

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

Scripture: *I Cor. 15:1-11.*

Summary of Sermon: The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news of God's life-transforming salvation that we receive by placing our faith in the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus.

Introduction

We hear this word *gospel* so often that we simply assume we understand it. The sad truth, however, is that many church-going people, and even many so-called church leaders, do not really understand this word, and they do not really know what the gospel is.

In **1 Cor. 15:1-11**, Paul helps us to understand the **reality** of what the gospel really is, the **reason** the gospel is good news, and most importantly, the life-transforming **results** of personalizing the gospel in our lives. These **3R's** give us both the content and the implications of the gospel for our daily Christian living.

I. Reality (Verses 1 - 8)

- 1) In **verse 1** our passage, Paul declares that he is going to remind the Corinthian Christians about the gospel he had preached to them.
- 2) In **verse 3** Paul writes that what he received concerning the gospel he passed on to the Corinthian Christians as of first importance. The original Greek words in this verse indicate that Paul is saying here that he delivered to them what he himself first received concerning the gospel.

We know from **Acts 9:17-18** that Paul is referring here to the Apostolic tradition that he first received from the community of Christians in Damascus immediately following his dramatic conversion experience on the road to Damascus. This was around AD 35, just a little over a year after the resurrection and ascension of Christ.

We know that the tradition Paul is referring to which he had himself first received in Damascus had originated from the Apostles of Christ in Jerusalem. This tradition corresponds to the narratives we have in the Gospels concerning the historical sequence of the death, burial, and the resurrection of Christ.

In **verse 11** Paul confirms that this tradition about the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ was the original Apostolic message that was based on the Apostles' own actual, historical, personal witness and their experience of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

- 3) In **verses 3 and 4** Paul then goes on to explain that this Apostolic tradition he had received was that *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, He was buried, and He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures*. Paul uses the word *scriptures* in these two verses to refer to the OT, which was the Bible of the early NT church.

- 4) We know that Paul is referring to OT passages such as **Isaiah 53:8-10** that had prophesied that Christ would die for the sins of God's people, and **Psalm 16:10**, that had prophesied that Christ would be raised from the dead.
- 5) When Paul states in **verse 4** that Christ *was buried*, he means that Christ died a real death, not a pretended death; Paul is saying here that Christ was buried in the same way that anyone who dies a real death is buried.

This is why, from **verses 5 to 7**, Paul then refers to eyewitnesses of Christ's death and resurrection who were still alive at the time he wrote this letter around AD 55. These included the Apostle Peter and the other Apostles of Christ, as well as five hundred other followers of Christ. Paul was obviously saying that these living eyewitnesses could testify to the truth and the accuracy of what he was writing about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- 6) In **verse 8** Paul then declares that the resurrected Christ also appeared to him, as to one abnormally born. Paul is referring here to his unique and life-changing encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus that is recorded in **Acts 9**. Paul's experience of the resurrected Christ was unique because, unlike the other Apostles who saw Christ *before* His ascension, Paul alone saw the risen Christ *after* His ascension.
- 7) So, we can summarize **our first R** by saying that the **reality** at the heart of the gospel is the announcement to us of the historically verifiable death and resurrection of Jesus Christ of Nazareth two thousand years ago in Palestine.

II. Reason (Verse 3)

- 1) In this passage, and in many other passages in the NT, whenever you see this word *gospel*, it is a translation of the Greek word *euangelion*, which means *good news*. The early translators of the Bible from Greek into English replaced *good news* with the word *gospel*.
- 2) They did this by taking two words, *good* and *spell*, and joining them together. The word *spell*, at that time, was used in place of our modern English word *story*. This was because to tell a *story* well is to cast a *spell* on your listeners as you capture their full interest and their imaginations. These early translators of the NT from Greek to English considered the story of Jesus Christ in the NT to be such a *good spell*, that is, such a good story, that they decided to join the word *good* and *spell* to form this word, *gospel*.
- 3) In **verse 3** Paul helps us to understand the reason the gospel is such a good story. In this verse he writes that Christ died *for our sins*. Let me explain to you why this is good news indeed for every human being.
- 4) God is completely holy and righteous. For this reason, our sins spiritually separate us from Him and place us under His righteous judgment.

This is why Paul wrote in **Rom. 6:23** that the wages of sin is death. The word *death* in that verse means spiritual separation from God. For us to be delivered from this fate, we need God's forgiveness of our sins.

This is why, throughout the OT, the people of God had to sacrifice the blood of bulls and goats to atone for their sins. In **Heb. 10:4**, however, we read that *it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*. This is obviously because it is human beings like you and I who have sinned against God, not the innocent bulls and goats whose blood was being sacrificed.

- 5) So, ultimately, it requires the blood of a human being to atone for the sins of human beings. So, either we die for our sins ourselves, or we need to find someone to die for us who has no sin of His own to die for, and who is willing to die in our place.

Because only God Himself has no sin, and because God, being our Creator, is the only one who can represent all of us, because of His great love for us, God became a real human being in the form of Christ Jesus so that the blood of a human being who had no sin, and who could represent all human beings, would be shed to permanently atone for our sins.

- 6) This explains why, here in **verse 3**, Paul writes that *Christ died for our sins*. In **1 Peter 3:18**, the Apostle Peter expressed it like this: *Christ died for our sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God*.
- 7) So, we can summarize **our second R** by saying that the reason the gospel is good news for everyone is that it is the message about how and why God can forgive the sins of human beings like you and I so that we can be reconciled to Him to become His sons and daughters.

III. Results (Verses 9-10)

- 1) In **verses 9 and 10**, Paul writes that he was the least of the Apostles and that he did not even deserve to be called an apostle, because, before his conversion, he had persecuted the church of God.

But Paul goes on to say in these verses that, by the grace of God, he had become what he now was, and God's grace to him had had a profound life-changing effect on him that enabled him, by the grace of God, to work harder in his ministry than even the rest of the Apostles.

From what Paul writes here, and from what he writes elsewhere in his other epistles, we can deduce three results of the gospel in our lives, when we, like Paul, by faith, personalize the gospel in our lives.

- 2) The first result is that, as Paul himself explains in **Rom. 6**, God forgives our sin, and He gives us a new heart that no longer wants to sin against Him, as happened to Paul, who before his conversion, had persecuted the church.

This explains why the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is not that the Christian is sinlessly perfect, but rather, that the Christian experiences genuine remorse over sin.

This is because the Christian no longer wants to sin against God, because he or she is now free from the penalty of sin, which is spiritual separation from God. Because of God's on-going work of sanctification in our lives, Christians are daily getting free from the power of sin in our lives, and one day when Christ returns, we will be totally free from the presence of sin.

We know from **1 John 1:8-10** that the additional good news of the gospel is that, even when we do sin, we have the assurance that God does not reject us because, on the cross, Christ has already paid the penalty for that sin!

- 3) Second, Paul writes in **Rom. 8:16** that, when we become Christians, the Holy Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit to convince us deep within ourselves, that we are God's children. This means that, the minute we become Christians, we are immediately adopted into God's family to become the children of God whose lives are daily marked with the grace of God as Paul testifies in this passage.

This is because, when we become Christians, God now looks at us, and treats us, exactly the same way He sees and treats Christ Jesus, as **1 John 4:17** tells us. God treats us as if we have done everything that Jesus Christ has done, and as is if we are everything Jesus Christ was, because Jesus Christ lived the life we should have lived, and He died the death that we should have died.

In **Rom. 6:1-3**, Paul reminds us that when Christ rose from the dead, as a result of our faith in Him, we too rose from our dead life of sin, to live a brand-new life in Christ. Isn't that amazing? This is the great message at the heart of the good news of the gospel!

- 4) Third, because the gospel's definition of a Christian is someone who rests by faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross, it means is that, it is not what we do for God through all our religious activities that makes us acceptable to God, but rather, what God has done for us in Christ to make us acceptable to Him.
- 5) This is why, here in **verse 10**, when Paul writes about working harder than all the other Apostles, he is not saying that it is this hard work that made him acceptable to God, but rather, that all this hard work was enabled by the grace of God at work in his life, and this hard work was his own response of thankfulness to God for saving such a sinner as himself who had even wanted to destroy the church!

In other words, we do not *achieve* our Christian identity through our religious activities; instead, we *receive* our Christian identity through the finished work of Christ on the cross that makes us the children of God.

This affirms the truth of the gospel that to become a Christian, first you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, second, at that moment, you are saved, and third, now that you are saved, you are empowered by the indwelling HS to obey God. So, as Christians, we obey God, not so that we can receive God's salvation, but rather, we obey God because we have received His salvation.

So, you see, the idea is simply wrong that many Christians hold today that to be a good Christian, first, you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, second, you obey the Law as best as you can, and third, you will be saved.

- 6) This means that, as Christians, like the Apostle Paul, we no longer need to obey God out of the fear and anxiety of losing our salvation, but rather out of joy and gratitude for what, through Christ, He has done for us, and given to us.

So, now, our praying, and our Bible reading, and our church going, and our giving, are not religious works through we hope to make ourselves acceptable to God. Instead, these spiritual disciplines are the means by which we grow into spiritual maturity because they help us to draw closer to our heavenly Father, and to deepen our relationship with Him as our loving Father.

- 7) So, we can summarize **our third R** by saying that the **result** of personalizing the gospel in our lives is that, by the grace of God, we become the children of God who now have power over sin, and our core identity is defined by what Christ has done for us.

Conclusion

This is how these **3R's** from **1 Cor. 15:1-11** teach us both the content and the implications of the gospel by helping us to understand the **reality** of what the gospel is, the **reason** the gospel is good news, and most importantly, the life-transforming **results** of personalizing the gospel in our lives.

Unfortunately, today, we have many people in our churches who were asked in a meeting somewhere to come forward and to repeat a certain prayer, and they did so, but without having first experienced the kind of true repentance that Paul experienced on the road to Damascus when he encountered the resurrected Christ.

You see, the truth is that the Bible does not tell us to pray *to invite Christ into our life*, as if we are doing God a favor. What the Bible asks us to do instead, as Paul explains in **verse 2** of this **1 Cor. 15** passage, and as we read in **Acts 2:38**, is that when God calls us through our hearing of the gospel, we need to respond to it with faith and genuine repentance in our hearts that is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

A person who says *I am saved* or *I am born again* but who shows no change in his or her life with reference to God and to sin shows that they have not truly repented of their sin, they have not truly understood the gospel, and they have certainly not personalized the gospel in their life.

So, let me share with you now how we personalize the gospel in our lives. As Paul explains in **verse 2** of this **1 Cor. 15** passage, we personalize the gospel in our lives, when God calls us through our hearing of the gospel, and we respond to it with faith and genuine repentance in our hearts that is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

In the NT this word *repentance* refers to more than feeling bad about our sins. In the NT, this word refers to a deep inner spiritual experience that involves a real change in our mind, and in our heart, and in our will, that leads to a real change in our behaviour, so that, going our own way from God all our lives, we now inwardly turn around and we return to God.

In **John 16:8**, Christ explained that it is God the Holy Spirit who opens our inner eyes to enable us see ourselves as lost sinners in need of God's salvation. In **Eph. 2:8-9** the Apostle Paul explains that it is also God the Holy Spirit who then imparts to us the faith we need to believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah who offers God's forgiveness and His salvation to us.

When Paul refers to his encounter with the Lord in **verses 8 and 9** of this passage, he is reminding us that it was through his repentance that he experienced a complete inner re-orientation of his heart, his mind, and his will towards God, so that he renounced his sin, he received God's forgiveness, he received God's Holy Spirit, and he became born again, and a true follower of Christ.

So, as you listen to this, if you have never personalized the gospel in your life, you can do so today by expressing your repentance to God in three ways, as the Apostle Paul tells us in **Rom. 10:9-10**.

First, you tell God from your heart that you are *sorry* for all your sins. Second, you say *thank you* to God that He sent Jesus Christ to take your place of punishment for your sins on the cross. Third, you ask God to *please* send His Holy Spirit to live in you so that from now on you can live as God wants you to live. *Sorry, thank you, please.*

If, through this prayer of repentance from your heart, you respond today to the gospel, you will be saved, as Paul explains in **1 Cor. 15**. Your life will never be the same again. This is because, then, you will experience for yourself the reality of the gospel, you will experience the reason the gospel is good news, and above all, you will experience these life-transforming results of the gospel that we have just seen from this passage.

This is the Apostle Paul's testimony in this passage. This is my own personal testimony. This is the testimony of countless other Christians throughout the Christian centuries. Today, *this* can be your testimony too.

Let us pray.

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