

THE FOUNDATION OF OUR FAITH

1 Corinthians 15:1-23

Intro: The first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians clearly reveals that it was a very troubled church. That is apparent from chapter 1, verse 10, to the end of the epistle. If the work that had been done in Corinth had only been a work of man, even of an apostle, it would never have survived. How had it been done?

I. THE WORK OF THE LORD IN CORINTH.

It was clearly a work of God. Paul indicated this when he said in chapter 3, verse 6,

I have planted, Apollos watered; **but God gave the increase.**

In chapter 4, verse 1 Paul added,

Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

And so even what Paul and Apollos had done, they had done as “the ministers of Christ,” and they had no desire to be known in any other way. And he had warned the church that the only foundation that can be laid that will survive is Jesus Christ. His purpose in coming to them had not been to impress them with his knowledge, but to preach “Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). How wonderful it would be if every servant of the Lord were as careful to do the will of God as Paul had been, and to give God all of the glory for all who had been saved, and for the progress which many had made in spite of all of the problems that were in the church.

While it is to be lamented that there will doctrinal problems as well as other problems, yet we should not be surprised to read what we find in the fifteenth chapter of this epistle. There he reviewed the Gospel which he had brought to them. Note in verse 1, “the Gospel which I preached unto you.” It was the Gospel which they had “received.” It was the Gospel upon which they were standing. This was the only hope that Paul had offered to them as giving them acceptance with God.. And he minded them that this was the Gospel “by which also ye are saved” unless it might have been that their faith was not a genuine faith. There is always that possibility when we see people turning from the Gospel of the grace of God.

Neither did Paul take credit for having originated the message which he preached to them. In verse 3 he said that he had “received” it. This was a

point that Paul made also with the troubled Galatian churches. In Gal. 1:11-12 we read these words:

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.

So even though Paul had not been an apostle when the Lord was on earth, he could claim that he had received his message directly from the Lord Jesus Christ. Read all of Galatians 1 to see all that he had to say on this point.

II. THE GOSPEL PAUL PREACHED.

What was the Gospel which he preached?

We see what it was in 1 Cor. 15:3, 4. (Read.)

There are two important points to the Gospel, and two points in support of the main points. The two main points are declared to be “according to the scriptures.” They are:

- 1) “Christ died for our sins,” and
- 2) “That He (Christ) rose again.”

Note that Paul spoke of our Lord as “Christ,” the Anointed One. He had been divinely anointed to do what He did. So the very title, “Christ,” adds authority to the message. And it is important to note this. Note how Paul referred to our Lord as “Christ” in verses 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23 (2x). It was “Christ” as a Man Who died. And Paul would not have been able to say what he did about the Gospel if he had been talking about a mere human being. “Christ died for our sins.”

But the authority of the message is emphasized by the statement, “according to the scriptures.” His death, i.e., Who He was and why He died were both predicted by the OT scriptures. And the same can be said about His resurrection. It was “according to the Scriptures.”

We can cite Isaiah 53 as an example of the predicted death of Christ; we can cite Psalms 2 and Psalm 16 as Paul himself did in Acts 13:32-37. Thus, if Christ had not died, and if he had not been raised from the dead, the reliability of the OT would have been destroyed. Christ had to come. He had to die, and He had to die as a Substitute for sinners, and He had to be raised again -- and raised on the third day!

The fact that He was buried proved that He died. This was a point upon which Christ's enemies agreed as well as His disciples. The fact that He was raised was confirmed by the fact that "he was seen." These words appear four times in the text. (Read vv. 5, 6, 7, 8.)

So the two great truths of the Gospel are:

- 1) "Christ died for our sins."
- 2) "He rose again the third day."

These are facts of history which are a fulfillment of OT prophecy. And now we have the record in NT Scripture as well as OT Scripture that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, that He died to save His people from their sins, and that three days following His death He arose from the dead.

Paul felt absolutely humbled by the message, and completely unworthy to be the bearer of such a message because of what he had previously done to put an end to the Gospel. See verses 9-11.

At this point Paul proposed the big question.

III. THE BIG QUESTION (1 Cor. 15:12).

I don't think that we have paid as much attention to this question as we should. It would save us a lot of trouble not only in connection with the resurrection, but in dealing with all of the other teachings of Scripture.

The question amounts to this: *Since the death and resurrection of Christ are clearly established facts of history, and since our Lord predicted that both would take place, plus the fact that they were in fulfillment of what the OT predicted concerning the Messiah, then why are some of you spreading a doctrine which would have made the work of Christ for our salvation?*

Will you notice that this was not a problem in Corinth, but not in the church. This was a problem in the church, a false doctrine which was accepted by people in the church. Apparently they were not denying the resurrection of Christ, but they may have believed that the body was evil, and therefore any future life that there might be would not include the body. Charles Hodge said in his commentary that there were certain philosophers which said that the hope of the resurrection is "the hope of swine," and that once the soul was freed from the defiling encumbrance of the body, it would never again be imprisoned in a body. See p. 319 in his commentary on the Corinthian epistles. We can see how quickly

people will try to harmonize pagan religious philosophy with the truth of Scripture. But in attempting to do so, they were denying one of the two major foundational truths of the Gospel. Because if there is no resurrection, then Christ was not raised from the dead after all.

But let us see what Paul said about the consequences of such teaching IF it were true.

IV. THE CONSEQUENCES OF DENYING THE DOCTRINE OF THE RESURRECTION (1 Cor. 15:13-19).

Let me say as we look at these, I don't think Paul was talking about people who denied the resurrection but believed in some kind of a spiritual existence in a future life. He may have been, but what Paul wrote does not appear to indicate that. It seems to me that, as amazing as it sounds, Paul was talking about the denial of any future existence at all. And I cite verses 18 and 19 as my reason for saying this. One may have led to the other, that is the denial of physical resurrection may have led to the denial of any future life at all, but it seems that what Paul was dealing with here was the hope of every child of God.

However, it may be, the denial of resurrection has many serious consequences. Let me list them for you.

The most tragic of all:

A. "Christ is not risen" (v. 13).

Think of what this would mean. Paul repeated it in verse 16.

B. "Our preaching is vain" (v. 14).

The integrity of the Gospel ministry was under attack. Paul would have been guilty of preaching error. He seems to have come back to this in verse 15.

C. "Your faith is vain" (v. 14b).

"Vain" is the same word Paul used in connection with teaching. It means that it was empty. There was nothing to either the apostle's preaching nor the faith of the people. It would not amount to anything.

Paul came back to this in verse 17, and he added a further consequence if

Christ is not raised from the dead.

D. “You are yet in your sins” (v. 17).

So the resurrection of Christ is actually a vital part of our salvation.

E. “They also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished” (v. 18).

We will never see them again. They were comforted in their deaths by a hope which would never be realized. The Gospel promise is that we will not perish, but have everlasting life. This is not true if there is no resurrection.

Finally,

F. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (v. 19).

Paul meant that if our hope in Christ is limited to this life, then we are to be pitied more than anyone else because we have placed our hope in heaven and glory, but we will never see them at all.

How dangerous it is to tamper with any doctrine of Scripture, but especially with the great doctrine of the resurrection. If what “some” were saying about the resurrection were true, it would in effect destroy the Christian faith. The foundation of our faith rests solely upon Christ, and upon His death for our sins, and His triumphant resurrection from the dead. Obviously there are many things about the Scriptures which we cannot fully understand, and which may not make sense to us now, but let us always beware of taking a position, any position, which places us in opposition to Scripture. When we take our stand on Scripture we can never be wrong.

How thankful we can be that those who denied the resurrection were not right, and to give assurance to the believers in the Corinthian church, and to all of us who today believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, at this point Paul gave:

V. A GRAND, POSITIVE STATEMENT OF THE HOPE THAT WE HAVE IN CHRIST (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

(Read.)

Christ is risen! And He has become “the firstfruits of them that slept.” By this Paul meant that the resurrection of Christ to glory guarantees the same resurrection to glory of everyone who in reality believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. Death came by man, Adam; by the man Christ Jesus has come the resurrection of the dead. All who are in Adam die, but all who are no longer in Adam but in Christ shall be made alive. Christ was the first to be raised never to rise again; when He comes our resurrection will be like His.

Concl: Men have come along from that day to this to deny one or another of the great doctrines of our faith. They all are important, but none is as important as the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the foundation of our faith. Let us have nothing to do with those who would change in even the slightest way what the Scriptures teach us about Christ and His work of salvation. Let us remember the words of Edward Mote’s great hymn:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus’ Name.

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

Make sure that your faith is in Christ, His death and His resurrection. He is the only Savior, and the Word which tells us of Him is forever true.