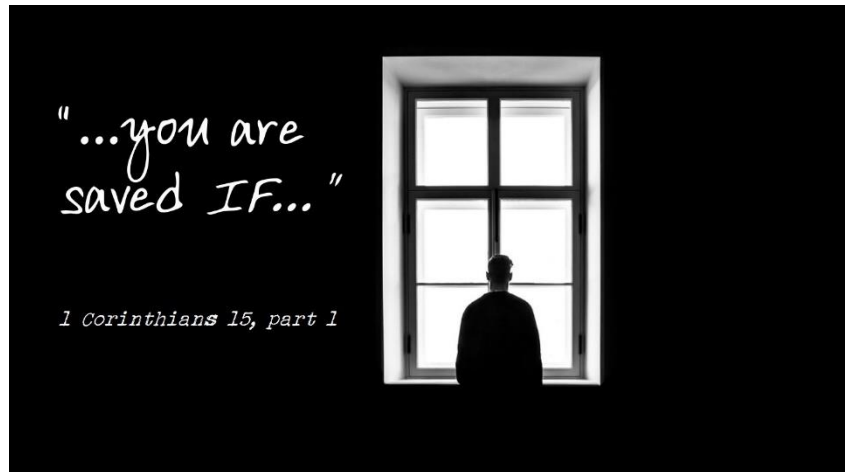


“...you are saved *if...*”

- 1 Corinthians 15, Part 1-

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**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, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 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. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy 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; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. 11 Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.*

Today we begin what many call the “Great Resurrection Chapter.” First Corinthians 15 is undoubtedly the climax of this whole book...this whole letter Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. The letter in its totality was written because subtle but serious doctrinal problems had crept into the Corinthian local church. They had allowed the world to begin to dictate their beliefs and thus dictate their practices. We must understand that doctrinal issues are not problematic simply because they are educational or philosophical errors, but because such errors cause *behavioral and life practice errors*. Meaning when we do not understand and embrace scripture and its practicum, then we make living mistakes and ultimately misrepresent God and the faith and even shame the very kingdom we say we represent. Like today, the church in Corinth had begun to fudge the absolute truth and had begun to take on attributes of the carnal and secular around them. What they wanted to embrace as grace had effectively become apostasy, which then began to corrupt their lives and certainly their witness.

Throughout the past 14 chapters Paul had been teaching the practical aspects of living the faith to this church in Corinth. There were no theological bombshells or any doctrinal position that could be scripturally debated or argued. Everything, it seemed, was supported and practiced by those before him, *including Christ Himself*. What Paul would now do in the final chapters of his letter would be to bring it all down to the “bottom line” and essentially declare the “why” in all he had said thus far. In other words, Paul had spoken for 14 chapters on how to live out the gospel presented here in chapter 15. His point was that the gospel had to be more than a religious position...more than philosophical fodder. *The* gospel was and is more than the good news of Christ and His resurrection, the promise of our subsequent salvation, and the eternal life which awaits us all, *however wonderful all that is*. It is a powerful dynamic in and unto itself with self-actuating capacity. Meaning its very innate makeup carries certain “actions-reactions” for our lives, relationships, and overall success in living. Therefore this “good news” was, *and is*, only real *and realized* in the lives of the truly born again...not merely the church goer or the intellectual adherent. If one really possesses and embraces the gospel, then such will profoundly and dramatically and continually and forever change a persons living and his or her priorities.

Paul seemed to have a real understanding and discernment when it came to the hearts of men. Sometimes that

can be a good thing, and sometimes it can be incredibly discouraging. Because as men (and women), we have a way of forgetting our roots, where we came from, how blessed we were in the journey we traveled, and what we once were before Christ and our brothers and sisters entered our lives. Not only does that then hold the potential for decisions which result in a painful life, but also pain for all of us to watch play out in the lives of others that we love. In our blindness we then easily forget where we're going and what our present and future journeys should encompass. Without the gospel embrace and the subsequent Holy Spirit indwelling, we going to create a lot of pain...for ourselves and for those around us.

The city of Corinth was renowned for its pagan leanings. It was the center of Epicurean philosophy, which stated that there is no after-life so therefore man should just eat, drink, and be merry. As is often the case, that world had "leaked" into the church. They, like so many church people today, wanted some *parts* of the Christian dynamic, but wanted to arbitrarily discount the other parts that did not suit them...that did not "fit their lifestyle." I have witnessed this innumerable times over my years of ministry. People will often come in here to this fellowship and are wow'd by its dynamic community and manifest energy, yet as they learn what the cost is to participate and benefit from that dynamic they are forced to decide: *are they truly a cross redeemed slave of Christ that now belongs wholly to Christ and kingdom...in every way...in their total practical living? Or are they seeking the illusive "half way" compromise that will provide them all the benefits of a vigorous Christian community but without the "all-in" expense of true "died-to-this-world" Christian experience.* However, the fact remains that scripture is a unit, sown together in perfection and completion, and it cannot be broken down into individual elements. Christianity is not a buffet line. Paul is now going to now remind them that this is a "package deal."

**15:1-2** *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.*

We have here before us one of the most important words in the Bible because it speaks directly to our responsibility to God. Most promises in the Bible have conditions and the word 'if' speaks to those conditions. It is a little word which changes the course of our lives and can ultimately determine our eternity. Our responses to God's commands affect our relationship with Him and determine our receiving from Him. In our day we have so embraced the concept of grace that we have come to believe that grace even covers our "no's"...our rejections along the way of God's covenants and commands and our hard hearts toward His calling and directions.

Jesus used the word 'if' all the time. Almost half of the 574 occurrences in the New Testament are in the four Gospels. Jesus always put the 'if' on man's side and never on God's side. God does what He says He will do, and never lies. We on the other hand are often not so faithful. Let's look at a few of the scriptural "IF" verses...

*See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I am commanding you today; and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known. Deuteronomy 11:26, 27, 28, and 13:18, 15:5*

*If you will fear the LORD and serve Him, and listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the LORD, then both you and also the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God. If you will not listen to the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the command of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you, as it was against your fathers. – I Samuel 12:14, 15*

*If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name," says the LORD of hosts, "then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed*

them already, because you are not taking it to heart. – Malachi 2:2

**If** your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; **if** he listens to you, you have won your brother. But **if** he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED**. **If** he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and **if** he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. – Matthew 18:15, 16, 17

**If** you consent and obey, You will eat the best of the land; – Isaiah 1:19

**If** anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. – II Thessalonians 3:14

But from there you will seek the **LORD** your God, and you will find Him **if** you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. – Deuteronomy 4:29

The Lord will not hear me **if** I hold on to sin in my heart.; – Psalms 66:18

Test yourselves to see **if** you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? – II Corinthians 13:5

But my righteous one shall live by faith; and **if** he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. Hebrews 10:38

Even so faith, **if** it has no works, is dead, being by itself. – James 2:17

So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “**If** you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; – John 8:31

“**If** you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. – John 15:7

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “**If** anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. – Matthew 16:24

Jesus answered and said to him, “**If** anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. – John 14:23

Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, **if** we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. Heb 4:6

For we have become partakers of Christ **if** we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, Heb 3:14

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—**if** indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and **are not moved away** from the hope of the gospel which you heard... Col 1:21 - 23

Paul declares, or makes known the good news to the people in Corinth. He reminds them that this is not something new, but something he had told them before. He knew, sadly, that people forget.

**Re 3:3** "Remember therefore how you have received and heard..."

**Re 2:5** "Remember therefore from where you have fallen..."

**Jude 1:17** "But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before..."

**2Th 2:5** “Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?”

**1Co 11:2** Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.

Paul lays out here in Chapter 15 the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is that gospel we believe on and on which we make our life stand. It is what Jesus did that saves us, however here is a very critical piece of the story; **“if” we hold fast that word. If** we continue in the gospel which we have received. In that gospel that we are to hold onto is attributes of faithful continuance, total truth and no lies, absolute surrender of our lives and daily living to Him and His kingdom pursuits. We can debate the doctrines of Arminianism and Calvinism, as well as the issue of eternal security forever, but we cannot argue that this is clearly what the scripture says here: *We are saved only IF we continue in the Word and do not hold onto sin.* Clearly we are not saying that when a person stumbles in sin he is out of the club, or none of us would be saved! However scripture is telling us when we sin and refuse to repent and refuse to fight to get out of that sin, we break communion with God and ultimately speak to the reality that we have **not** been transformed into the image of Christ, because the fact is that Jesus would never live in sin.

Scripture clearly teaches the necessity of the practice of repentance. Repentance is the act of changing one’s **mind** and one’s **acts** accordingly, **and we must hear this**... in such lies a verbal and lifestyle affirmation as to the authenticity of that repentance. If there is no actual **action** in that repentance, there is then no actual forgiveness nor restoration of one’s standing with Christ. Once again, if such is possible for an individual...if that is a reality in one’s life... if a person can let that sin stand, and merely profess verbal sorrow as to the act, then that person has not been transformed into the image of Christ.

Paul says that these are those who have “...*believed in vain.*” In context, this refers to those who attempt to chop up the gospel, to reinvent Christianity in their own image. The text tells us we are saved *if* we hold fast the Word. All of it.

Letting scripture be its own commentary, we are to take this verse in light of all scripture relating to this issue. The statement in its literal position is true. Yet in the whole context of scripture, believing that one can truly *be* saved and then lose that standing, would be the rejection of multiple passages that speak to the contrary. Therefore the only position that one is left with is that such a person...no matter how long they sat in church or what good works they did, *was never reborn in the first place.*

The gospel will lead us to salvation, and if we are indeed reborn, we will hold fast to its truth. If we are willing to reject, water down, or corrupt the gospel and truly *any of scripture*, it only proves we were never transformed (metamorphosis), to begin with. We would be merely a weed growing in the wheat. See Matt 13:24-43! It often takes some time to recognize, but eventually such *will* manifest itself. Such a one is still caterpillar, never a butterfly.

**15:3-8** *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.*

Paul lays out the gospel here in its pure and simple form. Jesus was crucified for our sins according to prophecy, was buried, and rose again on the third day. A multitude of witnesses testify that He was resurrected and lives today, of which I am one.

Please notice the details in this passage:

1) Christ died for *our* sins. Never forget this. He was purely innocent. It was *us*. We did this. In the end it was not the Romans, the religious powers, or the Jewish mob. It was us. We deserved the penalty. He paid it.

2) That event was prophesied/predicted long before that day in Jerusalem. See Isaiah 53 and Psalms 16 for details.

3) We see that afterwards Christ appeared to *Peter* of all people! Yes, the very one who denied Him! He denied Jesus not just once, but three times. Yet in a timeless message of God's grace, Christ, who could have appeared to the kings and rulers of the world as testament of His resurrection, chose instead to come to a simple man...a *simply disciple/follower*. Peter was an uneducated, blue-collar fisherman who had chosen out of fear, to save his own skin at the price of the murder of His friend and Savior. Yet, He still came to *Peter*. And He no doubt did so, because Peter *repented*. Not because Peter was *sorry*. After all, Judas was *sorry*, and he was eternally lost. Peter did not merely in prayer tell God He was sorry for His act. He dealt with Christ personally and horizontally as to the matter of his sin against Him.

4) He appeared to over 500 people at one time. That's hard to dispute. Paul says, "Hey, some of those people are dead now, but a lot of them are still with us, so if you dispute what I am saying, you can go ask them yourself." That was a dangerous gamble if he was lying! Among the many irrefutable proofs of the resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ that even serious non-Christians are forced to contend with is the testimony of Flavius Josephus, first-century secular/non-Christian Jewish historian and eyewitness to the remarkable fulfillment of Our Savior's prophesies. He wrote "*when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross; those that loved him at the first did not forsake him. For he appeared to them alive again, the third day: as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.*"

5) Lastly, Paul brings himself into the picture (as we all do ultimately) saying even *he* is a testimony that Christ lives again. Each of us, His true born-again children, testify to a lost and dying world that He lives. We are "*To those who are perishing...a fearful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved we are a life-giving perfume.*" 2Co 2:16

**15:9-11** *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.*

Paul reminds them, and us, that in reality, he should have been last on the Lord's list. Paul was uniquely the right person to remind the believers in Corinth of where they had come from. To say he wasn't worthy was an understatement, and he knew it. He was nowhere near neutral! He had actually **worked** for the other side. He persecuted the believers, and even had a lot of them killed.

Paul knew he was the living embodiment of God's grace. When you come as far as he had, it's hard to forget where you came from, and it would have been an astronomical disgrace had he done so. It was out of the depths of thankfulness that he would preach. Truly those who are the greatest recipients of God's grace seem to make the best witnesses for Christ. Mostly because, like Paul, it's harder for us to forget.

Paul's bestowed grace was not solely some "feel good" gift from God. It had *effect*. The grace given him was not "in vain." I wonder how many of us can say that we have been so affected? Grace caused Paul to **labor** for the kingdom of God! This was not a get tough attribute in Paul. Rather, it was the effect of the very real presence of God's grace in active reality in his life. It was the actual **proof** that Paul had indeed been a recipient of God's gift of grace.