

"Fishers of Men" Series

Tools for the Job

"The Gospel"

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

In our series on becoming "Fishers of Men," we've looked at following Christ, learning from Him, and understanding the tools He's given us. But today, we come to the essential message we carry – the message that saves.

In a world full of religion, the Gospel is not just another spiritual option. It is *the message* that Jesus died for, the one that changes lives, and the one we must proclaim. But what is this Gospel, really? Is it just "Jesus loves you"? Is it good advice for better living? Paul doesn't leave it vague. In 1 Corinthians 15, he gives us the clearest, most foundational summary of the Gospel in all the Bible.

This Gospel is the message we received, the message we share, and the message we carry forward, not just with words, but with changed lives. It's the message we are saved by, stand in, and sent out with.

I. THE GOSPEL WE MUST GRASP – VS. 1-2

We must have a clear grasp of the gospel.

A. Reminded of it – (vs. 1a)

1. *"I declare unto you the gospel..."* The idea of the word for "*declare*" here is that of making known again (reminding). The Apostle is declaring the gospel to them again, not because they hadn't heard the "full gospel," but because they needed to hear it again. He's not assuming they know; he's deliberately reminding them of the specific message that

brought them salvation.

2. *"Which I preached unto you"* – he reminded them of the simplicity of the message he preached when he was in Corinth.

It is with that same simplicity that we are to present the gospel to the lost today. Many of us feel equipped to share our testimony or invite someone to church, but we may struggle to articulate the actual Gospel message itself.

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

¹ And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. ² For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. ³ And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. ⁴ And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: ⁵ That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

B. Reinforced by it – (vs. 1b)

1. *"Ye have received"* – past action – refers to their initial acceptance of the gospel.
2. *"Wherein ye stand"* – present tense – describes their present position in the gospel.

If, when we received the grace of God provided by the work of Christ on the cross (the gospel), we are made to "stand" in a sense of completed action, once for all, then that salvation that we have received cannot be lost. It is, in fact, eternal (once and for all) salvation, eternal security.

Romans 5:1-2

¹ Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: ² By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

C. Remaining in it – vs. 2

1. *"By which also ye are saved"* – present tense – this speaks to sanctification and assurance.
2. *"If ye keep in memory what I preached unto you"*

The phrase *"ye keep in memory"* (κατέχω), in its use here, has the idea of holding the truth of the gospel firmly in one's mind, keeping it secure or in firm possession.

Paul uses this conditional statement to establish the reliability and completeness of the Gospel message rather than to create uncertainty about salvation. He's saying that the Gospel he preached is powerful enough to save anyone who truly receives it, and reliable enough that genuine believers will continue to hold onto it even when challenged by false teaching.

1 Thessalonians 5:21

²¹ Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

Hebrews 3:14

¹⁴ For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end;

Hebrews 10:23

²³ Let us hold fast the profession of *our* faith without wavering; (for he *is* faithful that promised;)

3. *"Unless ye have believed in vain"* – there apparently were some in the church at Corinth that did not truly believe in the entirety of the gospel. They may have believed Jesus was the Messiah but did not believe in the resurrection (as shown in this chapter).

Not everyone that says they are a Christian are truly born again. There are many in "churches" today that believe parts of the gospel, parts of the Bible, but not all of it, so their faith, their belief, then, is vain; it is without purpose, of no avail.

Matthew 7:21

²¹ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

II. THE GOSPEL WE MUST GIVE – vs. 3-9

We must understand what the gospel includes and why it's credible.

When we share the Gospel, we don't need to be able to answer every theological question or historical objection. We do, however, need to be able to clearly communicate the three fundamental truths of the gospel: Christ died for our sins, He was buried, and He rose again.

"For I delivered unto you first of all" – the message of the gospel that he preached to them was "first of all." He isn't saying that this is the first message he gave them (which it probably was) but that it was the most important one, the foremost, primary point of all – and it still is the most important message we have to give.

A. Received from Christ – vs. 3a

1. For Paul, this was literally true. He received the message of the gospel for salvation on the road to Damascus from the Lord directly, and then he was given the ministry of preaching the gospel directly from the Lord by revelation as recorded in Galatians chapter 1 (vs. 10-24).

Galatians 1:11-12

¹¹ But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. ¹² For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught *it*, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

2. For us today, we carry on the same ministry that was given so long ago – preaching the gospel to the lost.

B. Rooted in Scripture – vs. 3b-4

This is the core of our message – if we get this wrong, not much else that we preach matters.

1. *“Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures”* – this is what is known as the substitutionary atonement.

Isaiah 53:5-6

⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions, *he* was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. ⁶ 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.

Leviticus 16:21-22

²¹ And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send *him* away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: ²² And

the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.

When the Apostle states that Christ died for our sins *"according to the scriptures,"* he's anchoring the Gospel in the very heart of Old Testament prophecy and typology. Isaiah 53 declares it plainly: *"He was wounded for our transgressions... the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all"* (Isa. 53:5-6). The Gospel is not new; it is the fulfillment of what God promised all along – that One would come to take our place. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would lay his hands on the scapegoat and confess over it the sins of the people, symbolically transferring their guilt to another (Lev. 16:21-22). Jesus didn't just die, He died for our sins, in our place, just as the Scriptures had said He would.

2. *"He was buried"* – this was proof that He truly died.

Isaiah 53:9

⁹ And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

Jonah 1:17

¹⁷ Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Matthew 12:40

⁴⁰ For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Paul says Christ died and rose again *"according*

to the Scriptures," but he doesn't apply that same phrase to the burial. It's not because it wasn't Scriptural, but because the burial serves as historical confirmation rather than theological foundation. The death was substitutionary, the resurrection was victorious (1 Cor. 15:52-58), and the burial stands between them to show that both really happened.

3. *"He rose again the third day according to the scriptures"*

- a) It's because of the resurrection that we can stand before God justified.

Romans 4:25

²⁵ Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

- b) As stated, it was *"according to the scriptures."*

Psalm 16:10 [cited in Acts 2:25-31 and 13:15 as prophecy of the resurrection]

¹⁰ For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Psalm 2:7

⁷ I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou *art* my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

Acts 13:33

³³ God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

Isaiah 53:10-11

¹⁰ Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he

hath put *him* to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days [speaking of the Messiah after the crucifixion], and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. ¹¹ He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

During World War II, a small group of soldiers was cut off behind enemy lines. One soldier, entrusted with a coded message to headquarters, had to cross dangerous territory to deliver it. His orders were clear: “Whatever happens, get the message through.” He never made it back, but he delivered the message — and reinforcements arrived.

Like Paul, we’ve been entrusted with a message that must get through. We are not responsible for how it is received — but we are responsible for delivering it.

C. Revealed by eyewitnesses – vs. 5-8

1. By Peter (Cephas)

Luke 24:34

³⁴ Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.

2. The twelve – used here as a fixed title for the group of Jesus’ closest disciples (similar to what we understand in the term “*the Supreme Court*” even if one seat is vacant).

3. 500 brethren – a public appearance

4. James (the brother of Jesus)

- a) He was once a skeptic (John 7:5), but because of a personal appearance of the risen Christ (as

recorded here), he became a believer and eventually a pillar of the early church.

- b) This appearance is not recorded in the Gospels and is only mentioned here, suggesting it was a personal, intentional meeting.

5. *"All the apostles"*

- a) This is distinct from "the twelve" of verse 5 – these are overlapping but not identical groups. The twelve were all apostles, but not all apostles were among the twelve (Paul and Barnabas – Acts 14:14; James, the Lord's brother – Gal. 1:19; Silas and Timothy – 1 Thess. 2:6; Andronicus and Junia – Rom. 16:7).
- b) The witness of "the twelve" establishes the historical fact of the resurrection, while the broader apostolic witness shows how that fact was verified and proclaimed by a wider circle of commissioned workers who also encountered the risen Christ.

- 6. Vs. 8 – the Apostle Paul saw the risen Christ on the road to Damascus and according to Gal. 1:11-12, his apostolic authority and gospel understanding came through direct divine revelation rather than human instruction.

Being *"born out of due time"* points to the fact that he wasn't part of the original twelve but came to Christ after the resurrection.

D. Reaching the unworthy – vs. 9

Paul never forgot where grace found him. He was a persecutor of the church of God when Jesus called him by His grace.

This verse reminds us that the gospel doesn't come to the deserving or worthy, for we are all unworthy,

we are all undeserving, we are all sinners (Rom. 3:23). As many have said before, “If grace could reach Paul, it can reach anyone we witness to.”

1 Timothy 1:15

¹⁵ This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

III. THE GOSPEL MUST GO FORTH – vs. 10-11

We must recognize our role in the ongoing proclamation of the gospel.

A. A life changed by grace – vs. 10a

“But by the grace of God I am what I am” – Paul doesn’t glory in his background, his knowledge, his abilities, or his accomplishment. He only glories in the grace that changed him.

- The gospel going forth begins with lives that have been genuinely changed by grace.

B. A labor empowered by grace – vs. 10b

Paul’s labor wasn’t in his own strength, but was grace working “with” him.

Paul doesn’t just say the grace of God was *in* him – he says it was *with* him. The word used (σύν), when used with the word “me” (ἐμοί), emphasizes alongside, in company with, or accompanying. He wasn’t laboring alone. Grace wasn’t just something he had; it was a companion. Every step Paul took in ministry; grace walked with him, guiding his path and strengthening his hands.

- Every soul-winner needs to know that you’re not fishing alone. Grace labors with us when we share the gospel.

C. A light shared through grace – vs. 11

1. The light that transformed Paul is now being preached and received ("believed").
2. The gospel continues to shine out, no matter the "preacher," because it's the same grace, the same message, and the same result: belief.
 - When we carry the Gospel forward, we shine the light of God's grace into dark hearts – and that light still saves.

Conclusion: The Gospel is not just something we *heard* once and that was it. It's the truth we stand in, the message we share, and the mission we continue. Paul reminds us that we were not only saved by grace, but we are *sustained* by it and *sent* with it. This Gospel (the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ) is not just a historical fact, it's hope for a lost and dying world. It has changed us, it empowers us, and it now shines through us. So, whether we are preaching from a pulpit or witnessing at a doorstep, we do so knowing that the grace of God goes with us, and the Gospel we carry still saves.

In 2005, archaeologists in Israel found a 2,000-year-old jar of date palm seeds buried near Masada. Against all odds, scientists planted one — and it sprouted. After millennia, that seed still had life in it.

The Gospel Paul preached is the same Gospel we preach. It hasn't lost its power. It still saves, still grows, still bears fruit.