

PREFACE

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-5.

In a sense, the question is implicitly asked in v2: “the word which I preached to you.” What word? What “word” did the apostle preach to the Corinthians in which they stand, and to which he now expects them to hold fast? Answer: vv3-5.

Don’t make the mistake of being complacent about this succinct summary of the gospel. Don’t just yawn and pass it by, as if you’ve heard it all before—old stuff. Though familiar to anyone raised in the church, it is not just profound, but essential. That is, it requires all of its component parts to be an effective, evangelistic message. Strip down even this brief statement to its skeleton and for the gospel to be the “good news” that it is, each part is required for the world to believe it is true.

1. Christ died
2. He was buried
3. He was raised
4. He appeared

After one has believed, only the first and third are required—Jesus died and was raised—but as a message going out to the unsaved world, all four are required. Let me illustrate; imagine a conversation between a Christian and non-Christian.

Christian: Let me tell you the good news of Christ: He died for your sins.

Non-Christian: Oh yeah? Prove it. Maybe he didn’t really die. Maybe he just passed out and was revived later.

Christian: Well, He was buried in a sealed tomb from Friday to Sunday.

Non-Christian: OK, I’ll buy that. So he died and was buried. He was just a martyr for his cause. So what?

Christian: Ah, but God raised Christ from the dead. He came out of the tomb after three days.

Non-Christian: Sure. Right. Prove it.

Christian: He showed Himself to many people for the next forty days, starting with the women who visited the tomb and then His disciples.

Non-Christian: Could have been a vision. Just an hallucination.

Christian: But He appeared to many more after that. He was there—in person, in the flesh. He ate with them, they touched Him; He was *real*.

Statements two and four confirm statements one and three. That Christ was buried proves that He really died; that Christ appeared to so many (more than 500) proves that He was raised from the dead. As I said, once the Holy Spirit is residing in a believer, the proof of two and four are not necessary; the proof they offer has been replaced by faith.

At great risk of being struck by lightning, I would add only one more necessary component that Paul does not include here—again, necessary from an evangelistic viewpoint, as well as pertinent to our study of Chapter Fifteen. Let's give just a few more lines to our two characters.

Non-Christian: All right, I'm with you so far. But just one more thing: If he was raised from the dead, in flesh, then that flesh surely died eventually. Somewhere there is a second grave with his remains.

Christian: Nope. Christ was raised from the tomb in a *glorified* body—not the kind of body you and I have. It could not die; it was eternal. During those forty days Christ spoke with His followers and ate meals, but he also walked through walls and would disappear from their sight and reappear moments later many miles away. He did not die again; Christ's resurrected body was eternal.

Non-Christian: Now you're really pulling my leg. C'mon—prove it.

Christian: His disciples watched Christ ascend into heaven. They are His witnesses: Christ lives on with God the Father.

Non-Christian: They could have made it all up.

Christian: Hmmmm... Would you allow yourself to be tortured and put to death for something you know is a lie—something you just made up?

v3

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

Let's look at the second phrase first. Although the word *protois* can be used in a temporal sense—as in the KJVs, “first of all,” i.e., first *in time* before anything else—most interpreters say that what the apostle delivered to the Corinthians was (as translated by all our other common versions) the *most important* thing, the *chief* thing. The most important words out of the mouth of the apostle—or any other evangelist—are “Christ died for [your] sins,” followed by the rest of the fundamental gospel. No detailed doctrine, no liturgical instructions, no nuanced theology—just the facts, ma'am:

Christ died.

He was buried.

He was raised.

He appeared.

And, being the most important, these words may also have been the first stated.

For I delivered to you ... what I also received,

When the UPS driver brings you a box, he did not make what is in the box; he just picked it up from one place and delivered it to another. The apostle Paul did not create himself what he delivered to the Corinthians. He did not invent the gospel; he did not dream it up. Because, it is assumed, he was not a direct witness to the teaching and subsequent crucifixion of Jesus, he learned of it from other sources. The hard facts of the passion he probably received from the other apostles, but what about the *meaning* of those events?

Read Galatians 1:11-12.

Paul's commission, handed down directly from Christ Jesus Himself, and explained to him by Ananias. I would guess that most everyone in that region had heard of Christ, that He was killed, that He was buried. But did they know what it meant? Paul was to deliver the meaning behind these events—the gospel—to the Gentiles. Paul offers more details later when giving his defense before the Jews.

Read Acts 22:12-15.

Some see a contradiction between v3 and the passage in Galatians, but in v3 Paul does not say he received the gospel message from men; he may have heard the cold facts about what happened, but he did not learn from them the gospel he delivered to the Gentiles. He just says he received it—from the Holy Spirit and Jesus Himself, we learn from other passages.

...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

This is the first of the four necessary components. The apostle launches immediately into an itemized description of that which he “received” and subsequently “delivered.” This first clause reflects not just the prophecy of Isaiah 53:4-5, but specifically that passage in the Septuagint ([ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew OT](#)):

He bears our sins, and is pained for us: yet we accounted him to be in trouble, and in suffering, and in affliction. But he was wounded on account of our sins, and was bruised because of our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his bruises we were healed.

In v3 the apostle does not cite chapter and verse when he says, “according to the Scriptures,” but he certainly would have had a passage such as this in mind. This is the language of atonement: one dying on behalf of others. Jesus used it when He taught His disciples about servanthood—

Read Matthew 20:28.

—and during the Last Supper, when Jesus instituted the ordinance of Communion.

Read Matthew 26:27-28.

and that He was buried,

It is no small thing that we—as well as the world at large—understand that Jesus truly, objectively died on the cross. Absent His death, there would have been no need for the tomb; without the tomb there would have been no resurrection; without the resurrection, we are all lost (vv16-19).

Note: This pertains to Christ Jesus—“the *first-fruits* of those who are asleep” (v20). *Our* being resurrected to a new, glorified form does not depend on our being dead first. As Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). That is, since those who are alive at His coming for the church will “always be with the Lord,” they, too, will be raised (from the earth) into a glorified state.

Just as, on the Day of Atonement, the goat slaughtered for the atonement of the sins of all Israel must be a real goat and really shed its blood and die, so too the sinless Lamb slaughtered on the cross for the sins of all mankind must really shed His blood and die. The tomb verifies the reality of His death.

...and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Now we get to the nub of Paul’s concern with the Corinthians in this chapter. Permit me to get down into the Greek weeds here for just a moment; it’s important. Understanding what is going on beneath the surface can really bring this to life for us. Back up to v3, where it says, “Christ died.” The tense of the verb translated “died” is **ao^{ri}st active indicative**, which means it objectively occurred (indicative) in the past (ao^{ri}st), and Christ did it all by Himself (active); He died.

Now look at v4, where it says “He was buried.” The first verb, translated “was buried,” is in the **ao^{ri}st passive indicative** tense, which means it objectively occurred in the past (ao^{ri}st indicative), but someone else did it to Him (passive)—because He was *dead*. Obviously, if one is really dead, one does not bury oneself.

Finally, consider the next verb, which is translated “was raised” in all our common versions, but for the KJVs. “Was raised” is just fine (Gordon Fee suggests that “He has been raised” is better). This verb is not aorist but **perfect passive indicative**, which means it is an objectively completed act done by someone else, the effects of which are still felt in the present; Fee says it implies “that He was both raised and still lives, [and that] the passive is an example of the ‘divine passive,’ with God as the implied subject... It is absolutely crucial to Paul’s view that Jesus did not so much rise [cf., KJVs: “He rose”] as that God raised Him, thus vindicating Him.”

...on the third day according to the Scriptures,

The end of v4 is a little more difficult to understand, for there is no crystal-clear passage in the OT that speaks of the Messiah being raised from the dead on the third day. There are a couple of passages that nibble around the edges of this. The first is found in Psalm 16:

**I have set the LORD continually before me;
Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.
Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices;
My flesh also will dwell securely.
For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol;
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay. (Psalm 16:8-10)**

Hold that thought, “undergo decay.” The second is in the prophecy of Hosea.

Read Hosea 6:1-2.

Both of these passages may turn on the popular Jewish belief that corruption of the corpse set in only after the third day. In Psalm 16 he says that “You [will not] allow Your Holy One to undergo decay”—commonly seen as a Messianic prophecy. He would have to be raised by the third day, for after that corruption would have set in. Beyond that, there are a number of references to things occurring in or after three days—“on the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord” (Hezekiah), “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (Jesus). In any case, this clause does, admittedly, remain an enigmatic statement.

...and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

The sentence ends in v5 with the fourth essential component, confirming the third: Jesus appeared to Peter and the rest of the disciples (“the twelve,” a collective designation for the group; at this point there were only eleven; at this point His disciples were just called “the twelve,” no matter the number).

Once more the verb tense becomes important in substantiating this phenomenon of someone who was dead being raised *from* the dead. Again, all of our versions save the KJVs translate this “He appeared,” which is appropriate since the verb is **ao**rist **passive indicative**—that is, in relation to the one seeing the resurrected Jesus, the verb is passive because Jesus is the one doing the appearing. Something is happening to the ones seeing Jesus. Read again the familiar passages outside the tomb, on the road to Emmaus, and others. In all these it is Jesus who is in control of each situation, in control of who and when He is recognized for who He truly is. In these scenes no one knows it is their risen Lord standing before them until He wants them to realize that. He is in charge, and He is in charge of His appearing. In these Jesus was not an apparition, nor a puppet being manipulated by someone else. It was the risen Lord, in the flesh, confirming His return for Himself.

Because this fourth component is so important to Paul’s argument in this chapter, he will continue, in v6-8, to add more sightings, more occurrences of Jesus showing Himself to His followers.

[This we will pick up in our next session.](#)