

Keep The Faith – 1 Cor 15:1-11

1 Cor 15:1-11; (p.961)

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, 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 at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 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, unworthy 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 was not 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 preach and so you believed.

As we enter full speed into the Christmas season, and focus on the Christmas story, this is the *rest* of the story; The point of it all; The *reason* for the season
Referring of course to the gospel; The good news
That's why Christ came in the first place – so he could live, and die, and rise again
So it's particularly appropriate that we look at it *now*, that we read the rest of the story
first – so as to keep it in *mind* as we celebrate later; as we celebrate the birth

- But even more important than keeping it in *mind*, is that we hold fast to it in our *hearts*
That we *keep the faith*, Christmas time or not
That's Paul's main thrust here; Keep the faith
And I trust this will be an encouragement to many, a warning to some, and maybe even a wake-up call to a few

So if you've *embraced* the gospel of Jesus Christ; If you've embraced the message he declared and embodied and carried out, then hold fast to it; It's as simple as that

Hold fast to the gospel (v1-2)

Cling to it as if your life depended on it; Never deviate from its truth

Never waver in your trust; It's the first aspect of Paul's reminder, here in v1-2

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you

IOW the gospel is the means by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to it

Prerequisite to enjoying the benefits and promises of the gospel for all eternity, is holding fast to it now
If you hold fast to the word Paul preaches, you'll continue in its provision and protection
You'll *stand*, you'll remain, in the sweet spot of God's grace and mercy
And *continue* to be saved – progressing in your sanctification, and growing in your Christlikeness

The question is – Have you laid hold of it? Have you embraced it for all it's worth?

If so, hold fast; Not b/c it's a good story and feels right

Or a convenient *out* from the reality of hell

But b/c it's true and trustworthy; True and trustworthy b/c . . .

• It's historically based (v3-4)

Paul doesn't just leave us hanging to come up with our *own* reasons for holding fast to the gospel – he reminds us of the ones that actually happened

The ones *he* was faithful to lay out; Saying in v3-4 . . .

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received [most likely from the other apostles]: *that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures*

Contrary to the message of most religions, the good news of Jesus is true and trustworthy, b/c *it happened*; It happened to a real person, at a real time, in a real place
He actually died, he was actually buried for 3 days to prove it, and he actually came back to life – in the flesh; Walking around to show it; It happened

The best part of which, is that *when* he died, he died for our sins, v3

He didn't just die and rise again to prove that he was God . . .

He bore our sins in his body on the tree (1 Pet 2:24), and paid the penalty of death for them, that *we* deserved; He took our place and died *for* our sins

And then, rose again for our life – the tense of which here in v4, indicates that he was both *raised*, past tense; and still *lives*, present tense; He rose again; It happened
Which makes the gospel trustworthy, and worthy of our adherence

• It was openly predicted (v3-4)

Hold fast to the gospel as true and trustworthy, b/c it was openly predicted

That's one of the implications of saying that Christ died for our sins and rose again *in accordance with the Scriptures* – at the very least, referring to the OT Scriptures
Scriptures that anyone and everyone had access to

There was nothing secretive about it; Nothing written after the fact, or conjured up in a cave, or dug up in a backyard, or anything else

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was alluded to, foreshadowed, and openly predicted by a number of OT prophets/authors – well in advance of when it happened

Like Moses in Gen 22 with the account of Isaac's near sacrifice – it's a foreshadowing
Or David in Ps 16:10, quoted by Peter in Acts 2:27 – that the Messiah wouldn't decay
Or again in Ps 22, the first phrase of which was quoted by Jesus on the cross, and the events of the whole Psalm explicitly mirrored in his death

And then there's Hosea 6:2 and 2 Kings 20:5 that allude to a 3 day resurrection and restoration in general – again foreshadowing what was to come

And the 3 days and nights of Jonah in the belly of the whale, that Jesus explicitly used as an analogy for his own death, burial, and resurrection

And last but not least, Is 53 – the amazing foretelling of the plight of Christ to a “T”

The gospel is true and trustworthy, and worthy of our steadfast adherence – b/c it was openly predicted; Not only that . . .

• It was accurately recorded (v3-4)

While Paul is most likely referring to the *OT* Scriptures in v3-4, *we* have the NT as well
Where the gospel was accurately recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – some within a few years of 1 Corinthians, and maybe even earlier

The point being, that the life of Christ, and especially his death, burial, and resurrection . . .
Was not only faithfully preserved in verbal *creeds* like the one found here in v3-4 . . .
But it was accurately recorded on paper, as well

Accurate, b/c even the few differences in details between the gospel accounts, are easily explained by the various perspectives or emphases of each writer
And there's no doctrinal or substantial disagreement at all
Indicating that the gospel we have in our hands, is accurately recorded, and worthy of our trust; Yet another reason to hold fast to it; Fourth . . .

• **It was widely witnessed (v5-8)**

Paul says in v5-8 – *he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 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.*

From *Peter*, one of the most highly respected apostles, and significant figures in the early church; To the *twelve* – a title for the inner circle of apostles who knew him best . . .
To 500 *brothers* at one time and one place – debunking any objection to the resurrection on the grounds of delusion or conspiracy . . .
Especially since many of them were still alive and available for questioning in order to confirm it . . .
From Peter, to the twelve, to 500 at one time – the resurrection of Jesus was widely witnessed

And then there's *James* in v7; Most likely referring to the half-brother of Jesus
Another significant witness b/c he too would have known Jesus when he saw him . . .
And didn't believe in him until he did (Jn 7:5) – he was a skeptic
But he went on to lead the church in Jerusalem, and author the book that bears his name
That's a good witness – highly respected, closely associated, and a former skeptic

And then he appeared to all the *apostles* – including those who weren't a part of his inner circle, like Matthias, probably James, and maybe Barnabas
He appeared to all of them Paul says – most likely at his ascension, or the occasion of his Great Commission, or possibly the night of his resurrection
Whatever the case, they all saw him

And then he says in v8 – *Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.*
Referring to his own sighting of Christ, later than the others, and in an abnormal way on the road to Damascus; Recorded in Acts 9
It was after Christ had ascended, and absolutely overwhelming

So from a quality of people to a quantity of people – the resurrection of Jesus was widely witnessed; Which is so important, b/c . . .
“Without the resurrection salvation could not have been provided, and without belief in the resurrection salvation cannot be received.” (MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 398)
Everything depends on the resurrection, and thankfully, we can depend on it – b/c it was widely witnessed; And then last . . .

• **It was faithfully preached (v1,9-11)**

Faithfully preached by those who knew Jesus, saw Jesus and were commissioned by Jesus
Like Paul says in v11 – *Whether then it was I or they, so we preach* [referring to the other apostles] *and so you believed.*

The gospel is worthy of our steadfast adherence, b/c it was faithfully preached by men who had nothing to gain, and everything to lose; Including their lives
Which most of them gave; It's the 5th reason to hold fast to the gospel – b/c it was faithfully preached by people like Paul*****

- Who refers to himself in v9, as *the least of the apostles*
Unworthy to be called an apostle [he says], *because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them* [any of the other apostles], *though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.*
It's a perfect example of the *effect* of God's grace on those who have received it – those who hold fast to the gospel, like Paul

Far from leading to laziness or passivity, God's grace in your life should lead to zeal and *activity*; No zeal, no gospel; No activity, no grace
If you have no zeal in your life for the things of God – you have no grace in your life from the heart of God
If you have no passion for his kingdom, no enthusiasm for his church, no fervor for the lost – *you're* lost
I don't care what kind of a profession you've made, or what you say – if there's no zeal, there's no gospel; No activity, no grace

So how about it? Are you holding fast? Does it show? Are you full of passion and zeal for the things of God? If so, don't deviate, don't waver, and . . .

Don't stop believing (v1-2, 11)

Paul says in v11 – *so we preach and so you believed*; You believed/*received* like v1 says
If you've crossed over from death to life; If you've been forgiven for your sin
If heaven is yours and Jesus Lord – it's b/c you first *believed*, right?

You believed that Jesus is God in the flesh
You believed that he came at Christmas, to die at Easter
You believed that you were a sinner and needed a Savior
That you were lost, and needed to be found; You were blind, and needed to see

You believed that hell is real, and heaven awaits
That Satan has lost and Christ has won; That Jesus lives so you could too

You believed the narrow way is the best way; The world's way is no way . . .
And God's way is the only way

You believed that Jesus is Lord and deserves your life
That he is King and deserves your worship
That he will provide and always protect
That he will remain and never forsake
That he will love and never leave
If Jesus Christ is Lord of your life, it's b/c you believed

- But just b/c you believed in the past, doesn't mean you can stop in the future
Don't stop; Having first believed like the Corinthians, and currently standing in the truth of the same gospel – don't stop

Otherwise, it's all for naught – you will have believed in *vain*, v2

The gospel is the means by which you are being saved – *if* you hold fast to it; *if* you don't stop believing

Otherwise, your initial belief is of no use; It matters not

Forsaken faith is not saving faith

Your salvation rests not only on initial belief, but continual belief

Which is why it's so crucial, to . . .

Persevere to the end (v2)

To keep on keeping on

Once again, the gospel is the means by which you are being saved – *if you hold fast*; if

you persevere to the end; In which case, you're saved

If you persevere to the end, you're saved; Right now

If you don't, you're not; If you don't persevere to the end, you're not saved

Salvation is not a fire insurance policy that you throw in the safe, while continuing play with matches; It's meant to be lived out; It's meant to be applied your entire life

- That doesn't mean that your salvation is *dependent* on your perseverance
If that were the case, it would be a work; And works don't save you
It's *by grace you have been saved . . . not of works* (Eph 2:8-9)
Not by external things you *do*, but only internal things *God* does
Like forgiving your sin, and granting you life, and declaring you righteous

God is the one who saves you, and God is the one who keeps you; **Eph 1:13-14** says . . .

When you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, [you] were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance [our eternal life] until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

It's God who saves you, and it's God who keeps you, seals you*****

And it's your perseverance that shows it's *genuine* – that you've *genuinely* believed, and genuinely *received* the gospel

- In that sense Heb 3:14 says that *we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end*
If indeed we persevere in our belief, firm to the end of our lives
We show that we're saved *now*, if we *persevere* later
No perseverance, no salvation; Persevere to the end; Keep the faith

And if you're *not* persevering these days – repent

Repent of your sin and return to the Lord; Maybe you're outright rebellious, or maybe you're indulging in sin, or maybe you're just lazy in following the Lord

Whatever it is, stop counting on your profession of faith in the past, and start living it out; Stop treating the gospel as fire insurance, and start treating it as blessed assurance

Stop flirtin' with disaster and get right with the Master

B/c the longer you wait, the harder it'll be*****

- Are you holding fast?
Ask yourself – Am I holding fast to the gospel? Am I continuing to believe? Am I continuing to trust? Am I persevering? Am I keeping the faith?
Are you?

If you can't answer yes to those questions, emphatically so, the time is now to get right

To get on your knees, repent of your sin, and return to the Lord

The time is now to renew your commitment and refresh your zeal

In order to keep the faith, at Christmas and always

If that's you, you come as I pray

Pray – God, help us; Forgive us for wavering; Forgive us for wandering; Forgive us for flaking out; We commit anew, to keep the faith; For your glory, and our joy

Worship – Stronger

Close – Buraga's; Gift bags; Invitations; Love to meet you