

**1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:1-11**

1 Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, 2 through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you — unless you have come to believe in vain. 3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, 4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them — though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe (NRSV).

The Apostle Paul went to Corinth because his strategy was to plant seeds of the gospel along the larger trade routes. This would enable the gospel to spread, take root, and go out into the world. He worked in Corinth for about 18 months and the church grew into one of the largest. Several years later reports of problems came to Paul. Corinth was a large industrial city with population estimated to be around 700,000. Today, every large city has pockets of drugs, prostitution, and crime. These problems exist in every city of size but in Corinth the whole city was in shameless moral decay. They worshiped money, materialism, and Venus the goddess of love.

The basic point of the gospel is to lay down a theological foundation that instructs in ways of restoration to correct practices that cause division, fix immorality, and abuse of the Lord's Supper. Paul wrote the letter from Ephesus in response to a letter from the Corinthians that we do not have. The diverse population of mostly Gentiles was seeking guidance on disputed matters. The Apostle Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth of the good news of the gospel. You are being saved if you hold firm to the gospel. It is very important that you have the tenacity to hold firmly to the message. Christ died for our sins just like the scriptures dictated. He appeared to others after the resurrection and he appeared to Paul after the resurrection. Paul is considered the least because he once persecuted the church. However, by the grace of God he now proclaims the message so that you have the chance to believe.

Paul switched from attacking problems to addressing doctrine and a problem of false teaching on the resurrection. This is very important because it ties into our salvation. No one denied that Christ died. No one denied the body was not there. Even the enemies of Christ provide evidence of the resurrection by failure to provide the body and sealing the tomb so that it could not be stolen. Some doubted the resurrection thinking that death is the end. Paul emphasizes the significance of resurrection because he knows very well how important it is. It is the resurrected Jesus that Paul encountered. He lists multiple eyewitnesses and offers an explanation. If there is no resurrection, then Christ was not raised, and if Christ was not raised then our faith and all of our preaching is useless. If

don't believe then why call yourself a Christian? Your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. If there is no future life then the Christian message is a lie. Then Christ's death is that of a martyr that died for human reasons and politics. But in the death of Christ death is conquered and a new beginning is in store for us.

Hold on to the message. Paul insists on tenacious devotion to the word. Hold firmly to the message. Stick with the word. Don't follow crowd. Stay true to the doctrine. God has a son whose blood is pure but is exposed to the evil on the earth. He is not influenced by evil. He is not tempted in any way. He stays true to the will of God. We are to follow his example when we are exposed to the evil of the earth, not influenced by evil, and resist temptation. When you stay true to the will of God and are focused on the blessings, you get internal and eternal satisfaction. This degree of satisfaction overrides temptations of the world. God's perspective is that the Son died for you, so you have to know how much God cares. It is a loving relationship and relationships that are founded upon love require a mutual response.

In the death of Jesus there are two opposing forces of power and weakness that culminate with the crucifixion and resurrection. Rome had power, the king had power, and the religious leaders had power. The religious leaders held the position that their power was being threatened by Jesus. They perceived a human weakness and used their power to kill him. But the power of God is above all and humans are unable to defeat God's power. The crucifixion of Jesus did not receive desired result of religious leaders. It received the desired result of God because it connects to the resurrection and all of the grace and salvation that is connected with the resurrection. The power to kill is met with the power to resurrect. Human weakness is met with the power of God. The power to kill is met with the power to raise. The resurrection is Christ's vindication as divine power raised him from the dead. In the resurrection of Jesus faith is a reality, his death is a victory and death is swallowed up in victory.

I recently took a survey from one of my favorite college professors that is doing research for a book. All of my college professors have authored books because that what PHD's do. It was a study about preaching on social issues, like politics, justice, and diversity. She was conducting research on whether preachers should or should not preach on controversial issues and what is the response of the congregation and what is the degree of tension. At the end of the survey, where they typically ask for comments, I wrote that I neither preach or avoid these things. I follow Jesus. What did Jesus say about X with X representing your favorite vice. Since X existed in the time of Jesus why don't we have a record of Jesus addressing such social issues. The answer that I come up with is because those issues are divisive. Social issues are about things that people want. They distract from the more important love and unity that Jesus emphasized. We are to be united in love not divided over differences of opinion.

The Christian church has a history of being divided over differences of opinion instead of following the unity and love of Christ. The early church struggled with how to live as believers in a world that held onto different values. We have the same struggle today. The main thing is to focus on Jesus and hold firmly to the message.