

"Our # 1 Priority"

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Perhaps the word in this passage that we give very little attention to but speaks volumes is the first word "**now**". Since Ch. 7:1 Paul has been answering questions the Corinthians asked Paul in a letter they sent to him that no longer exists. 7:1 showed this when Paul said,

Now for the matters you wrote about

And he addresses questions about marriage. Then

Now about food sacrificed to idols:

From 8:1 through the end of 11:2 and then in 11:3

³ **Now** I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

Where he talks about head coverings in worship and then in v.17 he challenges them about communion issues. And one more now starting in Ch. 12:1

Now about spiritual gifts

Which lasts until the end of Ch. 14. And so here in Ch. 15 it's like Paul's saying, now let's get back to what I want to talk about which I began back in Ch. 1. Paul began the letter thanking God for the Corinthians, commending them for their giftedness and growth but confronting them with their divisions, especially about bible teachers. Paul said in 1:13

¹³ *Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?* ¹⁴ *I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius,* ¹⁵ *so no one can say that you were baptized into my name.* ¹⁶ *(Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.)* ¹⁷ *For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*

This is what Paul wanted to talk about because then he goes on,

¹⁸ *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* ¹⁹ *For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."* ²⁰ *Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?* ²¹ *For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.* ²² *Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom,* ²³ *but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,* ²⁴ *but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* ²⁵ *For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.*

And it's a good reminder for us too that we can get caught up in spiritual discussions about preferences and theological differences – like the Corinthians - that we forget what's our number 1 priority. The gospel. So Paul reminds us

Don't Lose Focus of the Gospel **(15:1-2)**

Now I make known to you, brothers and sisters, the gospel which I preached to you, which you also received, in which you also stand, ² by which you also are saved, if you hold firmly to the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

I purposely read from the NASB because it and the ESV leave it as it should be – one sentence – and captures the sequential flow brilliantly. Paul brings the church back to the core of what unites them together, the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no hint in the letters that they have departed in any way from the gospel – unlike the Galatians – but in their zeal for spiritual gifts and trying to prove which of them has God's approval based on their theological and personal preferences, they were losing focus of what unites them. The gospel of Jesus Christ. Why does he bring them back to these core truths?

The gospel saves you (v.1-2a)

Notice the sequence: Paul preached the gospel in the past, they received it, and are taking their stand on it. The verb for you stand means you made an original stance (accepted the gospel) and you are continuing to maintain that stance and are saved. Not "were saved" as if salvation is something that happened to you only in the past. Back in 1:18 we read,

¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

We are saved when we believe in the gospel which is the good news that Jesus Christ paid the debt for our sins on the cross and rose from the dead proving we too will have victory over death itself one day. When we receive the payment Jesus made for us, our sin debt is wiped out and the penalty of sin (separation from God forever) is wiped out. Faith in Jesus is what saves us. But because we are not free from our sin nature yet [since we haven't died] we are being saved because God keeps us saved. Listen to 1 Pet. 1:3

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

We greatly rejoice in the good news of the gospel because we still experience the bad news that comes with living in a sin-infected world. God keeps us saved and we take our stance in this gospel, which guarantees what God has promised, even when we may not feel saved and kept by God. We're saved by faith and we live by faith. And

The gospel sustains you (v.2b)

, ² by which you also are saved, if you hold firmly to the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

Makes it sound like we have to work for our salvation. No, we are saved by faith which we must continue to maintain that faith because we want to live this trusting-in-the-God-who-saves-us life. The proof of our salvation is evidenced in the fruit of how we live. Remember back in the parable of the soils that Jesus told about the reactions to the gospel.

Matt. 13:20 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."

Challenges to our faith will come. Proof of our salvation is endurance not a one-time decision with no changed life. In Matt. 7:21 Jesus says

²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

What's God's will? To believe by faith and live by faith in the gospel of Jesus that you are saved, are being saved and will be saved. People don't know this. We have to keep this our priority because like the people Jesus spoke about here, many will similarly say 'I went to church, I was a good person, I did more good things than bad'. All are commendable but we're not saved on a bell curve. We're not saved by performance or any other human standard of measurement. If we want to go to God's heaven we have to get there by God's standards. And that's believing He loves you so much He sent His Son Jesus to die for your sins, and was buried and rose again. Which is now what Paul goes over. He gives us a

Gospel Refresher **(15:3-8)**

The gospel is of "first importance". It takes precedence over other things that are also important but not on the same level. Paul gives us the basic facts but also the proof of those facts. Paul received this Himself from Jesus and now he was handing it down to others. It's not something he invented. It comes from God Himself;

that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

Christ is not Jesus' name. It's an Old Testament title referring to the prophesied Messiah who will one day rule from David's throne over the world. But first He had to die. And Jesus is the Christ,

God's Son died for our sins (v.3)

It was God's plan to save us by sending His Son to die for the sins of the world. The sacrificial system was the temporary solution to the forgiveness of sins based on the future ultimate human payment for sin, his own Son. Where is that written in the Scriptures?

Is. 53:4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. ⁵ 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. ⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

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.

The religious leaders believed God was punishing Jesus when in reality it was God's plan and Jesus willingly submitted to the Father's will so we could find forgiveness as He took on our punishment.

⁴ that he was buried,

Also 'according to the Scriptures. 'He was buried' is in the passive sense, meaning somebody did the burying. Why is it important that

People buried Jesus (v.4)

To show He really died. There are theories that Jesus fainted and that He was placed in the tomb and the cool air revived Him. Nonsense! The Roman guards attested to His death. His friends buried Him. They prepared spices for His body like they do for all the deceased. Is their Old Testament proof that Jesus would be buried?

Is. 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.

We know He was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy man (John 19:38-42). This is an important aspect of the gospel that we must not forget, Jesus had to die for our sins so that the power and presence of sin would one day completely die.

that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Again, "raised" is in the passive tense. Somebody did that to Jesus. Who?

God raised Jesus from the dead (v.4b)

For the sake of time here's a few references to God raising Jesus from the dead that you can look up later.

Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15, 26; 4:10; 10:40; Ro. 10:9; 1 Cor. 6:14

Where does it say Jesus would rise from the dead in the Old Testament?

Is. 53:10 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.

How can God 'prolong His days' once He's died? Who are His offspring? Us, God's children. "After the suffering of His soul He will see the light of life." In the Old Testament there are many references to God delivering Israel on the 3rd day but it was Jesus Himself who associated His resurrection on the 3rd day with Jonah's being in the fish 3 days. And Jesus Himself, the author of Scripture, prophesied He would rise on the 3rd day. (Luke 13:32; Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19).

But there are more witnesses to this too.

Hundreds saw Jesus alive (vv.5-8)

Jesus appeared to Peter, the 12 [i.e. the core apostles], a group of 500, His brother James and Paul of course. We're not told about His separate appearance to Peter or this 500 or His stepbrother James. Other references that we do know about, with the women especially are left out. Lots of proof Jesus actually rose from the dead and appeared alive many times over 40 days.

And Paul mentions Jesus' appearance to him to remind his readers and listeners,

The Gospel Can Change the Hardest Hearts **(15:9-11)**

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve 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 to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. ¹¹ Whether then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

The reference to himself as being one "abnormally born" or prematurely born, the implication being, he was disadvantaged. If God reaches out by grace and opens the heart and eyes of one who hated Christ followers, God can do that to anyone. Because the gospel has the power to change lives.

*Rom. 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the **gospel**, for it is the **power** of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

¹ Thes. 1:5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sakes.

With this reminder of the gospel, Paul brings the Corinthians back to basics and away from their pet peeves, preferences and issues. We can lose focus on the gospel when we get caught up in issues. Remember, people are lost without Christ, heading for a painful eternity without God. So we would be remiss if we didn't ask the most important questions about the gospel:

***Have we received the gospel?**

Have we admitted we are sinners, separated from God, without true hope in the world and unable to save ourselves?

Eph. 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Jesus died in our place for our sins so we don't have to pay for them for all eternity. Accept His payment and ask for forgiveness and receive Christ Himself.

Rom. 10:9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

And if we are saved

***Are we sharing the gospel?**

If it's of first importance we need to pray for and be ready for opportunities to share Jesus with friends, family, co-workers, teammates, neighbours ... Is it on our minds every-day or are we too busy pursuing good, earthly goals that distract us from the most important thing? Let's make sure the gospel is our number one priority.

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