

Paul's Gospel

1 Corinthians 15:1

Paul has spent the past chapters rebuking the Corinthians for their behavior (Chapters 1–6), answering questions they had about living the grace life including questions on marriage and divorce and food offered to idols. Paul then explained the purpose of the Body of Christ and how they were to treat the weaker Christian. The weaker brother is one who could be pulled into sin by going against his conscience because a stronger brother is exercising his freedom in Christ.

Chapters 12–14 cover the use of spiritual gifts. These gifts were given to strengthen the church, not for bragging rights. The Corinthians had failed to understand that they were to watch out for, and build up each other. Paul spells out exactly what the functions of the gifts were and how they were to be used within the church.

We now come to a very important chapter that is filled with the hope of our resurrection. This is one chapter that is often misunderstood because the traditions of men interfere with what Paul teaches. A good understanding of this chapter will firm up your assurance of eternal life and give you much joy in the unwavering anticipation of our eternal existence with Christ.

Overview of chapter 15

Paul begins chapter 15 with a reminder of what they believed for their salvation. He then shows them the importance of the resurrection and shares with them some information about the end of the age and the supremacy of Jesus Christ. Paul then goes into some detail about the type of body we will have in the resurrection. He finishes up with specifics about the resurrection of the saints who are in the Body of Christ at the Rapture of the Church.

It seems as if Paul is encouraging them to live a life focused on serving Jesus Christ rather than on a life that is self-centered. He is raising their sights above and beyond this life on earth by giving them a vision of their future eternity. They were questioning the idea of a resurrection and Rapture because they walked away from Paul's doctrine and were listening to those within the church who were teaching false doctrine (1 Corinthians 3:1–5; 5:9–11; 10:14).

Paul's doctrine

Not only does Paul continually emphasize his authority as an apostle, but he often asserts that his message is unique and one that was hidden until it was revealed to him by Jesus Christ. Paul was a masterbuilder of the church (1 Corinthians 3:10). He is called a steward of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1). This is why Paul tells them to be followers of him, not of Christ nor Peter (1 Corinthians 4:16). Those who follow Paul are actually following Jesus Christ, which is why we are to follow his teaching (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17).

Ephesians 3:1–5 explains how God used people to disseminate this new doctrine of the Mystery. We can easily understand that God gave Paul this doctrine, and from Galatians 1:1, 11–12 we can see that it came directly from Jesus Christ, just as He promised Paul He would do (Acts 26:16). Most people believe that Paul was told the exact information that Peter was preaching and that they therefore were preaching the same gospel. However, this does not explain why Peter was struggling to understand what Paul was teaching (2 Peter 3:15–16). A study of Peter's writings shows that Peter never spoke about the Rapture, only about the Second Coming. The Rapture is a concept that was given to Paul by Jesus Christ concerning the Church, the Body of Christ. Peter only addressed his letters to the nation of Israel because he was commissioned to minister to Israel. This confusion comes about because most people interpret the Bible through their theology instead of understanding their theology by Scripture rightly divided.

Although many people say they are rightly dividing, few actually do. Many people say that they separate Israel's program from the Church's program, but few actually understand what that actually means. Anyone who runs to the Old Testament for Church doctrine is mixing two different programs. Anyone who pulls truths out of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John for today is again mixing what was given to Israel with the doctrine of the Church.

Ephesians 3 shows that after Paul was given the distinct Gospel of Grace doctrine, that others received or understood it by the Holy Spirit. This was one of the purposes of the spiritual gifts. It didn't take months or even years for Paul's revelations to spread among the other churches. The other apostle and prophets were given the same information as Paul was given personally by Jesus Christ so that all would be equally informed. This would help to explain how the churches in Rome obtained scriptural knowledge, other than from believers who had traveled to Rome. It would help to explain how the Corinthians had received information in Paul's absence, and how Paul seems to be reiterating what they need to do to live a sanctified life.

Romans 16:25–26 also gives a great synopsis of what Paul was preaching. He was preaching his gospel, the one given to him personally by Jesus Christ. He is careful to tell us which gospel—the one according to the revelation of the Mystery, the one which was kept secret since the world began. This could not be the gospel preached by Peter, James, and John, or even by Jesus while on earth. They were preaching what had already been made known in the Old Testament (Acts 3:18; Romans 15:8). Paul is preaching doctrine which was unknown until it was revealed to him known as the unsearchable riches of Christ. This is doctrine that cannot be traced back to the Old Testament, it was unsearchable. The gospel that Paul preached is the gospel that was made known to all the nations so that they would obey in faith.

Received and standing

Paul was addressing believers within the congregation. There were heretics who had infiltrated the church and were causing the Corinthians to be led astray, but Paul is speaking directly to the saints. These saints had not been growing because they had been operating in the flesh instead of being led by the Spirit. They were called carnal, but that did not change their position in Christ. As 1 Corinthians 15:1 puts it, they received the word, and they were still standing in it, even though they were carnal.

Just as Paul received the word from Jesus Christ, the Thessalonians were shown to have received the word preached to them by Paul (1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:13). They understood that it was not a man speaking, but the very words of God. Not only did Paul receive the word, but he also stood in it having believed it (Romans 5:2).

It takes a great amount of effort to say that Peter's gospel is the same one preached by Paul, yet people do it all the time because they are following traditional teaching. If Paul's gospel were not unique, he would not be able to call it *my gospel* (Romans 16:25) and *the gospel that I preach* (1 Corinthians 15:1). He also called it our gospel, which includes those who were helping Paul in the preaching of the gospel given to Paul by Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:14). He even warns the Galatians about those who were preaching anything other than the gospel that he was preaching, the one which was given to him by Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:6–9, 11–12).

Peter's gospel was one that originated with the prophets of the Old Testament (Acts 3:19–21). In contrast, Paul preaches a gospel that was revealed to him by Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11–12). That message is not traceable back into the Old Testament (Ephesians 3:8). Peter's message was directed to Israel while Paul's message was primarily to the Gentiles. Peter spoke to a Gentile after Israel had been put aside and only after God commanded him to do so, but after Paul was called by God to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

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