

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 “The Importance of Remembering the Resurrection”**

Main Idea: In 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 we’re exhorted concerning the importance of remembering the resurrection of Christ. The text urges us to consider three things.

I. Consider the reminder of the resurrection (1-2).

- A. The gospel must be preached.
- B. The gospel must be received.
- C. The gospel must be cherished.

II. Consider the reality of the resurrection (3-8).

- A. Christ died (3).
 - 1. His death was for sinners.
 - 2. His death was according to the Scriptures.
 - 3. His death must be our priority concern.
- B. Christ was buried (4a).
- C. Christ was raised from the dead (4b).
 - 1. It was a historical event.
 - 2. It was a prophetic event.
- D. Christ appeared to witnesses (5-8).
 - 1. He took the initiative.
 - 2. He made Himself known to individuals and to groups.
 - 3. He wants people to know that He is alive.
 - a. Knowing the truth about Jesus is a privilege.
 - b. Knowing the truth about Jesus involves responsibility.

III. Consider the results of the resurrection (9-11).

- A. The Risen Christ reaches unlikely people (9).
- B. The Risen Christ works through unlikely people (10).
 - 1. Ministry involves our effort.
 - 2. Ministry is made possible by His grace.
- C. The Risen Christ deserves honor from all His people (11).

Make It Personal: We never outgrow our need to remember.

1. That's why we need to be in His Word.
2. That's why we need to be in His church.

Are you good at remembering things? Perhaps you heard the story about the man who bought a horse from a neighbor farmer. The seller made it clear that this was indeed a special horse, first rate in quality, well trained, and guaranteed to provide wonderful riding pleasure. But the horse did have one peculiarity. It was trained to obey two orders. If you wanted it to go, you said, "Praise the Lord!" If you wanted it to stop, you simply said, "Amen."

"Okay, I'll remember," said the man. And so the fellow paid the price, hopped on his new possession, and decided to take her for a ride.

"Praise the Lord!" he said with authority, and the mare started trotting. The ride was a little bumpy so he repeated, "Praise the Lord!" and the mare increased speed to a gallop. Feeling quite self-confident, the new owner shouted again, "Praise the Lord!" and the mare unleashed her strength in an all out dash. The rider smiled as he felt the rushing wind hit his face. But his smile quickly faded when, as he looked in the distance, he saw he was heading right for the edge of a canyon.

"No problem," he thought. I'll just slow the horse down. "Whoa!" he said. But the horse didn't respond. "Stop!" he shouted. But his command had no effect on the animal. He tried every word he could think of, "Slow down! Wait! Help!" But the horse kept dashing ahead straight towards the five hundred foot drop-off.

Helpless, the man began to pray, "Lord, I know I haven't talked to you in awhile, but I'm in trouble, big trouble right now. In fact, I'm going to die! Please help me to remember that word! Please, please, please!" And he finished his prayer with a frightened, "Amen!"

Immediately, the horse stopped, its front hooves right on the edge of the canyon. The man leaned forward and looked down into the abyss below, breathed a huge sigh of relief and said, "Wow! That was close! Praise the Lord!"

Remembering can be a life and death matter. And that's no joke.

Think about this. The Bible is filled with exhortations to *remember*, as well as with biblical reminders.^[1] Sure, it's important to be learning new truth from the Scriptures, and God's Word is full of yet unmined nuggets. But it's just as important to keep going back and reflecting on and reaffirming truth we've already learned. And there's no subject more vital to remember than *the resurrection of Christ*.

With that in mind, let's turn our attention to such a text, 1 Corinthians 15. Notice the first sentence: "Now, brothers, I want to *remind you*." The writer is Paul, and the readers were the members of the church in Corinth .

Paul wrote this letter in A.D. 55. He was in Ephesus at the time, and though miles away from Corinth , these dear brothers and sisters were on his heart. He'd received a visit from some members of the household of Chloe who informed him of some problems in the Corinthian church (1:11). He also received a letter from Corinth requesting counsel concerning various subjects (see 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1).

How do you help people you care about who are struggling? Here's one way. You help them *by reminding them* of what they already know. That's what Paul did. "I want to remind you."

Ponder those introductory words, "I want to remind you." The goal of preaching ought never be novelty, but always faithfulness. Paul is writing to *remind* his readers of something they knew very well. And what precisely is that? He says, "I want to remind you of *the gospel*."

We actually don't find out *why* he offers this reminder until verse 12, where we learn that some people in Corinth were saying there is *no resurrection from the dead*. The Greeks believed the body was bad, so why would it be raised after it died? It won't be, some were saying. They probably weren't denying the reality of *life* after death, but rather

life in a body after death.

Is that a big deal? Is belief in the resurrection of the body a big deal? According to Paul, it sure is. He penned the longest chapter in this letter to address that question. Our focus this morning will be on the first eleven verses. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 we're exhorted concerning the importance of *remembering the resurrection of Christ*.

Why should we remember Christ's resurrection? What difference does it make? What happens if we don't? Let's find out together. Our text urges us to consider three points: the reminder, the reality, and the results of the resurrection of Christ.

I. Point #1: Consider the reminder of the resurrection (1-2).

I should point out that the account of Christ's resurrection is mentioned over and over in the Bible. You'll find His resurrection presented in each of the four Gospel accounts, and references to it in nearly all of the New Testament books. That should tell us something. We need to know about Christ's resurrection, but this knowledge mustn't get stored on a top shelf. This is a front and center truth.

But to keep it front and center, what's necessary? You guessed it. We need *reminders*, just like the Corinthians did.

Verse 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."

Repetition is a great teacher, especially when you're handling great truth, and there is no greater subject than the gospel. *I want to remind you of the gospel*. The word 'gospel' means "good news." But just what *is* the gospel? That's a vital question, and Paul will define it for us in verses 3-5. But before defining it, he mentions three things we ought to be doing with the gospel.

A. The gospel must be preached. "I want to remind you of the gospel I *preached to you*." That indeed is what Paul did, as presented in Acts 18. Paul went to Corinth, entered the synagogue every Sabbath, and testified to the Jews that "Jesus was the Christ" (5). Due to opposition, Paul had to leave the synagogue, but he didn't stop preaching the gospel. He went next door to the house of Titius Justus and kept preaching (7). In fact, one night the Lord actually spoke to Paul in a vision and said, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city (9-10)." And so Paul did, preaching the gospel for eighteen months in Corinth.

B. The gospel must be received. "Which you received and on which you have taken your stand." Preaching the gospel is the first step, but merely hearing the gospel isn't enough. It must be *received*. And that's what happened. As Acts 18 records, many Corinthians, including Crispus the synagogue ruler and his household, "believed and were baptized (Acts 18:8)."

Of course, before a person can preach the truth of the gospel, he too must *receive* it, as Paul acknowledged in 1 Corinthians 11:23, "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you..." So the gospel must be preached and then received. But there's more.

C. The gospel must be cherished. The Corinthians didn't simply *receive* the gospel. Paul says they *took their stand on it*. They made it the foundation of their lives. That's good, says Paul, but then he points out that a proper response to the gospel isn't merely a *past tense* matter.

Verse 2—"By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain." Don't rush by that *if*. The gospel saves people, and if a person truly has been saved by the liberating power of the gospel, that person will *hold firmly* to it. What if the person doesn't hold it fast? Then he or she has *believed in vain*. He or she has exhibited a non-saving sort of faith.

“You mean not all faith is *saving* faith?” you ask. That’s right. This verse indicates that faith without a persevering devotion to the gospel is a vain, empty, non-saving faith.

Remember, Paul had preached to these readers. He shared Christ with them. He heard them give a public testimony of their belief in Christ, yet here he offers them a sobering warning. *If you truly have been saved, then you will hold firmly to the word I preached to you. If you don’t hold on, your faith is deficient and vain.*

Because I care for you I must level with you. There are many people sitting in church this very moment who are convinced they are saved and heading for heaven because they *prayed a prayer*, or *walked an aisle*, or *got baptized*, or *joined a church*. But it’s all *past tense*. They’re not *holding firmly to the gospel* in the present. They may have *agreed with* the gospel, but they don’t *cherish* it. And they don’t cherish it because they don’t cherish *Him*. This is serious, beloved.

I’ll say it again. We need *reminders*. It’s not that we forget the facts of the gospel. They’re still there in our cranium, neatly tucked away, ready to retrieve in a Sunday School discussion when needed. But for all practical purposes, the facts do not affect our lives. We don’t think about them at the office, or when watching television, or planning this year’s vacation. Should we? Should we be thinking about Christ and His resurrection as we’re moving through life, or is this subject matter reserved to the holiday we call Easter?

Now back to a question we posed earlier. Just what is the gospel? That brings us to our second point. We’ve considered the *reminder* of the resurrection. Now...

II. Point #2: Consider the reality of the resurrection (3-8).

Verse 3—““For what I received I passed on to you.” Paul didn’t make up the gospel. He received it from the Lord, and then passed it on to the Corinthians. And what precisely was that message? He tells us right here. The gospel message he presented included four critical truths.

A. Christ died (3). “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” Christ died. Christ—that’s His title, the Anointed One, the Messiah God sent into the world on a rescue mission. Christ *died*—the Living One actually stopped breathing and died. And what makes His death different from the deaths of other great religious leaders? Three things...

1. *His death was for sinners.* “Christ died *for our sins*.” Christ died in the place of sinners, that’s true. But here Paul says that Christ died, not simply *for sinners*, but *for sins*, that is, for the sins that sinners have committed.

Did you ever get in trouble growing up? Supposing you did (and if you say you didn’t, that’s another issue!), answer this. Did your siblings ever offer to take your place and experience the punishment you deserved for your transgression? Usually it’s just the opposite. “I didn’t do it! Don’t spank me! *He* deserves it!”

One of our problems is familiarity. We’ve heard it so many times that we’ve lost the wonder of it all.

It’s called the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. Christ died as a *substitute* for and in the place of sinners, bearing the penalty that their sins deserve. But it’s not just somebody else’s sins. Paul makes it personal for the Corinthians. Christ died for *our* sins. When He died on the cross He had *us* in mind, and it was *our* penalty He endured.

We find this amazing truth throughout the Bible. For instance, John the Baptist made this announcement about Jesus in John 1:29 “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” Paul declared in Galatians 1:4, “Who gave himself for our sins.” And Peter likewise affirmed in 1 Peter 2:24, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.”

2. *His death was according to the Scriptures.* “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” In other

words, Christ's death didn't just happen. It was the fulfillment of what the Scriptures predicted centuries ahead of time. Listen to what the prophet Isaiah prophesied over seven hundred years earlier in Isaiah 53:5-6:

“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. 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.”

3. *His death must be our priority concern.* Listen again to the first part of verse 3, “For what I received I passed on to you *as of first importance*: that Christ died for our sins.” “*First of all*,” says the KJV. It doesn't get any more basic than this. Christ died for our sins. That truth is at the heart of Christianity. It is central to the gospel message.

But that's not all. This historical fact that's central to the gospel message must be central to *our* message. That is, it must be the most important thing in our lives, not merely one fact among many, but *the fact* around which our lives revolve.

On a dreary winter day in 1943, 903 troops and four chaplains boarded the SS Dorchester. One of the chaplains was Moody Bible Institute alumnus Lt. George Fox. World War II was in full swing, and the ship was headed across the icy North Atlantic where German U-boats lurked. At 12:00 on the morning of February 3, a German torpedo ripped into the ship. “She's going down!” the men cried, scrambling for lifeboats.

A young GI crept up to one of the chaplains. “I've lost my life jacket,” he said. “Take this,” the chaplain said, handing the soldier his jacket. Before the ship sank, each chaplain gave his life jacket to another man. The heroic chaplains then linked arms and lifted their voices in prayer as the Dorchester went down. Lt. Fox and his fellow pastors were awarded posthumously the Distinguished Service Cross.^[2]

Here's a question for you. Do you think the men whose lives were saved by the sacrifices of those chaplains ever shared that story with anybody else? Do you think they ever told their family members and friends about the sacrifice the chaplains made?

Now answer this. Christ died in our place. Have you told anybody recently? If not, could the silence be an indicator that His death really isn't a priority concern? Paul said that what he received he passed on to the Corinthians, and what he passed on to them was *of first importance*. How important is the death of Christ to us?

But there's more. As Paul defines the gospel message, he states a second truth.

B. Christ was buried (4a). “That he was buried.” Why is that detail important? Think about it. Some critics say that Jesus didn't really die on the cross. The “swoon theory” proposes that He merely fainted on the cross and then resuscitated in the tomb when the cool air hit Him. The theory is ludicrous. The facts say otherwise. The centurion was convinced that Jesus had died. He'd seen the blood and water pour out of His side once the Roman sword pierced Him. He'd given the report to Pilate, confirming Jesus' death. He knew that Pilate had given Joseph of Arimathea authorization to take down Jesus' body and bury it.

And that's what Joseph did (see Luke 23:53). He actually handled Jesus' lifeless body, transported it to an unused, rock hewn tomb, and placed the body on the cold, stone slab. He *buried* Jesus' body, a fact that Paul emphasizes here. *Jesus was buried.* His burial confirmed His death.

C. Christ was raised from the dead (4b). “That he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” We learn two insights here regarding His resurrection.

1. *It was a historical event.* Christ arose, says Paul, “on the third day.” In Jewish thinking a part of a day was treated as a whole. Good Friday was the first day, Saturday was the second day, and Sunday was the third day. He was raised *on the third day*. His resurrection wasn't merely some inspirational idea, as Liberal theologians suggest. It was a *historical* event. And like His death, so with His resurrection...

2. *It was a prophetic event.* “He was raised on the third day *according to the Scriptures.*”

King David recorded these prophetic words in Psalm 16:9-10, “Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.” David affirmed that God would not leave him in the grave. He also affirmed that the Lord’s “Holy One” would not see decay. And He didn’t.

Jesus Himself made this announcement in Matthew 12:40, “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish [a reference to Jonah 1:17], so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” The resurrection happened right on schedule, for it was a historic and prophetic event.

Is Christ’s resurrection important? Absolutely, for many reasons. It’s easy to claim that His death took care of the penalty of sin, but proof is needed. A dead Savior couldn’t help us. If He was not able to overcome death, why would we think He could help us do the same? But He did, and He can!

This is the gospel message. Christ died for sinners. Christ was buried. Christ was raised from the dead.

D. Christ appeared to witnesses (5-8). “And that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.”

Notice three things about Christ’s post-resurrection appearances.

1. *He took the initiative.* Paul repeats the verb over and over. He appeared to Peter...He appeared to the Twelve...He appeared to five hundred...and so on. People didn’t initiate these encounters. Christ did.

2. *He made Himself known to individuals and to groups.* He appeared *to Peter*—that happened on the Sunday evening of Jesus’ resurrection (Luke 24:34). Then He appeared *to the Twelve*, a reference to the apostles, originally twelve men but minus Judas (and Thomas) when Jesus made Himself known to them that Easter Sunday evening (John 20:19-23).^[3] After that the Lord appeared to more than five hundred brothers, at the same time, according to Paul. This appearance is not mentioned elsewhere, but apparently it was well known even to the readers in Corinth since Paul offers no other explanation (indeed, he indicates they could verify this appearance by talking to the eye witnesses since some were still alive).

Then Jesus appeared *to James*, a reference not to the two James’s who were apostles, but to the half-brother of Jesus. This James didn’t believe in Jesus during His earthly ministry (John 7:5), but became a believer after His resurrection, perhaps as a result of this encounter with the resurrected Christ. James later became a key leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13). Next Jesus appeared *to all the apostles*, and this could refer to any of several occasions (such as when Jesus appeared to Thomas and the others a week after Resurrection Sunday, in John 20:26), or the occasion of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20), or the day of Christ’s ascension.^[4]

And last of all, says Paul, Jesus appeared *to me*. Of course, Paul was not one of the original apostles. He did not spend three years living with Jesus, watching His life, hearing His teaching, and so on, as Peter, James, John, and the rest of the Twelve did. Paul refers to himself as “one abnormally born.” The Greek word is *ektroma* and means “born out of due time.” It is translated “stillborn child” in Numbers 12:12, Job 3:16, and Eccles. 6:3. It can refer to an untimely birth, an abnormal birth, even a monstrous birth. It’s the word for miscarriage and even abortion.

David Prior comments, “Apparently the word was used as a term of abuse. Perhaps it had been hurled at Paul by his opponents. He was not a handsome man (2 Cor. 10:10), and they may have combined an insult to his personal appearance with a criticism of his doctrine of free grace. We can imagine such opponents declaring that, so far from being born again, Paul was an abortion.”^[5]

Think of the contrast. When Jesus appeared to the Twelve, it was after they had spent three years learning from Him, three years of preparation and training, and His resurrection appearances launched them into service. But when

He appeared to Paul, or ‘Saul’ as he was known then, Saul was on his way to arrest and kill Christians. As one commentator put it, Paul’s ministry “had been born without the due period of gestation.”^[6] Yet the Risen Lord broke into Saul’s life on that road to Damascus , and he became a new man!^[7]

So Christ appeared to witnesses. What does that tell us? Something very profound...

3. *He wants people to know that He is alive.* It’s true.

a. Knowing the truth about Jesus is a privilege. A wonderful privilege that many in our world haven’t yet experienced. Therefore, know this...

b. Knowing the truth about Jesus involves responsibility. Do you believe that Jesus Christ left His tomb and is alive today? Do you? If you do, it’s because someone told you. And if you do, you have a responsibility to tell others.

Does Jesus’ resurrection matter? Craig Bloomberg hits the nail on the head, “Christianity lives or dies with the claim of Christ’s resurrection. To be sure, it is possible to believe in Jesus’ resurrection and not become a Christian, but without the bodily resurrection Christianity crumbles. Finding the bones of Jesus would assuredly disprove our religion!”^[8]

So, yes, the resurrection of Jesus Christ matters. It’s central to our faith. To be a Christian a person must believe that Jesus is no longer dead, but alive as the result of conquering death and receiving a glorified body.

And that brings us to our third point. We’ve looked at the reminder and reality of the resurrection. Now let’s consider...

III. Point #3: Consider the results of the resurrection (9-11).

Paul presents three results in verses 9-11.

A. The Risen Christ reaches unlikely people (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 .”

Paul calls himself the *least* of the apostles.^[9] He took it a step further in Ephesians 3:8, “Although I am *less than the least* of all God’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

I am the least. Did Paul have a self-esteem problem? No. His esteem was working quite well. He never forgot what he was, nor what changed him. He put it this way in a letter he wrote a friend:

“Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life (1 Tim. 1:13-16).”

Perhaps you’re thinking, “You don’t know what I’ve done. I’m not the Christian type.” Answer this. Did you ever hunt and kill a person just because he was a Christian? Paul did. Yet the Risen Christ chose and saved him! But there’s more. Not only does Christ *reach* unlikely people, but...

B. The Risen Christ works through unlikely people (10). “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.^[10] No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”

Paul loved grace. He was saved by grace, and he served by grace. If Christ has saved you, please know that He saved you to serve. He has a ministry He aims to accomplish through you. And notice two things we learn here about ministry...

1. *Ministry involves our effort.* “I worked,” says Paul. Are you working for Christ, not to earn His favor, but to show your gratitude for it? He who gave His life for us deserves our all for Him, doesn’t He? And of course...

2. *Ministry is made possible by His grace.* “Yet not I, but the grace of God,” said Paul. “To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me (Col. 1:29).” Oh, what a difference grace makes! In His grace the Risen Christ reaches unlikely people, saves them, and transforms their lives. In His grace, Christ also works through unlikely people to reach more unlikely people. And that’s why...

C. The Risen Christ deserves honor from all His people (11). “Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.”

Make It Personal: We never outgrow our need to remember.

If that’s true, then so are these two implications.

1. *That’s why we need to be in His Word.* If we’re not, we forget. We get sidetracked. Our priorities get out of whack. But being in the Word helps us remember. Yet being in the Word on our own isn’t enough. We’re too selective. We miss things.

2. *That’s why we need to be in His church.* Being in church places us under the ministry of the Word, the whole counsel of His Word. It helps us *remember*.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] The word “remember” appears 166 times in the NIV Bible. “Remind” appears 11 times.

[2] *Today in the Word*, April 1, 1992.

[3] The designation *The Twelve* simply referred to the apostolic band, even if all twelve men weren’t present, much as the designation “The Big Ten” refers to a conference that today actually has more than ten teams.

[4] I am indebted to Craig Bloomberg for his insights concerning the appearances; *1 Corinthians*, p. 296.

[5] David Prior, p. 261 (quoting Barclay, p. 145?)

[6] Quote by George Nickelsburg, in Craig Bloomberg, p. 297.

[7] It’s worth noting that two of the people in this list did *not* believe in Jesus prior to His resurrection, that being James and Paul. Why is that significant? Some say that Jesus’ resurrection was merely a story fabricated by loyal followers who simply couldn’t imagine life without their leader, so they made up the story of His return from death. But the evidence says, *No way!* James and Paul certainly had no motivation to make up or add to the resurrection account!

[8] Craig Bloomberg, p. 308.

[9] We find the same word in Matthew 25:45, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the *least* of these, you did not do for me.”

[1101](#) The words “without effect” come from the Greek word *kenos* which means ‘empty’ and ‘without result or purpose.’ It appears in 1 Corinthians 15:14, “And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is *useless* and so is your faith.”