

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor  
Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreekbaptistchurch.com)  
18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834  
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## 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 “God Has Good News for You”

Intro. You know our world is full of bad news. If you have been watching the television, or reading the newspaper, you know about all the bad news. Last year there were some terrible hurricanes. There was an earthquake Friday in California that did a good bit of property damage. We hear about war and terrorism. At any moment we could hear about another mass shooting, like the one in VA Beach recently. We hear about lawlessness in some countries that can spread elsewhere. Politically, our country is extremely divided. The world is full of bad news!

And you know in our own personal lives there can be bad news. We all have sinned. Sin has a way of enslaving us in its grip and if we don't do something about our sin, we can spend eternity separated from God. After all, the Bible says, “The wages of sin is death.”

But in a world of bad news, I have some good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ. In fact, Paul calls the message of the Christian faith, “the gospel” in v.1, and that word means “good news.” I have good news this morning that God loves you. I have good news that your sins can be forgiven. I have good news that you can be set free from the power of sin. I have good news that you can have a life that is full of love, joy, and peace, and that Christ can satisfy the deepest longings of your heart. I have good news that you can have eternal life in heaven.

This morning I want to share with you the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. This gospel was not invented by men. This gospel was received from God, as Paul says in v.3 and Gal. 1:12 and so I want to share with you this good news from God, and I hope you will listen carefully.

Now the first thing I want to share with you is:

### I. THE SUMMARY OF THE GOSPEL

In vv.3-4 Paul gives a brief summary of the Gospel. From this summary we see that Christianity does not rest on a set of ideas or creeds. Christianity is not merely a philosophy of life. Christianity is not just a set of rules. But Christianity is first and foremost the good news about Jesus Christ. The gospel is rooted in the saving work of Jesus Christ. So what is the summary of the gospel that Paul gives here? First, it is:

A. That Christ Died for Our Sins – That's what Paul says in the last of v.3. Normally the death of someone is not good news, but the death of Christ had a saving purpose. So, the Gospel begins with the fact that Jesus Christ *died* by crucifixion. I want you to appreciate the depth of suffering that Jesus endured to save you from your sin. We know that He went through severe torture and punishment. They hit him in the face and elsewhere. They spit in the face of Jesus until the spittle flowed down His cheeks. They mocked Him, crowning Him with a crown of thorns, and dozens of needles sent pain into His body. Then they took the Lord and they scourged Him. In the hands of a trained Roman soldier that scourge was a whistling monster. They just beat and ripped the back of the Lord Jesus until it was a chunk of blood and raw flesh. Then they took Jesus Christ up Calvary's hill and on that hill you could hear the ringing blows of the hammer, driving large nails into his hands and feet. Pain with shoes of fire went running up and down His nervous system. The hot Middle Eastern sun beat down upon the form of Jesus Christ. Thirst and dehydration set in. None ever went through such misery and agony as did Jesus on the cross that day.

The Gospel accounts make it clear that Jesus could have avoided such suffering (John 10:18). So why was He willing to go through such an agonizing death? Well, the gospel is not simply that Jesus Christ died on a cross. But Paul clearly writes in v.3 that Jesus died “*for our sins.*” You see, that word “for” [*hyper*] means He died instead of, on behalf of, or in place of. It is the language of substitution. You see, Christ took our place. Over in 1 Peter 3:18 the Bible says, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God....” Jesus never sinned, so He did not die for His sins, but for our sins. He took our place. He was our substitute. Every time we read of a nail going through the hand of Jesus, we should remember that it should have been our hands. When we think of that soldier taking that big nail and driving it through the feet of Jesus, we should say, “That should have been done to my feet.” I should have been crucified, not Jesus! We were the ones who deserved that death. Isn’t that wonderful that the sin debt has already been paid by Jesus?

Again, notice that he wrote that Jesus died for “*our sins.*” If you remove sin from the picture, His death does not make sense. Our culture is losing a sense of what sin is. But the death of Jesus on the cross in such pain and agony proves that there is sin, and that God’s holy wrath must punish sin. And because of our sin, we deserve death and hell. So Jesus suffered on our behalf what we deserve because of our sin. His death was a satisfaction of the just demands of the righteousness of God against sin.

How do we know that Christ died “for our sins”? How do we know that He wasn’t just another victim of Roman crucifixion? One reason is given by Paul. Notice that He said that Christ died for our sins “according to the Scriptures.” The Old Testament points to the sacrifice of the Messiah from Genesis to Malachi. The sacrificial system pointed to the death of Christ, especially the annual Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). The priest would confess the sins of the nation as he laid his hand upon the sacrificial animal. Then its throat would be slit and its blood flow. The sacrifice would die for the sins of the nation, and they would go free. Isa. 53 and Psa. 22 clearly prophecy of the death of Christ, and even give indications of a death by crucifixion, long before crucifixion was even used as a form of capital punishment. The prophet Isaiah said, “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities...” (53:5). The prophet also said that God would lay upon Him the iniquity of us all (53:6). How could it be more clear that Christ indeed died for our sins, just as the Scriptures predicted!

During the Civil War unusual punishments were sometimes administered to keep the men in line. Some involved physical discomfort and others humiliation. According to Webb Garrison in his book, *The Amazing Civil War*, a common punishment was to be branded. For instance, a deserter would be marked with a “D” on his shoulder, chest or back. Thieves might be marked with a “T” and a coward marked with a “C.” There were even some who were branded “W” for worthless. Can you imagine what it would be like to bear your sin in such a fashion for the rest of your life? As Christians we are grateful that God does not mark us permanently for our sins. This is because of Christ, who took our punishment for us.<sup>1</sup>

Now because Jesus died for our sin, He offers salvation from the penalty of sin. You do not have to suffer for your sins. Christ will forgive you and wash your sins away. He will set you free from the condemnation of sin. You can be forgiven, and have peace in your heart.

B. That He Rose from the Dead – Paul says in v.4, “...and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” With only Christ’s death and burial, we have no good news. If Jesus’ body is lying in some forgotten grave, then there was nothing in His death that had the least bearing

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<sup>1</sup> *Preaching*, July/Aug. 2005, p.72.

upon men's sin, and it is no more to me than the deaths of thousands in the past. But Jesus did in fact rise from the dead, as Paul proves in vv.5-10.

The resurrection of Christ is good news to us personally for at least 2 reasons: First, His resurrection proves that His death was indeed an acceptable sacrifice for our sin. If Jesus had died for His own sin, He would no doubt have remained dead. Rom. 4:25 says that Christ "was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification." Secondly, the living Christ can now dwell in us to give us power over sin. When Paul says v.2, "you are saved," he uses a present tense. Salvation is not static; it is dynamic. The Christian is not only saved from past sin but is being saved from the power of sin by the living, dynamic presence of Jesus Christ. A number of people give the excuse that they do not become Christians because they do not believe that they can live the Christian life. But Christ not only forgives sin, but He also lives within us, enabling us to have victory over sin. Christ changes lives by His resurrection power!

So those are the basic facts of the Gospel. Because of what Christ has done, we can be forgiven of our sin, and we can have new life in Christ. But how do we know that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is true? Well let's see not only the summary of the Gospel, but also:

## II. THE SUBSTANTIATION OF THE GOSPEL

There are those who deny that Christ died for sin. They deny the reality of His resurrection. No doubt there were skeptics and unbelievers in Corinth. So Paul gives strong, convincing evidence that Jesus truly did rise from the dead. And if He rose from the dead, then He surely died for our sins. So what evidence can we present concerning the resurrection? Well I present to you 7 evidences of the resurrection! First, I know that Christ rose from the dead because of:

A. Old Testament Prophecies – In v.4 Paul says that Christ rose again the third day "according to the Scriptures." Psa. 16:8-11 and 110:1-4 and several other Old Testament passages (Psalm 2:7; Isa. 53:10), either directly or indirectly (Hos. 6:2), literally or in figures of speech, foretell of His death, burial, and resurrection. Aaron's rod was dead wood, but by the power of God it budded with new life. Furthermore, the experience of Jonah typified the Resurrection according to Jesus (Matt. 12:38-41). It was a good as dead but came forth on the third day. The Scriptures predicted the Resurrection.

B. The Testimony of the Empty Tomb – Paul is sure to mention the burial of Jesus as part of the Gospel (v.4a). That burial tomb would prove to be significant. You see, in the providence of God, the body of Christ was laid in a tomb of solid rock. No one could get His body out except by the entrance. Yet it was sealed with a heavy stone and the seal of the Roman Empire. It was guarded by a special guard. Yet, the tomb became empty, except for the grave clothes. That is proven by the fact that the enemies of Jesus never could produce the body of Jesus, which would have stopped the spread of Christianity very quickly.

What is the satisfactory explanation for the empty tomb? The story that the disciples stole the body is incredible. They wouldn't go face a Roman guard, break a Roman seal, and try to steal a body which could only bring them more trouble. And the gospel accounts make it clear that they certainly weren't looking for more trouble! And if they stole the body, and lied about the resurrection, why would they face persecution and ultimately die for a lie? And how could such a high system of morality come from a religion founded on a lie? Oh, no. The empty tomb cries out, "He is risen, just as He said."

C. The Testimonies of the Apostles – In v.5 Paul says “that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.” Acts 1:3 says concerning the apostles, “to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days....” The first apostle to see Jesus was Peter. One reason that I know that Peter saw Jesus alive was because of the transformation of his life. Peter, who denied Christ because he was afraid of a servant girl, later stood up before the hostile crowd that had crucified Christ, and boldly preached in resurrection power. How can you explain the change in Peter’s life if the Resurrection had not occurred?

The others of the 12 disciples also saw Jesus. They all became witnesses as well, including doubting Thomas. And but for their profound belief that the crucified had risen from the dead, the Church would never have come into existence, and Jesus Himself would probably have been all but forgotten. And this belief came with reluctance, as the gospel accounts indicate. If the resurrection had not occurred, there is no doubt in my mind but that the disciples would have left Jerusalem and gone back to Galilee to try to start their lives over again. With the shepherd dead, the flock would have scattered. But their testimony, even unto death, proves that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead. The New Testament would never have been written apart from the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, there was:

D. The Testimony of the 500 – Paul says in v.6, “After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.” Scripture gives little indication of who those people were, but they were surely well known in the early church. This took place probably during the appearance in Galilee that is referred to in Mt. 28:10. In a remote section of the hill country of Galilee the Lord could meet with a much larger number without their attracting undue notice.

Another important point is that at the time of Paul’s writing, more than two decades later, most of the witnesses were still alive. It is as though Paul was giving an invitation to the Corinthian doubters to find these people and ask them their experience with the living Christ. In fact, it’s possible that many of these witnesses went all around as lay missionaries, giving testimony of what they had seen. How can you deny the testimony of so many? Perhaps one or two could have been mistaken about seeing Jesus alive again, but not 500! So many could not have been hallucinating. So Paul proves the resurrection by referring to the large number of eyewitnesses. You just can’t get around witnesses. Any lawyer today would love to have as many witnesses for his position. These witnesses were reliable, competent, and contemporaneous.

E. The Testimony of a Skeptic – Paul says in v.7, “After that He was seen by James....” This is surely a reference to the half-brother of Jesus. Paul met James on a visit to Jerusalem, and probably learned of this encounter from him. Originally, he was a skeptic and an unbeliever. John 7:5 says, “For even His brothers did not believe in Him.” It was probably the experience of seeing the resurrected Christ that finally brought James to saving faith. In fact, he became a key leader of the Jerusalem church. In any case, the convincing testimony of a family member and former unbeliever was added to that of the apostles and the 500. After all, when it comes time to identify a body, they always call in a family member. James gave strong testimony that the person who appeared was in fact his brother, Jesus.

F. The Testimony of a Former Enemy – In v.8 he says, “Then last of all He was seen by me also....” One of the greatest witnesses of the resurrection was Paul himself. For years he was an unbeliever and a chief persecutor of the church, as he indicates in v.9. But he claims that years after the resurrection of Christ, the Lord made a special appearance to him. How else can we explain the

fact that Paul, the enemy of Christ, was suddenly completely changed? How else could the greatest persecutor of the church become the greatest proclaimer of the gospel of Christ? Paul himself was a great example of the power of Christ to change lives. For he says in v.10, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Paul was an example of God's grace and resurrection power working in a life to make a person a great blessing to others.

The size of the testimony and the consistency of the testimony are adequate to prove the resurrection to any who are willing to believe. Historian Thomas Arnold of Oxford has written, "I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is better proved by fuller evidence than the great sign that God has given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead."

I have reached the end of the evidence given by Paul. But there is even more evidence:

G. The Testimony of Millions - In vv.1-2 Paul reminds the Corinthians of the gospel which saved *them* out of spiritual blindness and deadness into the light and life of Christ. Paul says back in 6:9-11 that at one time they were extortionists, thieves, adulterers, fornicators, homosexuals, liars, and idolaters. Who but the risen, living Christ could have taken such thoroughly worldly pagans and transformed them into a community of believers? Such was the product of resurrection power.

And to this very day millions testify to the transforming power of Jesus Christ. He changed *my* life. Sometimes we sing the old hymn that says, "You ask me how I know He lives, He lives within my heart." If *you* believe that Jesus is alive today, and has changed your life, give testimony by saying, "Amen."

Furthermore, the endurance of the Church of Jesus Christ through almost 2,000 years is evidence of His resurrection. You simply cannot explain the Church apart from the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. His church and His Word have survived skepticism, persecution, and other attacks. The Church lives because Christ lives!

Aren't you convinced that Jesus rose from the dead? Don't you believe that Christ died for your sins? Well it is most likely that some of you need to turn to Jesus Christ this very day. So let's see from our text:

### III. HOW TO RECEIVE SALVATION OFFERED BY THE GOSPEL

Christ died for us all. You can be forgiven and have eternal life. But God's great gift of salvation is not automatically imparted to you. God's salvation must be received by each individual. There must come a time in your life when you personally appropriate the gospel. So what must you do to be saved?

A. *Receive* the Message of the Gospel – I have been preaching the Gospel to you today. Likewise, we see in v.1 that Paul preached the Gospel to the Corinthians. But they were saved only when they "received" it. That word (*paralambano*) indicates taking something to yourself as your own. Here it means "to receive with the heart and mind." Paul said in Romans 10:17, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." We must not only hear the gospel, but also receive it.

Sometimes we husbands audibly hear what our wives are saying, but we are not receiving what they say. That is not good in our relationship with our wives and that is not good in our relationship with God.

So don't reject the Gospel; receive it. Are you grasping what you are hearing this morning?

B. Receive Salvation as a Gift - You do not work for it or earn it. It is a gift of grace. Paul wrote in v.10, "But by the grace of God I am what I am." He wrote in Eph. 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." He wrote in Rom. 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Salvation is all of grace. Paul never lost sight of the fact that on the Damascus road God gave him, not what he deserved but what he needed, salvation from sin. God looked beyond his fault and saw his need. His former position as grand persecutor against the church of God not only caused Paul much sorrow but also increased his admiration and appreciation for God's grace. That's why he said in v.9 that he was the "least of the apostles," for he was least worthy of them all.

Salvation by grace is very much a vital aspect of the good news of the gospel. All other religions do not have good news. Any good that they claim to offer, you have to work for, and you never know if you have done enough. Thus, you never have peace in your soul.

Suppose you came to me when I was 30 years old saying, "Preacher, I have some good news. I know how you can become a millionaire!" I would be interested. So you say, "Get an extra job, work long hours, set aside \$10,000 each year for about 40 years at 6% interest, and you would have a million dollars." That is not good news. What good is working so much for so long if you don't have time to enjoy the fruits of your labor? But if someone came to me and said, "Your cousin has died and left you a million dollars," that would be good news, for that would be a gift of grace, not of works.

Likewise, religion says that if you live right and do all these religious works you just might earn eternal life and a reward in heaven. Yet you never know if you have done enough. What kind of good news is that?

Yet I have true good news for you. Salvation from God is a free gift of His grace, provided by the sacrificial death of Christ. Now if salvation is a gift, how do we receive it?

C. Receive Salvation by Faith in Christ - Paul wrote in v.11, "...whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed." Believing in Jesus Christ is an absolute requirement. This is taught throughout the New Testament. Eph. 2:8 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith...." So once you hear the good news that Jesus died on the cross and paid your sin debt, and that He is willing to forgive you freely by His grace, you must in childlike faith believe in Jesus as your Savior. Don't trust in what you can do. Don't trust in a church or what a priest can do. Trust in Jesus. And the tense of the verbs here indicates that there must come a decisive moment in your life when you believe.<sup>2</sup>

So do you believe this good news? Surely you do! Why not place your faith in Jesus Christ this morning?

Yet we must be careful here. Paul mentions in v.2 the possibility of "believing in vain." There is a false faith. For example, you believe in vain when your faith is just a mere intellectual assent to the facts of the gospel. Jas. 2:19 says, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!" Such faith is vain. Furthermore, faith is vain when it does not produce a changed life. The missing ingredient in such faith is repentance of sin and surrendering one's life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. A true faith is willing to let go of sin, and cling to Jesus. Finally, a vain faith doesn't last. Jesus said in John 8:31, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed." So Paul said in the last of v.2, "you are saved if you hold fast that word which I preached to you...." Those who do not continue to learn the teachings of Jesus, to live by them, are not true believers. But most of the Corinthian believers had a lasting faith, as Paul

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<sup>2</sup> In vv. 1 and 11 the verbs are aorist; v.2a it is present.

stated in the last of v.1. They were standing firm in their faith, which was proof that their faith was genuine and not empty. Now which kind of faith do you have?

Two boys stood at the edge of a frozen pond. One of them said to the other, “Billy, I believe it will bear our weight.” “Do you?” asked the other, “Yes.” “Then get on it.” “No,” said he, “I don’t want to.” “Then,” said the other, “you don’t believe it will bear you.” He was right. In the same manner, if a man stands outside the finished work of Christ on the cross and says, “I believe that; I believe it is a valid philosophy: I believe that it is enough to save a man,” that man is not saved. He must step out on his belief, or it is merely a worthless profession on his part.<sup>3</sup> True faith is a committed faith, a faith that works.

Conclusion: Aren’t you willing to receive Christ right now? Remember, Christ died for your sins. You can be forgiven. And you can receive Him into your heart because He is not dead, but alive. The Bible says in Jn. 1:12, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” Someone said, “The door to the human heart can be opened only from the inside”. Will you open your heart to Jesus today? I Jn. 5:12 says, “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” I am asking you today to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior in repentance and faith. Don’t put it off another day.

Sources: R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937); John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 14 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint), also pp. 237-242; J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Paige Patterson, *The Troubled Triumphant Church: an Exposition of First Corinthians* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Jerry Vines, *God Speaks Today: A Study of I Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) and notes from his sermon on v.3; Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Wise: I Corinthians* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983); Spiros Zodhiates, *Conquering the Fear of Death: An Exposition of I Corinthians 15* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). Read Craig Blomberg, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), but no notes added yet.

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<sup>3</sup> From *Pulpit Helps*, Vol. 30, No. 1, January 2005, page 1.