

## The Historical Facts (#37)

1 Corinthians 15: 1-11

**We have skipped to chapter 15, because we have covered most of chapter 14 in our study of "tongues." And in this chapter, Paul is approaching the climax of his message to the Corinthian church. From many different angles he has challenged them concerning conditions that existed in their fellowship. He has revealed the emptiness of their supposed brilliance and philosophy. He has preached to them the message of the cross. He has rebuked them for their errors of practice and doctrine. He has proclaimed to them the ultimate triumph of love. In all this, he has presented to them what he calls in the opening verse of chapter 15, the gospel, "I declare unto you the gospel."**

**The one thing that matters, as he looks back upon his ministry to this church, is whether they have really received the gospel. How many of them really understand what the gospel really is? In this chapter, he brings heaven very near as he states the historical facts.**

**Now the time has come for him to face these people with a verdict. To bring that about, he demonstrates that this gospel of ours is based upon facts, concerning which there is indisputable evidence, so there is no excuse for failing to believe and accept it. Not merely is the gospel based upon facts, but it has immense personal implications for all of us.**

You have listened to the facts of the gospel, he says; if you have received it, therefore, you are standing in the power of the gospel, "By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain" (vs. 2). **The awful possibility grips his mind as he thinks that the congregation may after all only have believed in vain.** This, of course, all depends upon whether their faith has been resting upon facts based upon evidence, and has led to action. I want to give you some of the evidence of the gospel and point out some of its complications in our lives.

**What are some of the facts?** He says this in verses 3-4, "I delivered unto you first of all," that is, first in order of importance, "that which I also received," says Paul, "how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures..." **That is the whole gospel in a nut-shell. The story is simply that there was a man who lived in the Middle East about two thousand years ago and who was crucified outside Jerusalem. He was buried in a fast-secured tomb, and on the**

**third day He rose again.** This is the narrative. **But when I recognize that He was none other than Christ, the anointed Son of God, and that He died, as Paul says for our sin, that He was buried, and that His body was raised from the dead on the third day, then this narrative becomes the gospel.**

**These facts are inevitably linked together: if you take anything away, you have no gospel.** These things: He died, He was buried, He rose again, constitute the basic elements of our Christian faith. Twelve simple men, most of them fishermen, could never have turned the world upside down unless all these facts were true.

**What about the evidence for the facts?** We have no right to expect that any should believe the gospel unless there is evidence.

**One line of evidence is that the death of Jesus Christ must have been related to our sin.** Why? Because Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." The Scriptures say that death is not physical cessation from existence, but separation from God in eternity. If these things are true, then Jesus should never have died. Quite clearly His death was not related to His own sin, because even His worst enemies had to admit that He was without fault. Nevertheless, He died, and for that there is no explanation unless you connect it with the fact of sin.

For the answer, we must go back to the very beginning of the Book, and to Genesis 3:15, when God spoke with such authority to the one who caused our first fathers to fall, and said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." **In other words Christ was to suffer injury, but the wound inflicted upon the devil at the cross was authoritative and final.**

From the very beginning of the redemption story, we can trace all through the Old Testament the fact that "he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities:...All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:5-6). Here is the evidence that, as Paul says here, "He died for our sins according to the scriptures."

**In that tremendous moment when Jesus cried with a shout of victory, "It is finished!" the hand of God stretched forth from heaven and took hold of the veil of the Temple and ripped it from the top to the bottom. No human hand could have done that: the veil, which kept humanity back from the glory**

**of the presence of God, was torn aside.** The veil, through which only one man once a year on the Day of Atonement could pass, in order that he might make sacrifice for his own sins and the sin of the people, was rent so that *ALL* might enter into the presence of God. Now, because of what happened at the cross, 1 Timothy 2:5 says there is a way through to God without any human intermediary: there is "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." **The evidence that He died for our sins is indisputable.**

**What about the evidence for His resurrection? Without it, you just cannot explain the existence of the church at all.** This new movement would not have lasted one week if the truth of the resurrection had no revitalized that little group of disciples. **Immediately after Calvary they were about to separate, their fellowship was collapsing. The birth and growth of the church is one tremendous evidence that Jesus Christ rose again.**

Once again, Paul says that Christ was buried and that He rose again "according to the scriptures." **The unfolding of God's plan of redemption in the Old Testament is the story travail and of triumph. It is the story of suffering and yet of glory.** In Isaiah 53:10-12, we read, "When thou shalt make his soul and offering for sin...the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied...Therefore will I divide him a portion wit the great..."

**There is also the evidence of the disciples themselves. Their unbelief of the resurrection and their unreadiness to believe the message they were going to spread throughout the world reveals the fact that, as the Lord has said, they were "slow of heart to believe."** Although they were to be responsible for proclaiming the Christian message, they began by admitting that they did not believe it.

**Some have suggested that these early disciples were just being fools, that they knew the story was false. But would they ever have allowed themselves to be martyred for the sake of something they knew was not truth?** If only the Jews or the Romans could have produced the body of Jesus, all the rumors would have been quickly stopped, but they could not produce it.

**In the third place, Paul seizes upon personal evidence as the greatest factor of all.** He says in verse 5a, "He was seen of Cephas." **In an interview about which we know absolutely nothing about, Peter met the Master face to face.** And then he says in 5b, "Then of the twelve." **Twice in the Gospels is the record that His disciples meet their risen Lord.**

And then he says, "After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once." **Jesus had told them to go into Galilee, where He would go before them. Hundreds of believers, scattered abroad because of their fear after His death, fled to Galilee, and there they met Him as He revealed Himself to them.**

And in verse 7 Paul says, "Last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." **One never-to-be-forgotten day, when he was on his way to Damascus to continue his persecution of the young church, God met him in Jesus Christ and brought him on his face to the ground.**

**Paul has marshaled his evidence for the gospel; the facts are completely unshakable. But Paul's concern is to know how much these facts have been effective, and how the Corinthians church has responded to this message of the gospel.** That is the vital factor today: how far have you and I responded to the implications of this dynamic message of the gospel of Jesus Christ? **We may not dispute these basic facts of the gospel, but what is the result in our lives?**

**What are the threefold implications of the gospel?** First of all, to Paul there was a recognition of his own sinfulness, as seen in verses 8-9, "Last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church." **That is the burden that is revealed in Paul's life from the day he was saved.** Listen as he gave his testimony before King Agrippa in Acts 26:9-11, "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth .Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests;...and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities."

In giving a bit of his own autobiography to the Philippians, Paul said in Philippians 3:4-7, "If any man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:...Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the or righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." **Now he is admitting that he did not deserve even to meet the Lord at all. The thing that shook him to the core, as he was confronted with the truth of the resurrection, was a recognition of his own sin - not his immorality, nor his impurity, but the downright arrogance of his proud heart.** This was sin at its very root. **When he saw that Jesus Christ was alive, he saw what a stubborn, proud, egotistical creature he was, and he fell on his face before the risen Savior.**

**Unless this implication has really reached you, you are not a Christian, no matter what you say you believe. It is the crossing out of the capital "I" when you begin to recognize that sin is primarily not immorality or impurity. Of course, that is the fruit of it, but the basis of it all is the wretched, arrogant independence of your own selfishness.**

The second implication of the gospel is a revolution of character, as seen in verse 10, "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain." As Paul continued his own statement in Philippians 3:8-10, he said, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord:...That I may know him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." **It pleased God to reveal His Son to Paul. And Paul, in receiving the forgiving grace of God, he received the faithfulness and graciousness of the Master.**

**This man's life was revolutionized in character and personality through the gospel. Is your one concern that you might be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ? A recognition of sin involves revolution of character and habit.**

A third implication of the gospel in Paul's life was a redirection of energy, as seen in verse 10b, "I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." This again is closely connected with Philippians 3:13-14, "I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." **Paul does not say he is perfect or that he has attained, but this is his goal, his ambition as he sought to serve the Lord. As if he saw the pearly gates beginning to open, and soon would see the Savior face to face, this truth of a risen Christ so gripped him that he labored more abundantly than anyone else.** He has given himself supremely to the task, above everything else, of making known his wonderful Lord. But once again he says, "It is...the grace of God." **Three times in this verse, you will notice that he speaks of the grace of God.**

**Has the gospel got hold of YOU, or is this thing just theory to you? I tell you, unless in your life there has been a recognition of sin, which has brought you on your face before Jesus Christ, you are not saved. Until there has come a moment in your experience when God has shown you that sin is not only being immoral or impure, but basically it is "self" in all its ugliness, you know nothing of salvation.**

If you can say, "Yes, I have come to recognize sin to be what God says it is," then has there been a revolution of character? **Has Jesus Christ, your indwelling Lord, begun to form Himself in you?** If there has been a revolution of character and manner of life, then has there been a redirection of your energy? If there have not been these three things, then have you believed in vain?

**Paul was a Pharisee, fundamental with the best, but until these things happened, there was no new birth, no Christian experience, nothing to take him through the gates of heaven.** I trust the Lord will speak to you through the Word and take you from the side-lines of Christian work into that more abundant labor with Paul, that the passion and enthusiasm that was once used in worldliness or rejecting Christ might be poured out for the salvation of others.

If you are not saved, then tonight is a good time for salvation.