

The Gospel That Holds Us

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 (ESV)

Teacher's Guide

Introduction: What Never Changes

In a world where everything shifts—trends, headlines, loyalties—some truths never change.

When the world shut down in 2020, it wasn't just the economy or travel that froze. Something deeper cracked. People who had always seemed confident suddenly didn't know what to do. Church buildings sat empty on Easter Sunday. People watched funerals on screens. Families were separated by windows. And underneath it all, there was this quiet question in everyone's soul: *What can I actually count on?*

That season didn't just test our schedules—it tested our foundations. The illusion of control vanished. And for many, faith that once felt strong began to feel abstract. When nothing feels stable, vague spirituality doesn't help. We need something solid. Something historic. Something that holds.

That's exactly where Paul takes the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 15.

After addressing their arguments and confusion, their pride and dysfunction, he doesn't end the letter with strategy or correction—he brings them back to the center. He reminds them of what matters most: the gospel. Not something new. Not something trendy. The gospel they had already received, already believed—but were starting to forget.

Paul knows what we often forget: when you lose the gospel, everything else unravels. But when you hold to it, you find your footing again.

In this passage, Paul doesn't just define the gospel—he declares its power. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is not just the way into Christianity—it's the very thing that keeps us standing. It's the truth that steadies us in grief, humbles us in success, and assures us in doubt. The gospel isn't just our entry point—it's our anchor.

Because when everything else is shaking, it's the one thing that still holds.

Starter Question:

What specific circumstances or seasons in life make us most likely to drift from the gospel—and how does that drift usually show up?

Possible Answers:

- Times of crisis make us doubt God’s goodness, and we start relying on ourselves instead of His grace.
- When life is comfortable, we stop depending on the cross and start coasting on performance or routine.
- In seasons of busyness, we forget the resurrection is meant to shape our daily hope, not just our theology.
- When we suffer loss, we may question God’s power and stop clinging to the promise of resurrection life.

I. The gospel gives us something to stand on when everything else shakes.

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:1–2, ESV)

What’s Going On Here?

The Gospel Isn’t Just the Door—It’s the Floor

Paul isn’t introducing something new here—he’s re-centering them on something old. He’s not correcting doctrine just yet; he’s reminding them of what they already received: the gospel. But he doesn’t treat it like a beginner’s lesson. He treats it like bedrock.

This is the message, Paul says, that you *received*, that you *stand in*, and that is still *saving you*. In other words, the gospel isn’t just how we start the Christian life—it’s how we survive it. It’s not just the doorway into grace—it’s the ground we stand on when everything else starts shaking.

That kind of reminder matters, because the Corinthians—like many of us—were beginning to drift. They had gotten caught up in everything *but* the gospel: spiritual gifts, church

status, personal rights, and theological debates. And Paul is saying: *Come back. You don't need something new. You need to return to what you already know—what first rescued you and still holds you.*

This is Present-Tense Faith

Paul uses three phrases that highlight the ongoing power of the gospel:

- “*Which you received*” (past)—This is where your faith began.
- “*In which you stand*” (present)—This is how your faith is sustained.
- “*By which you are being saved*” (ongoing)—This is the work God is continuing to do.

This is not just theology. This is stability. When the bottom falls out of life—when the church is messy (like Corinth), or your personal life is chaotic—you don't need a novel idea. You need a reliable foundation. You need the gospel to hold.

Faith That Lasts Is Faith That Holds

But then Paul adds a tension-filled phrase: “*if you hold fast... unless you believed in vain.*”

That's not Paul questioning their salvation—it's Paul calling for perseverance. Real faith holds fast. It doesn't let go when life gets hard or doubts creep in. It clings—sometimes weakly, sometimes desperately—but it clings.

Some in Corinth were starting to loosen their grip on the resurrection. That's why Paul starts here. Because if you lose the gospel, you don't just lose a doctrine—you lose your footing. And once the foundation shifts, the whole structure begins to collapse.

So Paul isn't just being theological—he's being pastoral. He's saying: *Don't forget what saved you. Don't walk away from what's still saving you. Don't trade the truth that holds for a version that drifts.*

Discussion Question:

Why is it dangerous to treat the gospel as something we “graduate” from?

Possible Answers:

- It makes us vulnerable to self-reliance, legalism, or shallow spirituality.
- We focus more on performance than heart-level transformation.

- We lose the joy, security, and power that only flow from remembering Christ's finished work.
- It leaves us unanchored when suffering, sin, or doubt arise.

II. The gospel is the plan God promised and the victory Christ accomplished.

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, ESV)

What's Going On Here?

This Is What Matters Most

Paul doesn't begin with suggestions or second-tier truths—he begins with urgency. *“What I delivered to you as of first importance...”* This isn't spiritual trivia or doctrinal footnote. This is the core—the non-negotiable center of Christian faith. Strip everything else away—opinions, preferences, methods—and here's what remains:

Christ died.

Christ was buried.

Christ rose again.

Paul isn't just summarizing theology. He's identifying the beating heart of the gospel, the message that not only saves but holds us together when life unravels.

Christ Died—Not Randomly, but Redemptively

Paul is clear: *“Christ died for our sins.”* His death wasn't symbolic. It wasn't just tragic. It was intentional, substitutionary, and necessary. The cross was not a misstep in Jesus' ministry—it was the mission. He didn't just suffer to inspire us; He suffered to save us.

To understand the gospel, we have to take sin seriously. Without our guilt, there would be no need for grace. Without our rebellion, there would be no need for redemption. And yet, because of the cross, our greatest need was met by God's greatest gift.

The gospel doesn't just say *that* Christ died. It tells us *why—for our sins*.

The Whole Story Was Already Written

Paul says it twice for emphasis: “*in accordance with the Scriptures.*” In other words, none of this was accidental. The gospel wasn’t a divine backup plan. From Genesis to Malachi, the Old Testament pointed forward—through promises, prophecies, and types—to a Savior who would come, suffer, die, and rise again.

Every sacrifice on an ancient altar, every cry of the prophets, every shadow in Israel’s story whispered His name. Jesus didn’t come to rewrite the story of redemption—He came to fulfill it.

The gospel is not a break from the Scriptures; it’s the crescendo of them.

The Burial and Resurrection Are Not Extras

Paul doesn’t skip from death to resurrection. He says Christ *was buried*—a detail that grounds the gospel in gritty, undeniable reality. He really died. He wasn’t resuscitated. He was wrapped in linen and laid in a tomb. His burial silences the modern tendency to reduce the crucifixion to metaphor or myth.

But the tomb didn’t stay full. “*He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.*” This is the hinge of our faith. The resurrection is not a poetic ending—it is a physical, historical, bodily triumph over sin and death. If Christ is still dead, then so is our hope (see v.17). But He’s not. The tomb is empty, and everything has changed.

The gospel isn’t just that Christ died. It’s that Christ *conquered*. And that changes everything.

Discussion Question:

Why is it essential that the gospel includes both the cross and the resurrection?

Possible Answers:

- The cross shows the payment for sin; the resurrection shows the power over death.
- Without the resurrection, Jesus would be just another martyr.
- The resurrection proves Jesus is the living Lord we can trust and follow today.

III. The gospel didn't happen in secret—it was seen, shared, and verified.

“...and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time... Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.” (1 Corinthians 15:5–8, ESV)

What's Going On Here?

Eyewitnesses Anchor the Gospel in Reality

Paul moves from proclamation to proof. The resurrection wasn't a mystical experience. It wasn't spiritualized metaphor. It was seen. Repeatedly. Publicly. Bodily.

Jesus appeared to *Cephas (Peter)*—the once-broken disciple. He appeared to *the twelve*—the inner circle who had fled in fear. He appeared to *more than five hundred brothers at once*—a crowd, not a corner conversation. Then *James*—who once dismissed Him—and finally *all the apostles*. Paul's point is clear: *This actually happened.*

And he presses the point further: many of these witnesses were still alive when he wrote. In modern terms, Paul is saying: *“Don't take my word for it. Go ask them.”* This isn't blind faith. It's historically rooted, collectively witnessed, and widely proclaimed. The resurrection isn't hearsay—it's history.

Jesus Appeared to Failures and Skeptics

What makes this list even more powerful is who's on it. These weren't saints waiting faithfully at the tomb. They were doubters, deniers, deserters.

- Peter had denied Him three times.
- James, Jesus' own brother, had mocked Him during His ministry.
- Paul wasn't just indifferent—he was violently opposed to the church.

And yet, the risen Christ appeared to them. Why? To show that His grace reaches further than our failures—and that no one is beyond redemption. The resurrection doesn't just defeat death—it restores the undeserving.

Paul's Testimony Is Grace on Display

Paul's own inclusion in the list is deeply personal. "*Last of all... he appeared also to me, as to one untimely born.*" The phrase he uses—*ektroma* in Greek—was often used to describe a miscarriage or premature birth. It's a jarring, even painful image.

Paul isn't just being poetic. He's owning the fact that, by all accounts, he shouldn't be on this list. He didn't walk with Jesus during His earthly ministry. He didn't believe in the resurrection at first. He persecuted the very people who carried the message. And yet—Jesus appeared to *him*.

This wasn't sentimental. It was sovereign grace. The risen Lord sought out the church's greatest enemy and turned him into its greatest missionary. Paul's appearance wasn't just another proof of the resurrection—it was a living picture of what resurrection power can do in a human soul.

So when Paul says the gospel was seen, he means it in every sense. Not only was it visible to the eyes—it was undeniable in the transformation of lives.

Discussion Question:

How does the testimony of real eyewitnesses strengthen our faith in the resurrection?

Possible Answers:

- It grounds our belief in actual events, not feelings.
- It shows the resurrection wasn't a hallucination or fable.
- It reminds us that the early church didn't die for a story—they died for what they saw.

IV. The gospel turns the unworthy into witnesses and the broken into believers.

"For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle... But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain... whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed." (1 Corinthians 15:9–11, ESV)

What's Going On Here?

Grace Doesn't Ignore the Past—It Redeems It

Paul doesn't soften the edges of his story. He names what he was: "*the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle.*" That's not false humility. It's gospel honesty. Before grace found him, Paul wasn't just lost—he was hostile. He wasn't apathetic toward the church; he tried to destroy it.

But then comes the turn: "*But by the grace of God, I am what I am.*" That's not self-congratulation. It's worship. Paul isn't proud of his past—he's amazed by God's mercy. Grace doesn't pretend sin didn't happen. It doesn't erase the past like it never existed. It redeems the past by showing how far the love of Christ is willing to go.

Only the gospel could take a violent persecutor and turn him into a beloved apostle. Only grace could reach that deep and raise someone that far. Paul's story is a living argument for the resurrection—because only resurrection power can bring that kind of transformation.

Grace Produces Effort Without Producing Ego

Paul says something that might seem contradictory at first: "*I worked harder than any of them... yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.*" He's not boasting—he's bearing witness. Grace didn't make him complacent. It compelled him. The deeper he understood God's mercy, the more fervently he labored.

This is what real gospel transformation looks like: not laziness covered in the language of grace, but a holy urgency fueled by gratitude. Paul didn't work to earn anything—he worked because he'd already been given everything. Grace didn't sit him down—it sent him out.

And yet, even in his effort, Paul is quick to deflect the credit: "*Yet not I...*" It's not his discipline or drive that made the difference. It was the grace of God *with* him. Grace doesn't feed pride—it kills it. And in its place, it plants passion.

The Gospel Unites What Pride Would Divide

Paul closes this reflection with a sentence that cuts through comparison and celebrity culture in the church: "*Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.*" In other words: it doesn't matter which apostle you heard it from. The power isn't in the preacher—it's in the message.

This is a needed reminder for a church like Corinth—and for us. The church isn't built on personalities, preferences, or platforms. It's built on the gospel. The same message that

saved Paul is the message that saved them. The same grace that turned him into a witness is the grace that holds the whole church together.

In the end, Paul's story is our story. We were all unworthy. We were all broken. And yet—by the grace of God—we are now beloved, called, and sent.

Discussion Question:

Why does remembering our past—and what grace has done—keep us humble?

Possible Answers:

- It reminds us we didn't earn salvation.
- It helps us show compassion to others still struggling.
- It keeps the focus on what Christ has done, not what we've achieved.

Living Out God's Grace

1. Preach the Gospel to Yourself Daily

Don't assume the gospel—apply it. Let the truth of Christ's death and resurrection shape how you handle guilt, face trials, or make decisions this week. Ask: *"What does the gospel say about this?"*

2. Share Your Story with Someone

Just like Paul, your testimony is a picture of grace. This week, look for a chance to tell someone how Jesus has changed your life. It doesn't have to be dramatic. It just needs to be honest.

3. Rest in Resurrection Hope

Whatever weighs you down today—grief, fear, regret—remember: the tomb is still empty. Jesus lives. And because He lives, your hope is secure. Let that truth calm your heart and strengthen your faith.

4. Celebrate the Grace in Others

Who around you is evidence of God's grace? A transformed life? A growing faith? Encourage them. Let them know you see God at work. This builds the body and lifts the eyes.

Group Discussion Questions

- What part of the gospel do you tend to forget or overlook when life gets busy?
- How does the resurrection of Jesus personally affect how you face hardship or uncertainty?
- Who in your life needs to hear the hope of the gospel right now—and how can you start that conversation?
- In what area of your life do you need to “hold fast” to the gospel this week?

Conclusion: Holding Fast to What Matters Most

When the ground beneath us shifts, the gospel stays solid. It’s not just the starting line of faith—it’s the lifeline we cling to all the way through. In a church wrestling with confusion and division, Paul doesn’t offer a new strategy—he re-centers them on an old truth: Christ died. Christ was buried. Christ rose. And nothing is the same because of it.

The gospel isn’t a concept to study—it’s the rescue we stand on. It covers our past with mercy, fills our present with power, and anchors our future with hope. When we hold fast to it, we’re not just remembering doctrine—we’re regaining our balance.

So let’s not drift. Let’s stay rooted. Let’s keep coming back to the one truth that saved us—and still holds us firm.

Closing Prayer

Father,

Thank You for the gospel that saves us, strengthens us, and holds us. Thank You for the cross where our sins were paid for and the empty tomb that gives us living hope. Forgive us for the ways we take the gospel for granted or live like it’s not enough.

Help us hold fast to the truth that Christ died, was buried, and rose again—just as You promised. Make us a people who live with resurrection hope, gospel humility, and a passion to share Your grace with others.

By Your Spirit, remind us daily of what matters most—and let the gospel shape every part of our lives.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Nov 3 – **Nov 9, 2025**