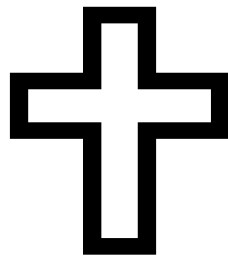


**The True and Blessed Gospel
of Our Lord Jesus Christ**



**Evangelical Lutheran Congregations
of the Reformation**

Fellowship Day Essay

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The True and Blessed Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Introduction

My dear brothers and sisters of the ELCR. Thank you so much for giving me this privilege of sharing God's Word with you. I pray that this essay will be an encouragement and a strength to you who are members of God's true visible church in these final days. Who knows but that this may be your last Federation Fellowship Day before the Lord returns with His holy angels to judge the quick and the dead. I count it a great responsibility to address you at this late hour, seeking to "stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance, that you be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets and.... the apostles of the Lord" (2 Peter 3:2).

The Holy Spirit expressly tells us that shortly before the end of this age, Satan will be loosed for "a little season" to again deceive the nations (Rev. 20:3). He will cast out of his mouth an overwhelming flood of false doctrine and confusion (Rev. 12:15). He will seek to deceive, if it were possible, even God's very elect (Matt. 24:24). Most significantly, he will cause "the way of truth (to) be evil spoken of" (2 Peter 2:2). That is, he will discredit and obscure the Gospel of our salvation. Because we are now in this "little season", I would like to use our present occasion to remind you of the true and blessed Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ - its nature, importance, and content.

The Gospel is able to do for us that which we cannot do for ourselves. It is the "power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 1:16). Paul thanked God that when the Thessalonians received the Gospel, they received it "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which *effectually worketh* also in you that believe" (1 Thess. 2:13). Paul commended the Ephesians to God, and to the Word of His grace, that is, to the Gospel "which is *able* to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18).

Now we must be certain of our Gospel. Here is a place where there is no room for error. Paul tells us that "though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8). And Paul also says, "woe unto me if I preach not the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9:6). The Gospel is that particular truth of the Word of God by which a soul is saved. A man may correctly believe every other doctrine of the Word of God, but if He doesn't believe the Gospel, he is lost. Likewise, a man may unknowingly err in many secondary-fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines, but if He believes the Gospel, he is saved. Jesus commissioned His disciples "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16).

God has not left us in the dark as to the content of the true Gospel. He has carefully defined the Gospel for us in 1 Cor. 15:1-4. Thus there can be no mistake about it, and those who ignore this clear passage are "without excuse". Let me now read to you this wonderful Word of the Holy Ghost, spoken through the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians. Paul writes, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

In this important passage, we see three truths about the Gospel. First, we see the nature of the Gospel (v. 1), that it is something objective, something that stands on its own as authoritatively true in itself and is able to be communicated to others. Second, we see the importance of the Gospel (v. 2), that it is the unique truth by which we are saved. And third, we see the content of

the Gospel (v. 3-4) in the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. All of these truths are quite simple, and probably not new to you, but as Peter says, "I will not be negligent to put you in remembrance of these things, though ye know them" (2 Peter 1:12). And Paul says, "To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe" (Phil. 3:1).

The Nature of the Gospel (15:1)

Let us begin with the first point - the nature of the Gospel. The Gospel is objectively true. In other words, it stands on its own merits, and is always true regardless of man's reaction to it. Paul says, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand" (v. 1). Here we see that the Gospel can be *declared*. It can be *preached*. It can be *received*. By Paul's use of the aorist tense here, he is saying that at a single point in time he preached this message called "the Gospel" to the Corinthians, and at a point in time they received it. The Gospel is transferable. It can move from one person to another. The word Gospel comes from a Greek word meaning literally "good news". It is not a word of command or exhortation, but it is a declaration - a declaration of good news about something God has done for us. It is not subjective, not mystical. One doesn't have to make a pilgrimage to a foreign land nor enter into a trance to discover it. Rather it is plainly set forth in the Word of God. It is objective, definable, and knowable. Paul says to the Romans that it "now is *made manifest*" (Rom. 16:26). To Timothy he says that God "hath brought life and immortality *to light* through the Gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10).

This is a very important point because we live in an age when men have abandoned the concept of objective truth. Having rejected the Word of God, they have concluded that nothing can be known with certainty. Like Pilate, they scoff with sarcasm, "what is truth?" For them everything is subjective. There is no right or wrong. Like in the days of the Judges, "each man does what is right in his own eyes". If one says white is white and another says it is black, then for one it is white and for the other it is black. They're both right. They must just agree to disagree agreeably. If one says Christianity is the way to heaven and another says Buddhism, again they're both right. Both are just different paths to the same mountain top. The whole world applauds those who are seeking God, but they despise those who have found Him. The keynote words of our evil day are love and tolerance. But love and tolerance at the expense of truth. And as dear Dr. Luther said, "Cursed be to the depths of hell that love which compromises the truth of God's Word". Now set against all this worldly deception, we Christians have the objective Word of the Gospel, spoken by a God "that cannot lie" (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18).

The objectivity of the Gospel is important for another reason. Because it is objectively true, it stands outside of us. In other words, it is in no way dependent upon us. It remains true whether we apprehend it or not. "Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4). It is a fact that Christ died for our sins. And our faith or lack thereof doesn't change what is. If I don't believe that Christ died for my sins, it still remains true that He did. But by my unbelief, I make no use of this great treasure.

Let me give you an analogy. Imagine that I have been convicted of crimes against my country and have been placed in a maximum security prison. I am to spend the rest of my days in a small cell and there is no possibility of escape. But then, apart from anything I have done or could do, the governor out of his gracious and merciful heart decides to grant me a full and unconditional pardon for my offenses. There is no more debt to pay, the doors of my prison are opened, and I am free to go. But now imagine that I do not believe the word of the governor nor apprehend my open door. Then, despite the fact that I have been forgiven and the way of escape has been provided, I will remain in my dark cell. And the fault lies not in the objective word of the gracious governor, which ever remains true, but in my own unbelief and refusal to make use of that which has been freely given.

The Power of the Word

Now it is also important to note that the Gospel comes to us via the Word. Paul reminded the Colossians of “the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the *Word* of the truth of the Gospel” (Col. 1:5). Again, he told the Ephesians that they had believed in Christ “after that ye heard the *Word* of truth, the Gospel of your salvation” (Eph. 1:13). Without the Word, we could not know the Gospel, and thus could not be saved. For this reason, Paul writes to the Romans, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!’” (Rom. 10:13-15). If Christ had died on the cross for our sins, but no one told us of it, the work of Christ would be of no benefit to us. For we are “saved by grace through *faith*” (Eph. 2:8). And without God’s Word there can be no faith, as it is written “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Just as God created the world by the Word, so He has chosen to redeem the world by the Word.

The Ancients recognized that a word is always connected with thought and breath. To become known, a thought must be wrapped, as it were, in a word and put forth with breath. And these three are one. Thus we have a picture of the Trinity in action. The thought corresponds to God the Father. Of Him it is written, “No man hath seen God at any time” (John 1:18). The word corresponds to God the Son. Of Him it is written, “the Word was made flesh” (John 1:14). And the breath corresponds to God the Spirit. Of Him it is written, “all Scripture is inspired by God”, that is, “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16).

Now let us apply this to the Gospel. The great truth that saves our souls is the fact that Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins. But this truth must be wrapped in an audible word, and this word is the Gospel. And wherever this Gospel is proclaimed, there with certainty is the Spirit of God. Thus the Gospel is not just a word, but a living and powerful Word, even the Word of God. It is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16). It is spoken by men, but is in truth the Word of God. And the whole life of God resides in the Gospel, as a whole tree residing in a single seed. Thus, whoever receives the Gospel receives the whole life of God. And like a seed, in time it will bring forth the entire Christian life. But also like a seed, the Gospel must be guarded and nourished. We see this truth taught in the parable of the sower and the seed (Matt. 13:18-23). You will remember that only the soil that persevered with the seed brought forth fruit unto salvation.

“Wherein ye stand”

So, we see the nature of the Gospel - that it is objectively true. Before we conclude this point, we want to look at the end of this verse. Paul says, “I declare unto you the Gospel.... wherein ye stand”. The Gospel here is being likened unto a circle of safety, a city of refuge, a spiritual ark, or a tower of strength. In other words, as we stand by faith in the Gospel, nothing can hurt us. We are surrounded, as it were, by “salvation’s walls”. For us to be harmed, these Gospel walls must fall, which can never happen for “the Word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you” (1 Peter 1:25). As our dear Martin Luther taught us to sing, “A mighty fortress is our God”.

Furthermore, Paul says that in the Gospel we “stand”. In other words, outside of the Gospel we would fall. Thus, the Gospel is not only our refuge, but the sole foundation upon which our faith can stand. Though the foaming waves of judgment threaten our destruction, the Gospel ever remains “the rock that is higher than I” (Psalm 61:2). Though Satan goes about as a roaring lion, the Gospel ever enables us to be “able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:13). The Hebrew term for faith had the idea of “leaning one’s weight upon”. The strength of faith was dependent upon the object of faith. Lean your weight upon a lie, and the lie will soon give way and betray your confidence. It will not accomplish that for which you have trusted it. People may believe many things, but the issue is whether what they believe is true, whether it has been derived from the Word of God which cannot lie. The Gospel is that which

we may safely "lean our weight upon" - now, at the judgment, and forever. "Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed." (Rom. 10:11).

The Importance of the Gospel (15:2)

We come now to our second point - the importance of the Gospel, that it is the truth by which we are saved (v. 2). Paul writes, "I declare unto you the Gospel... by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain". It is by the Gospel that we are saved. But, you may ask, saved from what? Well, saved from all of our enemies. Or as Zacharias said, "that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life." (Luke 1:74-75).

First, we are saved from our three personal enemies - the flesh, the world, and the devil. When I speak of the flesh, I speak of that natural man in Adam, born of the mother's womb - that man who is born from below, and loves the things below. He is at "enmity against God, is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). This is that wicked man we ever experience and who cannot please God. It is that man who is set against our new man in Christ, and causes us to war. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17). But this wicked man has been nailed to the cross with Christ (Gal. 2:20). Though there is always the challenge of the voice of experience, we are to reckon this man to be dead with Christ (Rom. 6:6,11). "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." (Gal. 5:24).

Likewise with the world. We ever experience its trials and temptations, but we are to regard ourselves as in it but not of it. Like the Apostle Paul, we must apprehend that by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ "the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14). This doesn't mean that the world no longer exists, but that we have been separated from it. We are dead unto it, and it unto us. Thus we must "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (1 John 2:15-17).

And, then there is the serpent of old, the devil who accuses the brethren day and night before God. My dear friends, by the atoning work of Christ, we have been freed from him too. For Christ partook of flesh and blood that "through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). Satan would like to scare us, but let us not fear. "Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). God already "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son" (Col. 1:13). Satan has no claim upon us nor authority over us. Let us now take up "the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." (Eph. 6:16).

But we must mention three other significant enemies that we are now saved from - that is, sin, death, and eternal wrath. Though the Scripture says that the soul that sinneth, it shall surely die, we through the Gospel have died with Christ (Gal. 2:20). "For he that is dead is freed from sin" (Rom. 6:7). While we experience sin in our members, sin cannot, so to speak, stick to us. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us (continually) from all sin." (1 John 1:7).

We also have been saved from death. For us Christ "hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." (2 Tim. 1:10). Again, if the Lord tarries, we must experience physical death, but Jesus said, "he that believeth in Me doth not come into condemnation, but *hath passed* out of death into life." (John 5:24). This is already an accomplished fact. Also to Martha, sister of Mary, Jesus said, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and

believeth in Me shall never die" (John 11:25, 26). Physical death is but a picture or shadow of the real eternal death that Christ has saved us from. Now, like David, we can sing, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the *shadow of death*, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me" (Psalm 23:4). Yes, Thou art with me, the Great Immanuel, "God with us."

Finally, we are saved from eternal hell, the wrath of God which "is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). We Christians do not "come into condemnation", but as Paul says, Christ hath "delivered us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:10). "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thess. 5:9).

A Great Warning

So, the Gospel is the truth by which we are saved - saved from the flesh, the world, the devil, sin, death, and eternal wrath. But Paul says that we are saved only "if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain." (v. 2). Here is a great warning, the possibility of loss. Not that this argues against our security in the Gospel, for as long as we hold to the Gospel, we are eternally secure. But let us always remember that our security is completely in relation to the Gospel. If we have the Gospel, we have security. If we let go of the Gospel, we let go of security. God says, "Abide in the Gospel house and the angel of death will pass over you. But leave this house and you are again subject to the same judgment as the world."

It is important that we pay heed to God's very real threats of loss in departing from the Gospel. Here, Paul says, we are to "keep it in memory". The Greek term is "katecho", meaning "to hold fast". Thus Paul says that we are saved if we "hold fast" that which he has preached to us, that is, the Gospel. The writer of Hebrews likewise warns, "whose house are we, if we *hold fast* the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." (Heb. 3:6). And, "we are made partakers of Christ, if we *hold* the beginning of our confidence *stedfast* unto the end" (Heb. 3:14). And again, "Let us *hold fast* the profession of our faith without wavering; for He is faithful that promised." (Heb. 10:23).

It is interesting to see how this word "katecho", or "hold fast" is used by the Holy Spirit in other passages of the New Testament. In Matthew 21 Jesus tells a parable of a certain householder that had a vineyard, and rented it out to certain husbandmen. After unsuccessfully sending his servants to get fruit from the husbandmen, he finally sent his son to them. And Jesus said, "But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us *seize* on his inheritance." (Matt. 21:38). The word "seize" here is "katecho", and we can see that the husbandmen wanted to "hold fast" the inheritance, that is, never let it go. In Luke 4, it says of Jesus that "the people sought Him, and came unto Him, and *stayed* Him, that He should not depart from them." (Luke 4:42). The word "stayed" is again "katecho", and shows that the people "clung to Him", that is, to prevent Him from getting away. In the parable of the sower and the seed, Jesus said, "But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, *keep* it, and bring forth fruit with patience." (Luke 8:15). The word "keep" is "katecho", and means to "retain it and persevere with it". So we see from other usages that when Paul tells us to "keep in memory" the Gospel, he means "to hold it fast, cling to it, retain it, persevere with it, prevent it from getting away, and never let it go".

This is not the only place where Paul warned his readers of the danger of losing the Gospel. He exhorted the Romans not to be high-minded toward the unbelieving Jews. "For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in His goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Rom. 11:20-22). Paul also wrote to the Colossians that God would present them holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in His sight: "if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel" (Col. 1:23). Peter also warned his readers about a person who "cannot

see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins” (2 Peter 1:9). And if he had forgotten that he was purged from his old sins, he had forgotten the Gospel. And if he had forgotten the Gospel, he is lost, for the Gospel alone “is the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16).

My dear friends, let us always remember that the Gospel is the all-important truth of the Word of God. It is the centre-piece, the crown-jewel, the “pearl of great price”. Every other doctrine of the Word of God is set about it as a protective wall. This is why we must hold to the entire Word of God in all of its truth and purity, not compromising a single point. For wherever we concede to error, we open a crack in the wall, and the serpent of old will inevitably creep in unawares with the intent of “taking our crown” (Rev. 3:11). For this reason, Paul wrote, “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another Gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him” (2 Cor. 11:3:4).

But the Gospel is not only the crown-jewel. It is also the key to the Scriptures. All other doctrines find their correct meaning and understanding in relation to the Gospel. Without the knowledge of the Gospel, the Bible remains a dark book. It was only after the resurrected Jesus reminded the disciples on the road to Emmaus, “ought not Christ to have suffered”, that their minds were opened to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:26-27, 32). Likewise, it was not until Phillip preached the Gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch that he could understand what he had been reading in Isaiah 53. Yes, the Gospel covers all of our faults, performs all of our works, and enlightens all of our understanding of the Word of God. It is truly the fount of every blessing.

The Content of the Gospel (15:3-4)

We come now to our third and final point - the content of the Gospel. Paul tells us that the Gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He writes, “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (v. 3-4). How can anybody be ignorant of the true Gospel with such explicitly clear words? This is what we must call “willful ignorance” (2 Peter 3:5). “But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor. 4:3-4). The Gospel is God’s brightest light. It is Paul’s “first of all”. To these same Corinthians, Paul said that he “determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:1). To the whole world we should cry out, “who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?” (Gal. 3:1) The Greek here reads literally “before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been placarded, that is, placed on a billboard, as crucified among you”. What a generous, gracious, and patient God we have. If any man is lost, it is not due to any lack in God, but “because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2 Thess. 2:10).

Paul says that he delivered to the Corinthians that which he also had received, “how that Christ died for our sins”. He delivered this Gospel “first of all”, that is, first in time and first in importance. This was the very same Gospel that Paul himself had received. And he had received it by direct revelation from God. For Paul wrote to the Galatians, “But I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11-12). Not only that, but Paul also had submitted his Gospel to the Apostles, for he says in this same Epistle, “And I went up (to see the Apostles) by revelation, and communicated unto them that Gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain” (Gal. 2:2). And what was the outcome of this examination? “And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the

grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship" (Gal. 2:9). Make no mistake about it, this Gospel that Paul now defines for the Corinthians is the true Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ's Death

Paul begins with Christ's death - "how that Christ died for our sins". Five glorious words, "Christ, died, for, our, sins". These five words correspond to the five smooth stones David took up to fell the mighty giant, Goliath. This is the true Gospel, and without all five of these words with their correct meaning, we would not have the Gospel. Rather we would have "another Gospel", "which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:7). But now let us carefully look at each of these five words.

We begin with the word "Christ". Here is our Lord Jesus Christ, identified by the greatest of all prophets as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Who else could have done this? It had to be the Son of God and the Son of Man. It was necessary for Christ to be the Son of God to render infinite value to His atoning work. Only the infinite Son of God could pay the infinite debt caused by our infinite offense. No man "can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: For the redemption of their soul is precious" (Psalm 49:7-8). No, it takes One who is more than a man, yea, even the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ. But it is also necessary that He be the Son of Man in order to be qualified to pay man's debt. For He took on not the nature of angels, but was "born of a woman, made under the law" (Gal. 4:4). He was "made in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:7). "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same" (Heb. 2:14). And He did this in order that He might "stand in the gap" between a Holy God and sinful man. "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

The next word is "died". Here is the true penalty for sin. Ezekiel wrote, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:4). Adam was told in the Garden of Eden, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Isaiah said, "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2). Jesus said, "if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). Paul wrote to the Romans, "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). The writer of Hebrews said that "without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). All of these verses teach us that sin can only be paid for by death. And here Paul tells us, "Christ died".

Next is the word "for". This is the Greek word "huper", meaning "in behalf of, in the place of, instead of". Christ died in behalf of our sins. That is, His death was not for Himself. No, it was a substitutionary death in behalf of others. He died in our stead, in our place. The death that we deserved, He bore. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). My dear friends, how is it that God cares so much for us that He would give His Son for us? What are we that we have this great value to God? How can we poor sinners who disappoint, betray, and fail God over and over be such objects of His love? Jesus prays to the Father that "Thou hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me" (John 17:23). The Father actually loves us just as He loves His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32).

Then we have this wonderful little word "our". Christ died for our sins. By this word, Paul indicates the universality of Christ's atoning work. In other words, Christ died not just for some people, but He died for all. He died for our sins - yours and mine. As Jesus said, "God so loved the *world* that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). Or as John wrote, "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the *whole world*" (1 John 2:2). Again, Paul writes, that "God was in Christ, reconciling the *world* unto Himself, not

imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Cor. 5:17). The writer of Hebrews says, “He tasted death for *every man*” (Heb. 2:9). In fact, there are over 20 clear verses in the New Testament showing the universality of Christ’s atoning work. And, it is a very important truth. Because by this truth alone, I know with certainty that Christ died for me. For if He died for all, He died for me, because I am always one of the all. Take away the universality of Christ’s atonement, and you are left in the worst sort of darkness, uncertainty, and death.

Finally, we have this word “sins”. Christ died for our sins. Oh, what is this terrible thing called sin? The Bible defines sin as “the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). It is thinking and acting in defiance of God’s revealed will in His holy law. It is always a violation of love, the summing up of the law. It displays a selfish disregard for God and for our neighbor. It returns to our loving God evil for good. At its foundation stands the worst sort of ingratitude. It is despicable, hateful, and worthy of God’s utmost wrath. And it is everywhere. It is in man’s heart, in his thoughts, in his words, in his actions, and in his world. And it makes this originally beautiful, lovely, good creature called “man” into a willing accomplice of the devil and his angels. A single sin brought about all of the evils and suffering of this present world, and a single sin cannot be paid for by endless torment in eternal hell. And yet each one of us has committed thousands upon thousands of sins. All praise and honor and glory be to this Blessed Savior, Jesus Christ, who “died for our sins”.

“According to the Scriptures”

Paul concludes this verse and the next with “according to the Scriptures”. He does this because he wants us to know that the Gospel had been foretold and is in complete harmony with the whole Word of God. In fact, it is the chief teaching of the Word of God. Even though Paul himself had received it by direct revelation, the fact that it is derived from the clear Word of God makes it more certain. In like manner, Peter tells his readers of the glorious experience of the Transfiguration on the holy mount when he heard God give audible testimony to His Son. But Peter reminds his readers “We have also a *more sure* Word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19). Likewise, the Bereans were commended by God as being more noble than others, because when they heard the words of the Apostle Paul they “searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). The thing which makes the Gospel absolutely certain and worthy of our faith is that it is “according to the Scriptures”. It is in complete agreement with the testimony of the Bible. Paul tells Titus that the Gospel is “the hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Titus 1:2).

But how is the Gospel “according to the Scriptures”? Where do we find this Gospel in the Old Testament? We find the Gospel in specific prophecies and in divinely ordered events that served as Gospel pictures or types. One man has calculated that there are over 330 prophecies in the Old Testament fulfilled by the Person and work of Jesus Christ. These prophecies begin with God’s Word to the serpent (and through it to Satan) in the Garden of Eden where He said, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). The seed of the woman is Christ who through His atoning death would crush the head of the serpent, Satan. Abraham, the father of faith, also clearly knew the Gospel. Paul tells the Galatians, “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham” (Gal. 3:8). For this reason Jesus said, “Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it, and was glad” (John 8:56). Some of the more prominent prophecies concerning the Gospel may be found in Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, and Zechariah 12.

The Gospel may also be seen in certain Old Testament events which served as Gospel pictures or types. Again, there are far too many to recount in an essay of this length, but I will mention some of the more prominent ones. First, there were the animal skins with which God clothed the nakedness of Adam and Eve. Here it was taught that our shame, caused by sin, could only be covered by the shedding of blood. Then there was Noah’s ark and the flood. Here the ark served as a picture of the refuge we have in Christ that is entered through the

single Gospel door and saves us from the judgment which comes upon the whole world. We also have the story of Abraham offering up Isaac, the father offering his only begotten son. And we have the great statement, "God will provide Himself a lamb" (Gen. 22:8). Next, there was the story of Joseph who was betrayed by his own brethren and yet became their savior. Then the passover where the blood of a spotless lamb was placed on the Jewish doorposts to protect against the angel of death who came in judgment upon all the land of Egypt. We also have the Old Testament sacrifices which according to the writer of Hebrews all spoke of the atoning work of Christ. There was also the bronze serpent on the pole, of which Christ Himself said "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14). And the types go on and on as we march our way through the Old Testament. Christ's death for our sins was truly "according to the Scriptures".

Christ's Burial

Paul goes on to say, "that He was buried, and rose the third day, according to the Scriptures". As to Christ's burial, Paul mentions it to show the finality of Christ's death. A burial even today serves as final notice to all those still residing on this earth that this person is truly dead. The deceased is, as it were, put out of sight, and we are to know that we will no longer see that one until that great day of the resurrection known only to God. In the case of Christ, His burial would forever silence the critics who someday would say that He had not died but only fainted, etc. The burial also served to fulfill Christ's own words, "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40).

Christ's Resurrection

But let us now look at the resurrection of our dear Lord. The resurrection is a very important part of the Gospel message. It is prominent in all four Gospel accounts and serves as the chief theme of all of the Apostolic sermons in the Book of Acts. On the day of Pentecost, Peter told the Jews "This Jesus hath God *raised up*, whereof we all are witnesses" (Acts 2:32). In his next sermon Peter charged the Jews with having "killed the Prince of life, whom God hath *raised* from the dead; whereof we are witnesses" (Acts 3:15). To the High Priest and the Jewish leaders, Peter said, "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God *raised* from the dead...." (Acts 4:10). Next the Scripture tells us, "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the *resurrection* of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 4:33). Then the Apostles were imprisoned, but an angel of the Lord released them, and again Peter stood up and testified, "The God of our fathers *raised up* Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree" (Acts 5:30). Later Peter preached to Cornelius and his household, "Him God *raised up* the third day, and shewed Him openly" (Acts 10:40). Paul told the men of Asia Minor, "Of this man's seed hath God according to His promise *raised* unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus" (Acts 13:23). Paul reminded Timothy, "Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was *raised* from the dead according to my Gospel" (2 Tim. 2:8). Over and over again the Apostles testified of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now, why is the resurrection of Jesus Christ crucial to the Gospel? It is crucial for several reasons. First, the resurrection is conclusive proof of Jesus' claim to be the Son of God. And remember that it was His being the Son of God that gave infinite value to His atoning work. Paul says that Jesus Christ was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). Jesus having referred to the temple as *His Father's* house was questioned by the Jews, "What sign shewest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things?" (John 2:18) And "Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). In other words, Jesus pointed to the resurrection as the substantiation of His claim to be the Son of God. This is also seen when He gave the sign of Jonah as the only sign to that unbelieving generation.

The resurrection also proves that our sins are fully paid for and forgiven. As we have seen, "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Sin must be paid for by death. Jesus Christ entered

into this mysterious thing called “death” to pay for the sins of the whole world. Had He not risen from the dead, we would have to conclude that death’s demands were still upon Him, and thus our sins were not yet fully paid. Thus as Paul said to these Corinthians, “if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17). Again, Paul told the Romans of Christ, “who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). By the resurrection, we are justified, that is, we are declared righteous, with no sin to our account.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ also guarantees our own resurrection. Paul writes, “But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken *your* mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom. 8:11). Again he says, “God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up *us* by His own power” (Rom. 8:14). Again, “Knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up *us* also by Jesus, and shall present us with you” (2 Cor. 4:14). Christ’s resurrection and our resurrection are tied together as the harvesting of the firstfruits is to the harvesting of the entire field. Paul says, “now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor. 15:20). According to Levitical law, the Jews were required at the time of harvest to offer up their firstfruits to the Lord. This was both a thankoffering and a guarantee of the entire harvest. The firstfruits was a portion of a field, the best portion, which was cut off from the field and presented to the Lord. This then became the guarantee of the bringing in of the full harvest, the entire field. By His death, burial and resurrection, Jesus Christ was cut off from the field, so to speak, and lifted up before the Lord. He now has become the guarantee that the rest of the field, we Christians, will also be harvested, that is, lifted up before the Lord. It is this event that Jesus spoke of in the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:24-30).

There are many other reasons why the resurrection is an important part of the Gospel message, but I must conclude here. Suffice it to say that by the resurrection we have a living Savior. Our resurrected Lord reigns and rules in the midst of His enemies (Psalm 110:2). He helps us in our temptations (Heb. 2:18). He ever makes intercession for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). He is our Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1). And He is our loving and gracious Bridegroom whom we will enjoy forever (Rom. 6:9; 7:4).

Conclusion

I pray that all of us will “keep in memory” this true Gospel until that blessed day when our Savior calls us home. And it will always be my highest joy that God gave me, a very weak and poor sinner, the privilege of reminding you of this wonderful, saving truth. To summarize, there is no passage in the Word of God that more clearly defines for us the Gospel than this passage in 1 Corinthians 15. Here we have seen the true and blessed Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have seen its nature - that it is objectively true. We have seen its importance - that by it we are saved. And we have seen its content - the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I now bid you farewell, my dear brothers and sisters. May God bless His Word to your hearts both now and forever. Amen.