

You Are Being Saved If...
1 Corinthians 15:1-2

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— unless you believed in vain.

For fourteen chapters, the Apostle Paul has been encouraging the Corinthians to live holy lives amid a corrupt world, and his first letter provides evidence of their division.

One of the first repercussions of the Fall was relational disfunction –

- Adam and Eve from God – “...they hid themselves from the presence of the Lord...” (Gen 3:8)
- Adam from God – “The woman **you** gave me...” (Gen 3:12)
- Adam from Eve – “The **woman** you gave me...”
- Cain from Abel – “...Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him...” (Gen 4:8).
- Nations against God – “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves” (Gen 11:4).

Unity is important because it reflects God’s ongoing work in the world since Eden.

For instance, in Matthew 8, a centurion (Roman/Gentile) asked Jesus to heal his servant. Jesus agreed to go to the Centurion’s home, but he replied,

“Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof...” (v 8).

Matthew, writing to Jews said that

“...he (Jesus) marveled and said (about a Gentile) to those who (Jews who) followed him, Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.

And then, building off of the Roman/Gentile centurion’s example of faith, *“I tell you, many will come from east (Rome, Africa, North & South America) and west (like Russia, India & China) and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven”* (vs 10b-11).

Of course, all of this fulfils God’s promise that *“all the families of the earth shall be blessed” through Abraham*” (Gen 12:3).

The Apostle Paul reiterated this unifying work when he wrote, *“Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.”* (Galatians 3:7-9).

Just before his crucifixion, he told the disciples to *“Go...and make disciples of all nations...”* (Mt 28:19).

Then, after the resurrection, he called on the disciples to be *“witnesses... to the end of the earth”* (Acts 1:8).

We know they – and we – are successful in that endeavor because John sees people around God’s throne from *“every tribe and language and people and nation...”* (Revelation 5:9).

But it isn’t always a straight line between

- Jesus’s promises of unity,
- Paul’s pleas for unity and
- the Revelation’s fulfilment of it.

Nonetheless, Paul argues for unity throughout the New Testament –

Ephesians 4:3 – Paul encourages the Ephesians to be *“eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*

1 Corinthians 1:10 - *I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united...*

Again, as in many other things, the Corinthians are divided about spiritual gifts and tongues, in particular.

Note: Charlie said last week that I would talk to you about the spiritual gift of tongues. In connection with unity, let me say that

- The division of languages that God caused in Genesis 11:9b - *...the LORD confused the language of all the earth.*
- He reunites in Acts 2:8 – *“...how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?”*

God is indeed reconciling *“all things to himself...”* (Col 1:20).

It is on the basis that reuniting of languages that Paul appeals for unity in the church body at Rome and writes –

Romans 15:5-7 - *May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*

Right now, as the redeemed people of God, we are called to form the single family which anticipates the one-body scene in the Revelation.

Paul uses two great metaphors to illustrate God's work –

- In both the Jewish and Greek religion, the Temple is where Heaven meets earth

Ephesians 2:19-21 - So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Unity is the vocational habit of the church; to model the Spirit's uniting work

1 Corinthians 10:17 – Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 – For just as the body is one and has many members, and all are the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and were all made to drink of one Spirit.

After the pronouncement of Jesus as saving king, the doctrine of the unity of the body may be the predominate doctrine in the NT. Fundamentally, this is because it reflects God's trinitarian nature, but also because it properly echoes his invitation for all people everywhere to become part of the church.

Because of its location on the connector between the Ionian and Aegean Seas (much like the Connector between Isle of Palms and Mount Pleasant SC), Corinth was a gathering place for many cultures, but the church was failing to be a preview of that Heavenly gathering. This is an indictment of God's promises and God's power.

In the same way God reunited languages at Pentecost, he also does this for nations/peoples.

Genesis 11:9 - Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

Acts 2:8-11 - And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God."

Two things: One to the church and one to unbelievers

1 – Church - here, once again, we see our faithful God take a curse and turn it into a blessing (as he did at the cross (Gal 3:13). Here, he takes Babel's judgement and turns it into Pentecost's blessing.

Here, he takes the division of Babel's tongues and unites them to his praise, a foreshadowing of that great day when *"every tongue [will] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Phil 2:11).

And the Corinthians took something that holy and turned it into a volleyball that they flippantly tossed amongst themselves, reminiscent of the sin of Esau (Hb 12:16).

2 – Unbelievers - The church may fail to appropriately witness about God, but that doesn't disprove the truth. Children think $2+2 = 3$, but that doesn't eliminate the truth of $2+2 = 4$. Some people don't believe in God, you may not, but that doesn't negate the reality. On the day of judgement, you won't be able to excuse your lack of faith on someone else's misrepresentation of God.

What subjects divided the Corinthian church?

1 – Personalities – 1:10 - *For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. ¹² What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ."*

2 – Wisdom - 2:12 - *Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.*

3 – Sexual immorality – 5:1-2a - *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. ² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn?*

4 – Lawsuits between Christians – 6:1 - *When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? 5b - Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers,*

5 – Marriage, sexuality, divorce & singleness – 7

6 – Food offered to idols – 8:8-9 - *Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹ But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.*

7 – Rights – 9:27 - *But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*

8 – Idolatry – 10:14 - *...my beloved, flee from idolatry.*

9 – Head Coverings in church – 11:16 - *If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.*

10 – Lord's Supper – 11:20 - *When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat.*

11 – Spiritual Gifts - 12:2 - *You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led.*

14 – 14:20 - *Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.*

15 – The Resurrection - 15:12 - *Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*

All of this brings us to **the text** in which Paul reminds the Corinthians that

a) He preached the Gospel to them 1ab

'Gospel' is a secular word spiritualized by Paul. It is an announcement of something that has happened and calls for a corresponding response.

b) You are standing in the Gospel 1c

Despite all their confusions, divisions, and weird spirituality, they were still standing for the gospel.

1 Corinthians 1:2 - *To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints*

c) The Gospel is saving you 2a

- Saved from the penalty of sin
- Saved from the power of sin
- Saved from the presence of sin

2 Corinthians 3:18 - *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

d) If you hold fast to the preached word 2c

There are places where the word '*if*' and the word '*since*' are the same word and translated differently depending on the context of the discussion. But not here. (The Greek first class condition does not justify the translation of "if" as "since.")

The present tense "*you are saved*" clearly depends on the condition "*if you hold fast to the word*" referring to the gospel.

The verb for "*hold fast*" (*katecho*) is used in the New Testament in relation to the Christian's sanctification experience (See Luke 8:15; 1 Thes. 5:21; Heb. 10:23).

e) Otherwise, your faith is dead 2d

'*in vain*' = '*without basis*.' The faith is he calling them to concerns Jesus's resurrection.

15:3-4 - *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,*

So, this is the order:

- a) The gospel is preached
- b) We receive it
- c) We stand in it
- d) We are being saved by it
- e) If we hold fast to it
- f) Otherwise, our faith is in vain.

In other words, the resurrection should be relevant today. It should make a difference in your life, and, in the case of the Corinthians, concerning unity. Their voice, and our voices, should resemble the future Heavenly choir and not the city around them.

Conclusion:

Unity is so important that Paul has devoted an entire book to it. He does the same thing in Galatians and stresses it in a multitude of other epistles.

It echoes back to the pre-Fall Garden, demonstrates the power of the Gospel in a fallen world and foreshadows a Heaven that acknowledges God's success in unifying a body through Jesus.

It is only as the Corinthians, and we work through potentially divisive attitudes and issues that we are standing in the Gospel, holding fast to it, and are saved by it.

Community Groups:

- 1 – Review the divisions in the Corinthian church.
- 2 – What is the source of relational dysfunction?
- 3 – Where do we see it in Eden?
- 4 – How does Babel reflect division from God?
- 5 – How does Jesus's statement in Matthew 8:10-11 preview unity in the Church?
- 6 – How does Matthew 28:18-20 preview unity in the Church?
- 7 – How does Acts 2:8 resolve Genesis 11:9?
- 8 – Paul calls the church a Temple in Eph 2:19-21? Why is this significant?
- 9 – How does communion speak to unity (1 Cor 10:17)?
- 10 – Review the various steps listed in 1 Cor 15:1-2.
- 11 – What is "vain faith?"
- 12 – Why does Paul say that we are "being saved" only "if" we "hold fast" to the Gospel?
- 13 – Does this promote salvation by works?
- 14 – Why is unity in the church so important?

Daily Devotion:

Monday, September 26th – Read Matt 5:9. Relational dysfunction is one of the first results of the Fall. Where in *the* world do you see this? Where in *your* world do you see this? When you see it today, be a peacemaker.

Tuesday, September 27th – Read 1 Cor 15:1. Someone was faithful to preach/teach/witness about the Gospel to you. How/where did you "receive" it? How will you share the Gospel today? With whom? This week, contemplate those relationships.

Wednesday, September 28th – What are the three tenses of salvation? What does Paul mean that we are "being saved" in 1 Cor 15:2? What can you point to in your own life that demonstrates that you are "being saved?" How might you challenge others to demonstrate their salvation?

Thursday, September 29th – What does it mean to "hold fast to the word" in 1 Cor 15:2? Does holding fast promote salvation by works? Read James 2:14-16. How is your salvation working when it comes to unity? Are there relationships that need unifying work? What will you do about that this week?

Friday, September 30th – Read 1 Cor 15:3-4. Do you believe that Jesus has been resurrected from the grave? How are you living in the light of your own resurrection? Can you point to specific areas where the thought of your own resurrection has changed your attitude or behavior? How will it today?