LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Delivered as of first importance

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Welcome back to our study in 1 Corinthians. We're just going to cover 11 verses this time, so this might be a slightly shorter study, but there are some important things that are said in this section, and I wanted to give it its proper time. Let's go ahead and read the first 11 verses of chapter 15, and then we'll pray. It says, Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve, then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, 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, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Whether then it was I or they, so we preach, and so you believed. Let's pray. Father, just eleven verses, but so powerful, so meaningful. Help our eyes to be opened spiritually, our spiritual ears to be unstopped, that we might hear you and see you, and understand what you want to say to us through this passage. I pray it, Father, in the authority granted us through the name of Jesus.

Amen. Amen. Paul has been talking to the Corinthians a lot about how they were doing things, and he's had a lot of corrections and rebukes, frankly. Now he's going to get into a lengthy section on the resurrection, which we will do next time. But as a springboard to that section, he begins by restating the simple gospel of Jesus Christ, and he says, I would remind you now of that gospel.

The one that I preached to you, he says, the one that you received, in which you stand, and that means stand by faith, and by which you are being saved. Do you understand that we refer to ourself as saved, past

tense, by faith? We've not received our salvation. We have received a down payment, the Bible tells us, which is the Holy Spirit and the promise that comes with the gospel message. But we have not received the fullness of our salvation, not by a long shot.

So the Bible refers both to us as saved, past tense, and as being saved, present tense, because of the reality of the timeframe in which we live. I'm living in that time period where I'm waiting. I'm waiting with patient endurance for my Lord to appear and to either take me home through physical death or to come for me when he comes to receive his bride. So we are being saved in that very real sense of the word. Now he goes on to say something that I want you to be very careful to understand and to see in this passage.

So I'm going to start here again in verse two, where he says, and by which you are being saved if you hold fast to the word I preach to you, unless you believed in vain. We need to be very careful here now. The word if is a very important word for something that only is made up of two letters. It is such a powerful word because grammatically speaking, it introduces what we call a conditional clause. In other words, something is conditioned on something else.

We will go and have a picnic outside tomorrow if the weather cooperates. I used the word if there to introduce a conditional clause to saying that our picnic is conditioned on the weather. Paul introduces a statement with a conditional clause, and it's very important that you see it. He says to us that we are being saved if we hold fast to the word that was preached to us. That's what he's saying to the Corinthians.

That's what the Holy Spirit is saying to us. He's saying there is a conditional clause to our salvation, and it's faith. Faith—holding fast is another phrase to refer to faith. My faith is found in nothing less than Jesus Christ, and what he did on the cross. My faith rests on what Jesus did on the cross.

Paul says our salvation is conditioned upon faith. That's the condition. If someone doesn't have faith at all, they're never going to come to a place of salvation if they never choose to exercise faith in the finished work of Jesus. Now here's another question. What if a believer loses faith?

What happens? I don't know. All Paul is telling us here is that our salvation is conditioned on holding fast by faith to the promise of God's word that we are saved. You know, I would have to say one of the most popular questions that I have ever received as a pastor is, can we lose our salvation? And to me, I think it's kind of a dumb question, to be honest with you, because it comes from so many different angles.

Usually what people mean when they ask that question is, can you sin so much that pretty soon God just says, that's it, you've done too much, I'm kicking you out of the family. And so there are so many

layers that you have to unwrap to get to the bottom of what people are really asking when they ask that question. I think it's the wrong question. I really do. And I don't think that as a pastor that I really should be even answering that question.

What I should be telling people is what the Bible says. What does the Bible say? Well, right here it says that the word, the gospel was preached to you and by that gospel and your faith in that gospel, the message of Jesus on the cross, you are being saved if you stand fast. That's what we should be telling people. And when they come back to us and say, well, are you saying that?

I'm not saying anything more than what Paul is saying. I'm saying you are being saved if you stand fast. And he goes on to say, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. Here's a question. Is it possible to believe in vain?

Paul thought so. The apostle Paul thought so because he said to the Corinthians, unless you believed in vain. Obviously he thought it was possible to do so. Now I know that these statements, in fact, this verse is going to upset people. I know it will.

That's not my problem. As a Bible teacher, I'm here to tell you what the Bible says. Now I will say something else. In all my years of walking with the Lord, and that's been over well over 40 years, I have never once been concerned about my salvation, about losing it or losing faith. Never once.

I have never lost a moment's sleep worrying that somehow, some way, I either sinned too much or didn't have enough faith or whatever, you know. I have had a security all my life in my salvation. And I think you should too. Because salvation is not by works. It's a gift given us by God as we place our faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross when he bore our punishment.

That's it. Hold fast. We need to hold fast. That's one of the reasons why the Bible tells us over and over and over and over again to stand fast. Hold fast.

Hold fast to your faith. Make sure that your faith, make sure you're not messing with your faith. And what I mean by messing with your faith is I mean ignoring it. Because you know, your faith can be weakened If you're not in the Word, if you're not in fellowship, if you're not serving the Lord, if you're not spending time in prayer, your faith can and will be weakened. Don't let that happen.

Don't mess with it. Your faith is very important. It is how your salvation has come to you through the work of Jesus on the cross, by putting your faith, right? Isn't that what Paul said in Ephesians 2 verses 8 and 9? For it is by grace you have been saved through faith.

And this not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works so that no one may boast. So don't mess with your faith. Make sure you're building up your faith always. You never have to worry about it.

Stay in the Word every day. Go to church. Make it a priority. Serve the Lord. Make it a priority.

You never have to be concerned. Okay? Let's keep going. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I, he says, I also received. And that is that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, that's Peter, and then to the 12.

And then he appeared to more than 500 brothers. At one time, he says, a lot of those guys are still living at the time of this writing, though some have fallen asleep. By the way, that is a euphemism. It doesn't mean they're truly sleeping. It is a euphemism that Paul used for a Christian dying, because when someone dies, the body appears to be sleeping, but the spirit and the soul immediately go to be with the Lord.

Okay? So their body might take on the appearance of sleeping, but they're with the Lord. He goes on to say, then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and then last of all, he says, he appeared to me as one untimely born. Interesting term, huh? And then Paul goes on to say, for I am the least of those who bear that name, apostle.

He says, in fact, because of my past, I'm not even worthy to be called an apostle. And yet he says, by the grace of God, I am what I am. I want to talk about this for a little bit. Paul understood his past. I think he never forgot, you know, his past.

He knew that he was crazy in his mind to persecute Christians. He was so zealous that he was bordering on insanity, and yet God called him to be an apostle. Paul never, he never forgot. He never let go of the past in that sense. But he also didn't beat himself up about it.

He said, by the grace of God, I am what I am. And he's going to go on to talk about how God's grace has worked in and through him very powerfully. But I want you to know and understand that Paul said, I'm not even worthy to be called an apostle. I think Paul would have even said, I'm not worthy to be called the child of God. You know, I'm not worthy to even be saved.

Yeah, I agree. You know, I have had so many people over the years, usually after I'm done teaching on a Sunday or Wednesday, they'll come down, talk to me in the front of the church or something, and they'll

talk about their lives, and they'll talk about their sin and the things they've done. And they'll just say, I just feel so unworthy, you know. And I look at them and I go, yeah, so? You feel unworthy?

Well, I just feel like I'm never going to be worthy. Yeah, you are never going to be worthy. Get that through your head. I am not worthy to be a Bible teacher. I am not worthy to be a child of God.

It is not about our worthiness. It's about his worthiness. He is worthy. We are not. We will never, ever be worthy.

Okay? We need to all just settle our hearts on that and realize that it's not about being worthy. It's about putting your faith in Jesus and what he did when he gave his life for you on the cross. That's the essence of what Paul is going over in these verses. He says again, by the grace of God, I am what I am.

And that's what we all need to say. I mean, I think we should adopt this very statement. We should get a t-shirt made up. By the grace of God, I am what I am, you know. By the grace of God, I am a Christian, a follower of Jesus.

By the grace of God, I am a child of God. By the grace of God, I am a teacher of the Bible. But it's all by grace, by the grace of God. And that grace works powerfully. That's what he goes on to say.

That grace, he said, toward me, was not in vain. It was not for no reason. In fact, he said, on the contrary, I worked harder than any of the other apostles. Now, he's not bragging because he goes on to say, it wasn't me. It was the grace of God working in and through me.

And that's what grace is. Grace actually kind of has two definitions in the Bible. Grace means unmerited favor, but it is also the power to do. And those things are very closely related. So it's unmerited favor, but that favor is the power to do.

God favors you to do something on his behalf or to be something on his behalf. It was God's grace that caused Paul to be a disciple. It was God's grace that caused Paul to be an apostle. It was God's grace that caused Paul to do the work of the apostle. Okay?

And it's the same with all of us. It's grace to be, and it's grace to do, the power to do, the ability to do. And then he says in this final verse that we're looking at today, whether then it was I or they, right? So we preach, and so you believed. This is the gospel.

We preached it. You believed it. And by it, you are being saved by faith. So hold fast. Let's pray.

Father, thank you. Thank you for your word. Thank you for your love. Thank you for your grace, the power to be and the power to do. Lord, work through us.

We pray it in the authority given us by the name of Jesus. Amen.