to people what God had passed on to him.

And here he lists the **ingredients** of this Gospel...

He begins, "**That Christ died...**" Seldom does good news start with an obituary - a death notice. "*Here's good news, my best friend died.*" That sounds strange!

But what made the death of Jesus good news was the reason He died. It reads, "**Christ died for our sins..**"

Most ancient religions, particularly Judaism, were based on the concept of **substitution**. If a person sinned against God they were deserving of death, but a sacrifice could be offered in the sinner's place.

Thousands of animals were slaughtered in the Jewish Temple. So much blood was spilled a pipe was built to drain the river of blood into the valley below. Anyone in Paul's day knew the principle of *substitution*.

Not so much today! Examples are few and far between. Like Dwayne Johnson of Buena Vista, CO.

Dwayne, and his wife, Dawna, took their two teenage girls on a hike along a popular trail, not far from their home. It started out a perfect day. The family walked to the waterfalls at Chalk Creek Canyon, about 14k feet.

That's when the unthinkable happened. A rock slide came barreling down the mountain. Dwayne, Dawna, and his older daughter died, but not before Dwayne pushed his 13 year old, Gracie, into the crevasse of a rock, and covered her body with his own. The massive surge of dirt, rocks, and boulders crushed his body.

But not Gracie - rescuers heard her from under a pile of debris. A deputy on the scene reported, "(Gracie) said her dad jumped on top of her to protect her right at the last moment when the rocks were coming down."

Here's a modern-day example of what Jesus did for the human race. Just as Dwayne saved his daughter by covering her body with his own, Jesus covered us on the cross. He took the beating our sin deserved. An avalanche of God's judgment was headed toward us.

We would've died, had Jesus not jumped into harm's way - and made Himself a substitute for you and me.

If you want to be forgiven and be right with God, here is the first truth to believe, "*Christ died for our sins...*"

And He died, "*according to the Scriptures...*" By believing this, the Corinthians were acknowledging that the death of

Jesus wasn't a random act. It had been planned before time and predicted by God in His Word.

Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 describe in detail Jesus' crucifixion. Details of the cross appear in these texts 500 years before the Persians invented crucifixion.

Leviticus 16 - along with it an elaborate OT sacrificial system - foreshadowed Jesus' suffering on the cross.

A vital truth in *the gospel that saves* is that **Jesus' death was according to plan!** The cross was no accident, or tragedy. That Roman cross was the will of God. Jesus died voluntarily with us in mind. *Do we believe that?* If we do, it makes His death good news.

Here's another ingredient of the gospel we believe.

**"And that He was buried..."** We express our faith in Jesus' death and resurrection, *but do we believe He was buried?* His entombment is a part of the gospel.

The NT goes to great lengths to verify Jesus' death.

John 19 tells us when the Roman soldiers came to Jesus on the cross - to break His legs, and hasten His death - it was unnecessary. Jesus was already dead...

Afterwards, a spear was thrust into his ribcage. Out came blood and water - the sign of a ruptured heart.

John also tells us of His burial. Jesus' corpse was wrapped tightly in linen straps, under a hundred pounds of spices. It was placed in an unused tomb, owned by a rich aristocrat named Joseph of Arimathea.

A large stone was held by a chock block. Remove it and the stone rolled downhill over the tomb's opening.

This all meant that the confirmed dead body of Jesus, with the ruptured heart, was buried in a suffocating shroud - under a mound of spicy goo - in a cold, dark tomb - behind an immovable stone. *Do you believe in the gospel?... "that (Jesus) was buried..."*

There are some folks who don't. Doubters suggest that Jesus didn't really die. He fainted or *swooned*.

Everyone thought He was dead, but when they laid His body in the cold tomb the chilly air revived Him.

Islam was an early perpetrator of this falsehood. The Koran suggests Jesus pretended to be dead. *He faked His own death...* Other people have suggested Jesus was drugged, and just appeared as if He were dead.

Again, this all flies in the face of the facts...

You tell me, how does a man endure the trauma of torture by professional executioners, who's job it was to kill - suffer severe blood loss, a ruptured heart, the suffocation of burial - to awake three days later, free himself from the shroud and spices, walk on impaled feet, pop His shoulders back into joint, tack up His internal organs - and then with heavily damaged hands move a two-ton stone, fight trained Roman troops, and still be in a such shape as to impress His disciples?

If you believe that, I've got some beachfront property in Arizona I'll sell you! It takes more faith to believe Jesus didn't die and rise again, than to believe He did!

Here's the gospel, "*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures...*"

Several OT passages predicted Jesus' resurrection.

One of the clearest is Psalm 16:10. It's a messianic prophecy, "*For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.*" Jesus' body was not allowed to decay in the grave. The same body that was crucified was resurrected to new life.

Several OT passages even specify, "*the third day.*" It's mentioned metaphorically at least three times...

**First is Jonah** - as a type of Christ he was three days and three nights in the belly of a fish, just as Jesus was three days and three nights in the heart of the earth...

**Second is the feast of firstfruits** which occurred three days after Passover. *Firstfruits* was an offering of the initial gleanings of the spring harvest. And God raised Jesus from the dead on this very day. Jesus' resurrection was literally the fulfillment of this OT feast.

Then **third**, three days elapsed from the time Abraham committed to sacrifice his son, Isaac, on top of Mount Moriah, until God delivered the boy. Metaphorically, Isaac rose the third day, as did Jesus.

Realize, the gospel states, not just that Jesus rose again... but "*that He rose again the third day...*"

This treats the resurrection of Jesus not as a general, common event among redeemed humanity.

You can't say, "Sure, God will raise Jesus again at the end of the age with all the other righteous..." No, Jesus' resurrection was unique in the affairs of men.

Throughout His ministry Jesus told His disciples not just that He would rise, but He would do so on "*the third day.*" Jesus *picked His day. He called His shot.*

It testified to Jesus' mastery over death. *Here's the gospel: Jesus is Lord of life, He rose on **the third day!***

And what Scripture predicted, history affirmed. In the next few verses, Paul refers to the numerous eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection... Verse 5 begins, "**And that He was seen by Cephas (that is, Peter)...**"

Before, Peter's recommissioning on the beach, the Lord met him personally. *And what a moment that was!*

Peter was the disciple who turned chicken before the rooster crowed. After boasting He would never deny His Lord, he did so in front of a campfire girl, no less.

Peter was so broken - so ashamed and guilt-ridden - the Bible says He "**went out and wept bitterly.**"

What did a *victorious Christ* say to a *defeated Peter* in their first meeting after Peter's flop? *We don't know.*

*The dialogue was private.* But we can infer by his response... He went from *disgraced* to *champion of grace*. Jesus must've reminded Peter what He wants to tell us - **our failures are never final.** No matter how hard we've fallen, He has grace that'll help us get back up!

Afterwards Jesus was seen “by the twelve.”

Peter wasn't the only disciple to betray Jesus, *what about the others?* In the Garden of Gethsemane they all tucked tale and ran. None of them stood with Jesus.

Yet the risen Lord's first words to them were, “Peace be with you.” He replaced *their shame* with *His peace*.

Remember, the first attempt by Jesus' enemies to discredit His resurrection was to spread rumors that the disciples stole the body while the guards slept.

Jewish priests paid off the guards to spread the lie, *but it was flawed from the outset*. First, if the guards were asleep, how did they know the disciples stole the body? *The whole spiel was a whopper of a lie!*

A Roman legionnaire was a fighting machine. He would lose his life for botching such an assignment. No way would he fall asleep... And less likely would the disciples attempt a body snatching. They didn't want to fight the guards who came to take Jesus when He was alive, do you think they'd risk their necks now that they thought He was dead? The disciples were cowards.

And even if they had stolen the body, and concocted this ruse, what possibly would've been the disciples' motive? Because of their allegiance to Jesus they lived out their days poor and persecuted - not fat and happy.

Peter was crucified in Rome on an upside-down cross... Thomas preached in India and was impaled on a spear... Andrew was crucified on an X-shaped cross... Bartholomew was skinned-alive in Armenia...

All the disciples, except John, died for the gospel. And the emperor tried to kill John. He had the apostle boiled in oil. Miraculously he survived. God spared him.

Here's the point, a person might lie for money, or for fame, but no one submits to torture and death for what they know to be a hoax. If the twelve said they saw Jesus alive, they had no reason to lie or foster a con.

Paul continues, “After that He was seen by over 500 brethren at once...” Subpoena 500 witnesses and give each person just ten minutes on the witness stand, and their collective testimony would add up to 83 hours.

If just two or three eyewitnesses have corroborating stories it sends a man to jail. The resurrection's day in court would've prove the most lopsided trial in history.

Yet still you often hear the skeptics try to explain away the resurrection as wishful thinking...The disciples had a vivid imagination. They just saw what they wanted to see... It was all a mere hallucination.

*But this is preposterous!* For one, hallucinations occur only if there's prior anticipation. In the case of the disciples these men had no expectation of a risen Lord.

In fact, they even doubted the first reports that He was alive. When the women came with the news, Peter and John had to run to the tomb to see for themselves.

Recall Thomas refused to believe until He saw with his very own eyes the scars in Jesus' hands and side.

The fact, Jesus was seen *“by over 500 brethren at once”* eliminated any possibility that their Jesus-sighting was the figment of someone’s imagination.

Hallucinations are private phenomena.

Hundreds of folk are never simultaneously deluded. Mass sightings rule out illusions, and apparitions.

And of these 500 eyewitnesses, Paul adds, *“of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.”* Many of these witnesses were still alive.

1 Corinthians was one of the earliest NT letters written - around 57 AD, just 25 years after Jesus’ resurrection. Many of the eyewitnesses were still accessible... Paul is saying if you don’t believe me; then do your own investigation. Check it out yourself.

And if any of the Corinthians had asked, Paul would have gladly given them the names and addresses.

Realize this is what sets Christianity apart from all other religions. It’s what the historians call *“Falsifiable.”* It can be verified or refuted based on the evidence.

Our salvation was born in real-life time and space.

Philosophies, metaphysical beliefs, vague promises of the afterlife can all hide behind subjective criteria.

*Who can argue with an experience, or a promise?*

Say you worship azalea bushes... You pray to *The Great Azalea* in your yard. You chant, *“Life is more colorful since I trusted in you, Oh Great Azalea.”* I think you’re a *blooming idiot*, but it’s my word against yours.

Christianity though doesn't hinge on metaphysical boasts. If Jesus' resurrection had been a lie, or the fanciful tale of ecstatic followers, or even a carefully crafted ruse... His claims would've been easily refuted.

Jesus had plenty of enemies (*Jews and Romans*) with the wherewithal to search out the corpse. All His enemies had to do was produce His body, and Christianity was dead in its tracks. It would've vanished in a few days. But they couldn't, for Jesus had risen!

Verse 7 adds to the list of eyewitnesses another famous name, **“After that He was seen by James...”**

This was the Lord's half-brother. Jesus and James ate at the same table - played in the same sandbox.

Imagine, James growing up in the shadow of His big brother. That would be tough enough, but a proud James just couldn't accept that his brother was God.

That is until the risen Christ **“was seen by James...”** Jesus' resurrection changed everything for his brother.

After He rose from the dead, Jesus' identity was now undeniable. James had to admit, that *his brother* was the *Son of God*. All Jesus' siblings willingly bowed...

Verse 7 ends, **“then by all the apostles...”** The last sighting of the risen Lord Jesus by His own disciples occurred on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem.

**“All the apostles”** watched Him ascend to heaven. **And the ascension is also an ingredient of the gospel!**

The fact God received the Savior back to heaven was proof that He had done His Father's will, and had accomplish that for which He was sent - *our salvation*.

And while we're talking about first century witnesses of the resurrection, Paul's list is far from exhaustive. And it isn't just the NT writers that lend their voice...

There were secular sources at the time that did the same. Romans named [Tacitus](#), [Pliny the Younger](#) - the historian [Suetonius](#) - even the [Jewish Talmud](#) made reference to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

Josephus was a Jew on the Roman payroll - the emperor's historian. And Josephus wrote of Jesus, "[for he appeared to them alive again the third day...](#)"

Thomas Arnold, former professor of history at Oxford University, sums it up, "[No one fact in the history of mankind is proved by better and fuller evidence... than the fact that "Christ died and rose from the dead."](#)"

Verse 8 mentions one more eyewitness of the risen Christ, who testifies powerfully on the **impact** the experience had on his life. Paul speaks of himself...

["Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time."](#) Several years after Jesus had ascended to heaven, the risen Lord made a separate, special, post-resurrection appearance to Paul.

Before he was Paul - Saul persecuted the Church. He was an angry rabbi who hated all things Jesus. He was on his way to Damascus to stamp out Christians.

*Until the Lord intercepted him.* A bright light knocked Saul off his high horse. He was humbled. He repented. Christianity's *persecutor* became its *preacher*.

I believe God intended for Paul to be one of the twelve apostles. He just joined the band a little late.

**Pete Best** was the original drummer for the Beatles. But when you think of the Beatles it ain't, "**John, Paul, George, and Pete.**" It's **Ringo!** Everybody considers Ringo Star the fourth Beatle. Likewise, Paul was one of the 12 apostles - *he just got to the party a little late!*

As He says, "***As one born out of due time.***"

And Paul talks about his apostleship. "***For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.***"

You could make a case Paul was the most influential of all the apostles, but that's now how he saw himself.

He considered himself "***the least of the apostles***" - "***not (even) worthy to be called an apostle.***" Paul was ashamed of *what he'd done* and of *who he'd been*. He was just grateful for God's grace and for the gospel.

It's interesting, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in 57 AD, and here he calls himself, "***the least of the apostles.***"

Paul wrote to the Ephesians three years later, in 60 AD, and he called himself, "***the least of all the saints.***"

Five years after that, in 65 AD - when he wrote 1 Timothy, he referred to himself as "***the chief of sinners.***"

Apparently, the longer Paul walked with Jesus the lower an estimation he had of himself. **Jesus increased and Paul decreased.** And this should be true of us, the more we know Jesus - the more conscious we are of His glory - the smaller we'll be in our own eyes.

Paul has talked about the **importance** of the gospel, the **ingredients** of the gospel, and now in verse 10 he discusses the **impact** of the gospel on his own life. **The grace that saved him is the grace that changed him...**

Verse 10, **"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."** Paul was a poster child for God's grace! He ended up gripped by amazing grace.

The good news Paul received had produced *free favor, free forgiveness, free blessing* - and Paul spent the rest of his days finding ways to say thanks to God.

The grace that Paul received was not in vain. It had motivated him *to risk more - to love bigger - go farther - last longer - do greater* than all the other apostles.

**People today take pride in being a self-made man. Paul rejoiced that he was a grace-made man.** All that he accomplished for Christ he chalked up to grace!

I've often said, **"I'm hanging by a slender thread called 'grace,' but the longer I do, the more I learn that God's grace is stronger than a thousand ropes."**

Paul's life was proof - **the grace that saves us, and the grace in which we stand, is also the grace that changes us.** God's grace is effectual. It works in us.

You can't experience the grace of God and remain the same. The grace and gospel of Jesus doesn't just effect how *we believe*. It also impacts how *we behave*.

Paul closes verse 11, "**Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.**" The gospel Paul, and the other apostles preached, was powerful.

I've heard it said, "**The Gospel faithfully preached, meddles with everything else on Earth.**" The gospel turned Paul's life upside-down. It turned the believers in Corinth upside-down. It'll turn your life upside-down.

Perhaps you embraced the gospel as a child, but since then, somewhere on the path, you dropped it...

Maybe you've heard it numerous times throughout the years, but always considered it a thing "*for later*"...

Could be, you've even *flirted* with the gospel...

Whatever the case, you've stopped short of fully embracing it and holding to it with unflinching faith.

Let's remember what Paul tells us in this passage. The gospel, **its importance, its impact, its ingredients**...

The gospel is vitally **important!** No other invitation compares. And it's not only important how we start in the gospel - even more so, it's important how we finish.

*Faith at first* can end up *faith in vain*. Don't fumble away the gospel before you get into the end zone...

*And the gospel that saves us is the Gospel that changes us. It **impacts** our *belief*, and our *behavior*.*

Finally, let's get back to basics - to the **ingredients** of the gospel. Our success depends on our adherence to the fundamentals. *Are you certain of these truths?*

*“Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture, & that He was buried, & that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen...”*

*If you've never prayed to receive the gospel, or if you want to renew your commitment to the gospel...*

*Today, I want to give you an opportunity... We'll bow our heads, I'll pray a prayer, and you repeat after me...*