

## *The Gospel of Salvation* *1 Corinthians 15:1-5*

One cannot have a relationship with God except through faith. However, it is a misconception that everyone at every time had to believe precisely the same thing to be justified before God. The *thing believed* is called the object of faith (though some call it the content of faith). During Christ's earthly ministry, and even through the early part of the current age, the object of faith was the Person of Christ as Messiah. But that changed, as new revelation became available. Today the object of faith is the gospel for our salvation found in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5:

*Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, <sup>2</sup> by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*

<sup>3</sup> *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.*

### ***Paul's Declaration about the Gospel – Vs. 1a***

Paul is reminding the Corinthians of that which they already knew. It is easy to muddle the gospel. We must continually review the facts lest we fall into the error of imprecision.

Note the following exegetical elements:

- a. Paul is addressing believers, **brethren**, and reminding them of something.
- b. The phrase “**I declare**” translates the Greek word *gnorizo*. It is derived from the word *ginosko*, which means “I know.” The *-izo* ending changes the word from “I know” to “I make known.” The use of the root *gno-* indicates that Paul is presenting practical information.
- c. The word “gospel” is articular, that is, it has the article “the” before it. This is highly significant. In Greek the article does more than make a noun definite, it indicates specific identity.<sup>1</sup> Why is this important? Because the article specifically identifies this as “the gospel” of the context. There are several different gospels in Scripture, but this is the only gospel that is for salvation today.
- d. It is this gospel which Paul “**preached**” to them. The word **preached** is not the normal word translated preach, which is *kerusso*. Rather, here we have the verb *euangelizomai*. We get the word *evangelize* from it. It means to proclaim a good message (from *eu*, good, plus *angelizo*, to proclaim a message). In other words, the gospel which Paul presents here is the evangelistic message for the unbeliever. Note that the word **preached** is in the past tense. Paul is not in this passage evangelizing the Corinthians. He had already done that with this very message. Rather, he is reminding them of the gospel which he previously evangelized to them.

### ***The Corinthians Reception of the Gospel – Vs. 1b***

- a. Notice that Paul says that they **received** (*paralambano*, which emphasizes the reception of something from someone else<sup>2</sup>) the gospel, not that they received Christ. The reception of

---

1 “The basal function of the article is to point out individual identity. It does more than mark ‘mark the object as one definitely conceived,’ for a substantive in Greek is definite without the article.” H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, New York, The Macmillian Company, 1955. Pg. 137.

2 George Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1937. Pg. 841. Under the word.

## *The Gospel of Salvation* *1 Corinthians 15:1-5*

Christ as a personal presence in the life of the believer is a *result* of the reception of the gospel message, not the way the gospel messages is to be presented. Sadly, many today think they are Christians because they “received Christ,” or “prayed to receive Christ.” But if they do not believe the gospel as presented by Paul in this passage, their relationship to the Lord is in doubt. One does not get saved by receiving Christ, but by believing the gospel.

- b. Paul also states that the gospel was that “**in which you stand.**” They were standing in the gospel in the sense that they were not wavering from the truth of this gospel into a false gospel, of which there are so many today, even among those who claim to be Bible-believing Christians. Unlike many today, the Corinthians knew what the gospel for salvation was, and the held fast to it. They neither added to nor subtracted from its content. They were dogmatic in their stance!

### *The Gospel’s Application for Salvation – Vs. 2*

- a. The first phrase of verse 2 is often overlooked, but it is of paramount importance. Concerning the gospel presented here, Paul says, “**by which also you are saved.**” This is the only place in the New Testament where the agency of salvation is expressed regarding the message evangelized to the unbeliever. (Faith is also an agency of salvation, but it refers to the belief of the individual [Ephesians 2:8]). The agency that God chose to use is the simple presentation of this gospel. As stated, there is no other message which is called by Paul, or anyone else, the agency for salvation.<sup>3</sup> The word translated “by” is actually the Greek word *dia*. It means through, rather than simply by. It is used in such English words as diameter, the measurement through a circle. The gospel is the agent through which one gets saved.

The gospel of 1 Corinthians 15 is God’s object of faith for providing salvation today. Unless it is presented clearly, no one can get saved, and unless it is believed exclusively for salvation, one cannot get saved.

- b. The clause, “**if you hold fast that word which I preached to you**” has caused much confusion. Someone might ask, “What if they didn’t hold fast? Would they have lost their salvation? Or were they never saved in the first place?”

The answer lies in Greek grammar. There are three normal “classes” of conditions in the Greek of the New Testament, all of which begin with the word “if”. They are generally referred to as “first class,” “second class” or “third class” conditions. For a complete discussion of these classes, consult a good Greek grammar, such as the one by Dana and Mantey mentioned previously. In this case, the word “if” indicates a first class condition. A first class condition affirms the reality of the condition. We could paraphrase it this way, “If you hold fast the word which I preached to you, *and you do ...*” There was no question of the Corinthian’s salvation implied in this first class condition. It is the nature of saving faith that the truth will not be abandoned by the believer.

- c. The statement “**unless you have believed in vain**” is a vital one. It is possible to believe “in vain” and not be saved. In Greek the phrase “in vain” *en eike*. The Greek words *en eike* mean

---

<sup>3</sup> The word translated “by” is actually the Greek word *dia*. It means through, rather than simply by. It is used in such English words as diameter, the measurement through a circle.

## *The Gospel of Salvation* *1 Corinthians 15:1-5*

“without a purpose.” To believe **in vain** means to believe without the purpose of being saved. Simply believing the facts of the gospel is not sufficient. One must believe them for the correct purpose, or he is NOT SAVED.

Again there has been much confusion in this area of faith. Some have attempted to identify “levels of faith” by stating that there is a difference between “head faith” and “heart faith.” This is a false dichotomy, since all faith is “heart faith.” The reason for this is that at the time the word “heart” did not refer to the emotions, as it does today. Rather it referred to the seat of the intellect, the mind. We still use the word heart of the mind when we say that someone learned something “by heart.” We mean simply that he memorized it. That is done by the application of the mind, not of the emotions. The true distinction between faith which saves and faith which does not save we find in the words “**unless you believed in vain.**”

Faith without purpose is meaningless faith. One must believe the gospel for the purpose of being saved, else one is not saved.

There are many who believe the facts of the gospel, but do not believe those facts for the purpose of salvation. Sometimes they add things to the gospel. If someone says, “You must believe the death and resurrection of Christ, plus \_\_\_\_.” (you fill in the blank), they are giving a false gospel.

If someone gives only part of the gospel, such as leaving out the resurrection, they are giving a false gospel. This is common. Listen carefully to those who say they are giving the gospel of salvation, but leave out the resurrection. It is not enough that they are sincere, it is necessary that they be accurate.

Many believe they are saved by some generalized faith in Jesus, rather than in the facts of gospel as presented here. Such people are under a Satanic delusion. They have read in the gospels, especially the Gospel of John, about believing in Jesus and receiving eternal life, and are confused because they think John is talking about getting lost people saved. He is not. He’s talking about the reception of eternal life, which is altogether different.

There is no room here for a complete discussion of the various ways that eternal life is applied in Scripture. Suffice it to say, God applies eternal life in different programs in different ways. Note, for instance, Mark 10:30, where Christ proclaims that His disciples living during His earthly ministry would not receive eternal life until “the coming age.” They did not receive eternal life when they believed, but had to wait for a future age. A careful evaluation of the context will show that the coming age must refer to the establishment of the earthly kingdom of God on the earth, and not to the present evil age of today. Today one receives eternal life at the moment he or she believes the gospel.

My friends, please be careful with Scripture. Please realize that God has more than one program and that the various programs *must not be cross pollinated*. Receiving eternal life is not equal with being saved, but deals with one aspect of that which is applied by God to the believer, either at the time of faith as in the current age, or in a future age, as was true when Christ was giving the Messianic gospel.

What was written for those in the prophetic age of Israel must not be applied to those in the present evil age (Galatians 1:4).

## *The Gospel of Salvation* *1 Corinthians 15:1-5*

### *Paul's Presentation of the Gospel – Vss. 3-4.*

Paul introduces his presentation of the gospel with the words, “**For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received.**” The word “**delivered**” is *paradidomi*, meaning to hand over, which is what Paul did. He handed the gospel over to “you,” that is, to the Corinthians, “**first of all.**” He means that it was the first thing that he delivered to them. Without the first presentation of the gospel for salvation, there can be no further ministry. It is a waste of time to give unbelievers a course in correct doctrine. They only need one doctrine, the clear and simple presentation of the gospel of the death and resurrection of Christ for salvation.

Paul also states that he **received the gospel**. He uses the same word “**received**” as he used previously of the Corinthians receiving the gospel, *paralambano*, meaning to receive it from someone else. Whether he is referring to a direct revelation from God, or from some human agency is not stated, and no speculation is called for. The reason he includes this statement is to make clear that this is not some gospel that he made up. It got it from someone else, and he is passing it along.

Paul then proceeds to present the salient facts of the gospel. We can divide it into two parts:

#### **Part 1 – The Death of Christ**

First Paul says, “**that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried**” (1 Corinthians 15:3,4a). God requires a death for sins. Therefore the Lord Jesus Christ became obedient unto death and provided Himself as a sacrifice for our sins, He acted as our substitute because He died for our sins so that we are not required to do so.

Some have attempted to redefine the words to avoid the obvious meaning of this passage. For instance, some deny the deity of Christ. Once the words no longer mean what Scripture says they mean, no salvation is possible. Jesus Christ is God. Any other view of Christ is a false doctrine! Some also have attempted to redefine the word “death,” some even denying that Christ died, only that He appeared to die. See below for a discussion of the so-called “swoon theory.”

Paul gives the fact of Christ’s death two proofs. First, Christ’s death is **according to the Scriptures**. One can read in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John of the historical facts of Christ's death. Furthermore, the suffering and death of Christ is clearly predicted in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Second, **Christ was buried**. When the Roman soldiers were satisfied that He was dead, they allowed Christ’s followers to remove His body from the cross and to place it in a tomb. One simply does not bury a live body, unless a deranged sadist. The Roman soldiers made sure the Lord was dead.

Some have supposed that Christ hadn’t really died. He only fainted. This is sometimes called the “swoon theory.” It is an excuse to reject the following resurrection facts. He came to, they say, in the tomb, and appeared to rise from the dead. In fact, the Roman soldiers knew a dead man when they examined one. That was their job. They killed people for a living. It is an absurdity to think that Christ was not dead when He was buried.

#### **Part Two – The Resurrection of Christ**

## ***The Gospel of Salvation*** ***1 Corinthians 15:1-5***

The second part of the gospel concerning Christ is that “**He rose again the third day.**” (The word “**again**” should not be there. The Greek text says, “**He rose the third day.**”

Once again Paul gives two facts as proof. The first is, “**according to the Scriptures.**” In the four gospels mentioned above, we read repeatedly of the proof of the bodily resurrection of Christ. For example, we read in Luke 24:38 and 39 that Christ speaking to the disciples after the resurrection said to them, “*Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.*” Shortly after that, the Lord Jesus ate fish and honey in their presence.

Both Peter and Paul refer to the Old Testament Scriptures as confirming the resurrection of the Messiah. See Acts 2:29-36 for Peter’s presentation from the Psalms of Christ’s resurrection. For a similar presentation by Paul see Acts 13:32-37.

The second proof of the resurrection is that **Christ was seen.** In 1 Corinthians 15:5 Paul states that Christ was seen by credible witnesses, “*He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.*” In the following verses he expands on this fact.

*“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.”*

The simple gospel is that Christ died for our sins, and that He rose from the dead. While it is within human experience for one person to die for another, the resurrection from the dead is another matter. In order to be a Christian, a person must believe that at least one impossible event (from a human viewpoint) took place. Christ actually bodily rose from the grave.

### **Summary**

A person becomes a saved Christian by faith (belief) in the gospel of salvation, and by no other means. This gospel is identified for us in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5. It is the gospel of salvation that Paul proclaimed throughout his travels in the Gentile lands. He first gave it to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles (Romans 1:16).

The gospel must be believed with the specific purpose of becoming saved, else it is ineffective.

The gospel of salvation consists of two parts, the death of Christ for our sins, and His resurrection from the dead on the third day. One can only enter into a state of salvation by believing both parts, so that if one part is left out, the individual has not believed in the New Testament requirement for so entering.