

## 1 Corinthians 15:1–11 and Gospel-focused Living

### Prayer

### Introductory Questions

- What is the gospel? Why is it one of the most important terms in the Bible?
- Why do so many Christians struggle to define it?

### Overview of the Lesson

This lesson focuses on the gospel of Jesus Christ—the good news that he died and God raised him from the dead to save sinners. By way of a metaphor, the gospel is a tower of light that shines down on human history. God declares this good news through the darkness of our sin and separation from him: “I will save my people!” The heart of the gospel is the good news of Jesus’s death and resurrection, yet the broader concept of the gospel stretches from God’s first promise of salvation to the renewal of creation (Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 54–58).

- **Shaft of Light #1—The Good News of God’s Salvation in the Old Testament:** The Old Testament announced the salvation of God on behalf of his people, and it pointed forward to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 40:9–11; 52:7–53:12 (cf. Rom. 10:15); 61:1–3; Nah. 1:15; Luke 24:44–46; Gal. 3:8).
- **Shaft of Light #2—The Good News of Jesus’s Appearance—including His Arrival on Earth, His Inauguration of God’s Kingdom, and His Ministry before the Cross:** God intervened in the world through the person, words, and works of Jesus, who announced and ushered in God’s kingdom (Mark 1:15; Luke 2:10; 4:18, 43).
- **Shaft of Light #3—The Good News of Jesus’s Death and Resurrection:** This is the blazing center of the tower of light—the very heart of God’s intervention into the world to save sinners (Acts 3:15; 4:10; 13:26–37; Rom. 4:23–25; 1 Cor. 15:1–11).
- **Shaft of Light #4—The Good News of Jesus’s Ascension and Reign at the Right Hand of God:** Jesus’s death and resurrection flowed seamlessly into his ascension to the right hand of God, where he reigns over all (Acts 8:12; 10:36; Eph. 1:20–23).
- **Shaft of Light #5—The Good News of Jesus’s Final Salvation of His People and Eternal Life with God:** When Jesus returns, he will vindicate his people and renew all of creation, thereby completing the work God gave him (1 Cor. 15:24–26; Rev. 21–22).

We organize 1 Corinthians 15:1–11 into four main sections: (1) The Centrality of the Gospel (vv. 1–2), (2) The Content of the Gospel (vv. 3–4), (3) The Witnesses to the Gospel (vv. 5–8), and (4) The Grace of the Gospel (vv. 9–11). We conclude this lesson by summarizing the nature of Gospel-focused living.

## 1. The Centrality of the Gospel

1 Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel I preached to you, which you received, on which you have taken your stand 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold to the message I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. (1 Cor. 15:1–2)

Paul clarifies these truths about the gospel—truths of eternal significance:

- The gospel must be “preached,” proclaimed, heralded—not simply *explained* or *discussed* with others (v. 1; cf. Rom. 1:15; 1 Cor. 1:17).
- The gospel must be “received” by trusting in Jesus—not simply acknowledged in our heads (vv. 1–2; cf. Rom. 1:16; Gal. 1:9).
- The gospel is the truth on which we “stand” together, particularly in light of the world’s hostility to its message (v. 1; cf. 1 Cor. 15:58; Phil. 1:27).
- The gospel saved (delivered) us in the past, but it is also how we “are being saved” in the present and how we will be saved in the future (v. 2; cf. Eph. 2:8; Mark 13:13).
- The gospel must be grasped firmly throughout our lives: we must persevere in our faith in Jesus and his gospel. Otherwise, we believed in vain (v. 2; cf. Col. 1:23; Heb. 3:14).

- The gospel must be (1) proclaimed, (2) explained, AND (3) discussed. Explain each.
- What strategies can we use to persevere in (and not fall away from) our faith?

## 2. The Content of the Gospel

3 For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: 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. (1 Cor. 15:3–4)

In Greek, the noun gospel (v. 1) means “good news,” while the verbal forms mean “to proclaim or herald good news.” Paul passed on to the Corinthians the good news that he received directly from Jesus (v. 3; cf. Gal. 1:11–12). The content of the gospel is that Christ (the Messiah) died to atone for sins according to the Scriptures, he was buried, and he was raised on the third day, also according to the Scriptures (vv. 3–4; cf. Isa. 52:7–53:12; Hos. 6:2; Jonah 1:17). These are core truths of the faith—truths of first importance (v. 3).

- Why does Paul view the gospel as “most important” (of first importance)?
- How can we keep the gospel central and not “graduate” (move on) to seemingly more important truths or approaches to ministry?

### 3. The Witnesses to the Gospel

5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. 6 Then he appeared to over five hundred brothers and sisters at one time; most of them are still alive, but some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one born at the wrong time, he also appeared to me. (1 Cor. 15:5–8)

Jesus's death and resurrection are historical realities. We read repeatedly in Scripture that the apostles "witnessed" Jesus's death and resurrection (Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32). So here in 1 Corinthians 15: the resurrected Jesus appeared to Cephas (Peter), the twelve disciples (including Matthias), over five hundred believers at one time (most of whom were still alive when Paul wrote to the Corinthians), James (the Lord's brother), "all" the apostles (not simply the twelve), and, last of all, to Paul (Matt. 28:16–20; Luke 24:36–43; John 20:19–29; Acts 9:1–9). The Christian faith is not based on *the witnesses to Jesus's death and resurrection*; it is based on *the historical reality of Jesus's death and resurrection*. Those individuals verified the truth with their eyes, ears, and hands (1 John 1:1–3).

- What does it mean that Jesus said to the apostles "you will be *my witnesses*" (Acts 1:8)?
- How is our witnessing *similar to* and *different from* theirs?

### 4. The Grace of the Gospel

9 For I am the least of the apostles, 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. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. 11 Whether, then, it is I or they, so we proclaim and so you have believed. (1 Cor. 15:9–11)

The gospel is a historical reality, but it is much more than that. The gospel is *the power to save God's people* from judgment and into a relationship with him (Rom. 1:16; 5:8–11), even the most unworthy sinners (1 Cor. 15:9). The gospel also *transforms and empowers God's people* to be like Christ and do his work (v. 10; cf. Rom. 6:3–4; Gal. 2:20). Whether Paul or others preach the gospel, what ultimately matters is that the gospel is preached—leading to belief and transformed living (v. 11) (Naselli, *ESV Expository Commentary, Vol. 10*, 373).

- What are examples of why you are unworthy to receive eternal life?
- What evidence of gospel transformation (death to sin and new life with Christ) do you see in your life? What evidence of gospel transformation do you see in others?

## Sound Doctrine: Gospel-focused Living

The gospel is a historical reality: Jesus died and God raised him from the dead. But the gospel is also a living, dynamic reality in our lives, from the moment we first believed and then continuing throughout eternity. How should we *respond to* and *live by* the gospel?

1. **We see the gospel.** We cannot cherish and trust in something we cannot see. Satan's primary goal with non-Christians is "to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). Seeing the gospel, which contains and displays the glory of Christ, is essential for responding to it appropriately.
2. **We first come to God through the gospel.** The death and resurrection of Jesus is the only bridge to God. We cross that bridge through *repentance* (turning from sins) and *trust in Jesus* (Mark 1:15; Acts 2:38; 20:21). That is how we receive the gospel's saving benefits.
3. **We return to God through the gospel.** All of us sin, despite our best intentions. When we do, the gospel makes it possible for us to return to God—also through repentance and trust in Jesus (Heb. 10:19–23; 1 John 2:1–2; Rev. 2:5). The gospel creates the only way *to God* and the only way *back to God*.
4. **We are transformed by the gospel.** When we became Christians, we died with Christ and were raised with Christ (Rom. 6:3–4; Eph. 2:4–6). But until we are with Jesus, God enables us to progressively die to our self-centered ways and progressively participate in the resurrection life God outlines for us in Scripture (Rom. 6:4; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:10; 1 John 3:2–3).
5. **We witness to the gospel.** No one who is alive on earth *witnessed* Jesus die and rise from the dead. In that sense of the word, we are not firsthand witnesses. However, we do witness: we give testimony to the fact that Jesus died and rose from the dead. This is the heart of the mission Jesus gave us to do, even if it costs us our lives (Acts 1:8; Rev. 2:13).
6. **We hope because of the gospel.** Hope is a future-oriented faith in God and the promises that he will fulfill (Rom. 8:18–27; 1 Tim. 1:1; Heb. 11:1). Because Jesus died and rose from the dead, we are assured that we, too, will be raised from the dead and live with God forever—for all who trust in him (Acts 24:15; 1 Cor. 15:12–34; 1 Pet. 1:3).
7. **We worship because of the gospel.** We praise God for who is (Ps. 69:30; Rev. 5:12–13), but we also praise God for what he has done, such as creating the universe (Ps. 148:5; Rev. 4:11). Like the angels of heaven, we worship Jesus for what he did: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, *because you were slain, and you purchased people for God by your blood* from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9).

- What questions or comments do you have about this lesson?
- Identify and explain one or more ways that you plan to be more Gospel-focused in your character, marriage, parenting, neighborhood, and/or work.

## Prayer