

A Study of First Corinthians

Week Thirteen

1 Corinthians 15:1-28

Day One

15:1 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. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. 3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: 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, 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

v. 1 – Paul felt the need to review the basics of the gospel or good news that he had presented to the Corinthians. The Corinthians had received it when he came and they had taken their stand on what he had presented to them. It is of note that Paul was not afraid to be redundant. I had a seminary professor who spent the first 30 minutes of every class reviewing the course objectives and highlights. At the end of the course, there was no confusion as to what he felt were the important points.

I just finished a book by N. T. Wright entitled *Simply Christian*. It is a basic presentation of the gospel message and the basics of Christianity. I try to read books like that on a regular basis, just to understand clearly the fundamentals of my faith. **Is it time for a review of what you believe? If so, how can you best accomplish that review? Can you explain to others the essence of what you believe about Jesus? If not, why not?**

v. 2 – There is always a raging debate over whether anyone can lose their salvation or not. I maintain that it is possible, but not nearly as easy to do as some believe. Paul knew that the results would be disastrous for the Corinthians to stray from the good news he had preached. This is another reason, I'm sure, why Paul spent so much time explaining the issues. If it was possible then for someone *not* to hold firmly to the word preached, it is possible now. That is why you must spend some time every now and then reviewing what you believe and what you are doing about what you believe. I pray regularly, *"Lord, keep me from weird doctrine and arrogance. Don't let my practice of faith be separated from what I actually believe. Let me live it out."* That would be a good prayer for you to pray as well.

v. 3 – Here was a quick summary of the non-negotiable basics of our faith, which included the fact that Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures. There are some who have tried to modify that fact, coming up with all kinds of explanations of what actually happened or didn't happen during the crucifixion. But if the Scriptures are false concerning Jesus' death, then they are totally unreliable in every other area as well. You *must* believe that Jesus died on the cross as the Scripture says to be a follower of Jesus.

v. 4 – The second non-negotiable is that Jesus was raised from the dead. There can be no doubt or discussion about this for the same reason as in verse three. If the Scriptures lied about this event, then they are totally unreliable as a guide to life in God. Notice that Paul referred to the *existing* accounts that described Jesus’ death and resurrection as Scripture. He saw them as inspired and authoritative even though they were written in his day by his contemporaries. If Paul saw the existing gospels as “Scripture” on the same level as his Old Testament books, then we must believe that as well. So we believe that the gospel accounts are the inspired word of God and that they report accurately the events of Jesus death and resurrection, which are literal, historic events.

v. 5 – We believe the stories because they were verified by faithful witnesses, such as Peter and the Twelve. We have as many reliable witnesses to verify Jesus life, death and resurrection as other historic events. So there can be no deviation from their stories without saying that they were liars. **Have you strayed from absolute loyalty to the gospel accounts? If you have, I urge you to return to their accurate and inspired accounts.**

Day Two

6 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. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. 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.

v. 6 – Paul continued to establish the reliability of Scripture and the stories they provided. Paul did not share a gospel that he made up himself or that he received in isolation. He had delivered to the Corinthians a gospel that others could corroborate. The resurrection was a documented event, witnessed by hundreds. This was what Paul had presented to the Corinthians. He wanted them to know that it was worthy of their faith, that it was reliable. This was so important, for Paul’s authority was based on what he knew and had reported to them. If he was lying, then the Corinthians were in real trouble.

vs. 7&8 – Paul did not simply have a vision of Jesus. Jesus had actually appeared to Saul, just like he had to the other apostles. Saul had a face-to-face encounter with Jesus. You can see how Paul traced the progress of revelation from Peter, to the Twelve, to the five hundred, to James, to all the apostle and then to Paul himself. This established Paul’s credentials to the Corinthians and to us as well. Paul’s revelation was inspired by the Spirit and is credible. It was on that basis that Paul’s writings were included in the canon of Scripture—Jesus had appeared to him and the Spirit revealed God’s plan for salvation through him.

v. 9 – I don’t think Paul was just being humble in what he wrote here. He saw himself as the least of the apostles. The others had done nothing but build up the church of Jesus. Paul as Saul had actually worked to destroy the church of Jesus. It might be said that Paul was more of a convert to Christianity than the other apostles were. Not that they

didn't have their own salvation moment when they realized that Jesus was the Son of God, but Saul's conversion was much more dramatic and his sins much more intense and public.

Yet Paul went on to serve and distinguish himself above and beyond the achievements of the original apostles. Perhaps what Jesus said can be applied to Paul's life:

Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven — for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven" (Luke 7:46-48).

Are you letting your past affect what you can do for Jesus today? If so, please stop and think about Paul. Consider what he did for God's kingdom after such a sordid past. He went from persecutor to proclaimer, from enemy to friend. If that is what Paul was able to do with the grace of God in his life, what can you do? What should you do? Whatever it is, I urge you to get on with it and do it!

Day Three

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.
12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

v. 10 – Oh, that you and I could grasp the truth in this verse. I am who and what I am by the grace of God. He made me as I am with all my likes and dislikes, with my strengths and weaknesses. At one point in my life, I was seeking the Lord for what to stop doing, for I felt I was too busy. One morning I awoke with this verse on my mind, but I didn't know what it said. When I read it, I sensed the Lord saying, "I am not taking anything away. I am going to show you how to do more." And then I saw the truth of this verse.

I am who I am by God's purposeful creation. I love to be busy and be involved in a lot of different things. That is because that is how he made me to be! **Who has he made you to be? Are you happy with that? Do you celebrate who you are as God does?**

The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing (Zephaniah 3:17)

Notice how Paul rejoiced in and celebrated who he was: he worked hard, harder than all the other apostles. **How hard do you work? Are you achieving all that you can?**

v. 11 – It seems that the apostles all taught the same gospel, although they may have taught it to diverse audiences in different parts of the world. Purpose isn't just about what you do, it's about with whom you do it as well. For instance, my sphere seems to

be Africa. I have done very little work ever in Europe, except for England, and that is because of the ethnic and African churches there. **What is your purpose? In what sphere do you seem to be more effective in fulfilling your purpose?**

v. 12 – After an 11-verse introduction, Paul got to the crux of the matter: some Corinthians said that there was to be no resurrection from the dead. It seems that there was no end to the mis-steps of this church and its members, which causes me to reflect on Paul’s strategy for church planting. Due to the urgency of what Paul was doing, he did not linger long in any area or city. Even when he tried to stay, it seems like the Spirit moved him on. From my perspective, the new churches weren’t ready for Paul’s departure. The Spirit obviously felt otherwise.

Jesus knows how to build His Church. Too often, I have been afraid to let go of God’s work because the work “needs me.” Yet Paul moved on and corrected the problems that he knew would arise from another city where he was ministering. He wrote letters, sent emissaries and prayed a lot. The problems he faced were serious, but Paul trusted in the Spirit’s work to build the church and not in his own efforts. I think we can all learn something from this model—not to be perfectionists where Jesus’ work is concerned and to trust Him as we carry out His purpose for our lives and His Church.

v. 13 – Once again I feel like I am reading a Greek philosopher. Paul jumped to the logical conclusion of the belief that there is no resurrection from the dead. If that was true, then Christ had not been raised from the dead. Bad doctrine always leads to some confusion over Jesus, His life, death or role. **How sound is your doctrine? How do you know? Have you recently asked the Lord to correct any bad thinking that you may have? I ask that regularly, and He does! I pray that God will protect me from bad doctrine and deception.**

Day Four

14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

v. 14 – Who had told the Corinthians that Christ had risen? Paul had. So if there was no resurrection, then what Paul said was a lie. If that was true, then everything he had taught them, everything he had written in this letter, was false as well. If what he had taught and written was false, then they had put their faith in something that did not merit their faith. So this one belief was the linchpin, crucial to the entire structure of faith in Christ that Paul had built.

From this, you can understand what Jesus had predicted:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18 KJV).

The gates of hell will not prevail against the Church but that doesn't mean the gates of hell *won't try* to prevail against the church. And one of the means by which hell tried and tries to prevail is by introducing bad doctrine:

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons (1 Timothy 4:1).

And most if not all of the demonic doctrines in some way pervert Jesus, who He was, who He is, what He came to do.

vs. 15-17 – Not only would Paul and the apostles have been bearing false witness, but the ultimate implication of there being no resurrection is that Jesus had not been raised. If that was true, then their faith in Jesus forgiving their sins was faulty. So the Corinthians would still be in their sins if there is no resurrection, for Jesus was a High Priest but not like the other priests that had ministered before Him:

And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life (Hebrews 7:15-16).

It is absolutely essential that Jesus be alive, otherwise how could He continue to forgive sins. If Jesus had died and remained dead, He could have forgiven the sins of His contemporaries, but not of those who are alive today. No, the business of forgiving sins requires a High Priest who is alive and well for all time.

Paul was so clear and had such a keen mind. That is what you and I need as well. *Lord, I want to be as good at what I do as Paul was at what he did. Lord, give me the ability to think clearly. Keep me from wild tangents and weird doctrines. Give me insight that will help other people and not feed some morbid sense of curiosity or intellectualism that I may have. God, I want and need to know your word. I need You and the power of the Spirit. Amen.*

Day Five

18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. 20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.

v. 18 – True to his age and culture, Paul continued to lay out a logical, step-by-step case for the doctrine of the resurrection. He did this by showing how totally flawed their initial premise was that there was no resurrection. Their doctrine nullified the forgiveness of sins and negated the deaths of saints who had died in Christ up to the time

of Paul's writings. There was nothing redemptive about this error and Paul spent what we know are many verses to combat this insidious heresy. May we all be as zealous to preserve the truth in our day as Paul was in his.

v. 19 – Anyone who had hope in Christ only in this life had no more hope than one of the Greek philosophers, like Socrates or Plato. Without the resurrection, they only had a moral teacher who gave them noble ideas of how to live and relate. Paul argued that Christ had to be much more than that or else the Christians were to be pitied beyond all others. Why? Because they were believing that faith in Christ had eternal implications when their faith could not if Christ was not raised. They were nothing but poor, deceived individuals amidst a host of other deceived people. There would have been nothing distinctive about the Christians apart from their doctrines of love and doing good.

v. 20 – Now Paul turned the corner in his argument. Christ was indeed raised from the dead, the firstfruits of many others to follow. The practice of firstfruits was introduced in Exodus 23:16 and was primarily an act of faith. The farmers gave their firstfruits as an indication of their faith that there was more to come after the initial harvesting had begun. Firstfruits implied second, third, fourth and abundant fruits. I am not sure if the Greeks would have been familiar with the concept of firstfruits, but Paul drew on the analogy and teaching.

Did you know that you can apply the same principle of giving firstfruits as an indication of your active faith? When you begin to receive something that God has promised, don't wait to honor Him with your giving. Give now. When you do, you are saying, "Lord, I trust You. I know there is more to come and with that knowledge, I give You something now. I know that You will more than replace what I am giving. Bless my harvest, I pray." **Can you find some situation in which you can apply the practice of firstfruits now?**

v. 21 – Here Paul referred to the fall of man through Adam. God had promised that He would "fix" creation after Adam's sin, and Paul pointed out that Jesus was the Fixer and the Fix, all in one. Notice here that Paul believed in the literal story of creation, sin and the fall of man. If Paul believed in it and saw Jesus as the answer to God's promise in Genesis, then we should believe the account as well:

So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:14-15).

Jesus was the One who came forth from woman who would crush the serpent's head.
Thank you, Jesus!

Day Six

22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

v. 22 – This verse is the reason why Jesus is referred to as the second Adam. He came to undo what Adam had done and this act, this mission on Jesus' part reveals God's love for His creation. You can see how Paul related the work of Jesus right back to the earliest chapters of Genesis, so that Paul saw the divine connection from the very beginning of man's story.

v. 23 – The complete restoration of creation will not take place until Jesus' return in glory. And the order is important, for Christ had to be the firstfruits of those raised from the dead for He must have the preeminence in everything.

v. 24 – The Bible tells us something of the end times, but not that much. I am always intrigued by those who have it all figured out and find all kinds of current events in biblical prophecy. Perhaps they are right, but maybe they are wrong, too. It does matter what you believe about the end, for it affects your actions today. If the end is that near, as some predict it to be, then why aren't they selling all they have to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth? Why do they carry health insurance? Why do they have retirement funds? Those who believe that the end is near, and it may be tomorrow for all I know, should be involved in a radical lifestyle of evangelism, not an endless study of the signs of the end times.

I have said this before, but I personally resent those who have enriched themselves writing fables of the end. I don't begrudge them their money, but I do not like the fear and confusion that they have created in the hearts and minds of God's people through their novels and teaching shows on television. I think they have perverted the word of God and polluted the minds of God's people and I don't think that is a minor thing. If you have followed these studies, you know that I don't make statements like this very often. But those who write fantasy about the return of Jesus are insidious heretics, as far as I'm concerned. I urge you not to read anything about the end times except the Bible. Then you will have all that you need to know about the subject.

What does it mean that Jesus will hand over the kingdom to the Father? I have no idea how or when He will do this. I do know, however, that He will return, and every nation, government, power and principality will acknowledge His Lordship. When He has subdued and consolidated everything under His rule, He will then turn it all over to the Father. Again, don't ask me how or when. I just know that it will happen.

v. 25 – Jesus is reigning now, but not everyone acknowledges His Lordship. There are many pockets of rebellion, so to speak. But Jesus is ruling in the affairs of men as I write, whether everyone acknowledges that truth or not. And He is certainly ruling in the hearts of His people in the power of the Spirit. Eventually, however, all will have to recognize His rule:

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).

I repeat: Don't ask me how this will occur and don't listen too much to anyone who claims to know. Just be convinced that this will happen and don't try to figure out how or when.

Day Seven

26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. 28 When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

v. 26 – Death is an enemy, introduced when Adam sinned in the Garden. That was another reason why resurrection was and is such an important issue—death has to be eradicated or else creation will not be restored completely as God had promised in Genesis. Death came through sin, so life must be restored through faith in Christ.

v. 27 – In this verse, it seems that Paul made a clear distinction between the Father and Jesus, the Son. This would certainly seem to point to the existence of the Trinity, which of course was not defined as doctrine for a few centuries after Paul. Yet notice the distinction—the Son would come and wrap up and consolidate all of creation under His rule and then turn it over to the Father. This certainly points to a unity of purpose but a distinction in roles.

I have never understood the “Oneness” movement, which denies the historic doctrine of the Trinity. I can remember a woman from the Oneness background who attended my church when I was a pastor in Orlando. She came to me and asked me a question, “Was Jesus God or was Jesus in God?” I knew where she was coming from and answered, “I want to answer both, but I know from your background that this won't be acceptable. So I will say that He is in God.” She had a paper with a list of other questions to ask, but when she heard my response, she folded up her paper. Through tears, she said, “Then I cannot come to your church anymore!”

I have fellowship with many who have come from Oneness backgrounds and they certainly seem to love Jesus. For the most part, their churches are loving centers of

worship. They seem to be a little weak on missions and their pastors rule with a fairly strong hand, but all in all, I like them and consider them friends and brothers. Perhaps I am being naïve, and I know I need to do more research and work on the history and theology of the Oneness movement. But for now, I will continue to treat them as brothers.

v. 28 – I don't think that this verse indicates that Jesus is on less of a par with the Father, as some would want to believe. I do think this verse does verify that there are different roles in the "Godhead" but not a rank or hierarchy. It is at this point that I wish I knew more of the original languages, which would enable me to do more research and study the titles and words used in the Greek. But for now, I have to stand with the historic position of the Church and that is that the Trinity has three distinct persons of one substance or essence. While differing in role, they are all equal in divinity.

This may be hard for me to understand, but I would expect that God would be a bit beyond my comprehension. If I could understand God in all His glory and majesty, I think that would make me His peer. That, of course, isn't possible. So I will allow for some mystery in my understanding of God and leave room for me to understand more fully when I see Him face to face. After all, Paul did write, "Now I know in part." I would certainly think that this truth pertains to my knowledge of God Himself.