

At Easter we commemorate the events of Christ's death and resurrection and celebrate the significance of those events. In 1 Cor 15:3 he calls the events and their significance "of first importance." They are the primary truths of the gospel.

But there is a force and the hint of a rebuke in the more literal rendering of Paul's words in 15:1 – "I want to make known the Gospel to you." Some Corinthians had begun to doubt if there would be a physical resurrection and they needed to hear this foundation, this essential truth once again. The Gospel message is not just for the unbeliever. It is a continuing message even for believers because it is of first importance.

I. ***Why is the gospel message important? (15:1-3a)***

1. *The gospel is important as God's message to man.*

By his terminology and from his explanation elsewhere, Paul is very clear that the gospel message did not originate with him. It was a message not humanly devised, but revealed by God. (Cf. 1:17; 2:10; Galatians 1:11ff.)

2. *The gospel is important as God's power unto salvation.*

Paul is explicit in 15:2, "by which you are saved" (cf. Romans 1:16). It is also implicit in verses 1-2 by requiring that one must stand firm or hold firm. "Otherwise you believed in vain" (NIV) can also be translated "unless you believed emptily" or "without careful consideration." It may refer to the possibility which Jesus illustrated by the second soil in the parable of the soils (Luke 8:4-15). Superficial belief does not save. Only those who demonstrate true faith by continuing in that faith are saved. Only belief in the gospel – the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – is God's way of salvation.

II. ***What then is the essential gospel message? (15:3b-8)***

There are two main points: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, historical events with eternal spiritual significance.

1. *The death of Christ*

a. The death of Christ is explained as being "for our sins." Sin is an offense against God because of our failure to conform to His perfect standard, in thought or deed. Any sin, because it is an offense against God, requires punishment. The penalty of sin is death (Romans 6:23): separation of body and spirit and spiritual separation of a person from God. Without rescue, the latter will result in eternal separation from God and eternal punishment in the place called hell. When Jesus died, He took upon Himself the penalty that we deserved to pay, as foretold in the Scriptures (cf. Isaiah 53:4-6).

b. The genuineness of the death of Christ was demonstrated in His burial. The Gospels also include significant detail of the burial showing that Jesus was genuinely dead.

2. *The resurrection of Christ*

But God raised Jesus from the grave. Both the historical record in the Gospels and Paul's explanation here require that we understand a physical resurrection. The burial defines the character of the resurrection. That which was resurrected was that which had been placed in the tomb three days previous. A dead body was brought back to life.

a. Some of the significance of the resurrection is developed later in chapter 15. It says in Romans 4:25 that Jesus was raised because of our justification. Because Jesus' death adequately paid the penalty for sin, there was no reason for Jesus to remain dead. The resurrection was the necessary proof. The resurrection, too, was "according to the Scriptures." See Isaiah 53:10-11; Psalm 16:10.

b. The genuineness of the resurrection of Christ is demonstrated in His appearances. Paul's list is not exhaustive, but apparently emphasizes appearances to be the official witnesses of Jesus' resurrection, i.e., the apostles, and the magnitude of the testimony. Paul intimates that if any were to question the resurrection of Jesus, they could ask almost any of these because most were still alive.

These are the essential, foundational truths of the gospel message: Jesus died for our sin according to the Scriptures, proven unquestionably by his burial, and Jesus was raised again the third day according to the Scriptures, established unquestionably by witnesses to His appearances.

It is good and important to think on the resurrection of Christ, to make known to ourselves once again the Gospel. Beyond the teaching of 1 Corinthians 15 there are still further reasons.

For example, since we are raised with raised and seated with Him in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:5-6), we are also to set our hearts and minds on things above, not on earthly things (Colossians 3:1-4). Instead of being drawn to things around us (home, family, career, reputation, etc.), we should be concerned with Christ's evaluation of us, being part of His family, serving Him, etc.

Paul wanted to know the power of Christ's resurrection (Philippians 3:10), which is the standard for the power that is available to believers (Ephesians 1:18-21). To neglect the resurrection in our thinking is to lose sight of the power that God has for us. God might allow difficult times to come into our lives so that we might turn back to Him and rely on His power demonstrated in the resurrection (2 Corinthians 1:9). We are to rely on the God who raises the dead.

We commemorate more than the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We celebrate the significance. The sacrifice for our sin was satisfactory. But the resurrection is more than a message calling the unbeliever to turn to God for forgiveness of sin. The believer is called to focus on our risen Lord and Savior and to rely on the all-powerful God who raises the dead. The death and resurrection of Jesus is a message of hope for the future and for today. We need to keep in focus these truths of first importance.