

We are moving into chapter 15, so let's read the first 2;

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

We are not just saved to escape hell and make it to heaven – we have been saved *unto* something; saved for a purpose; a calling. We spent a lot of time discussing that purpose, as well as the development of the Christian life and the immense importance of that life as related to eternity.

Salvation is only the first step in a journey we are undertaking, a race we are running, a battle we are fighting, and the goal of spiritual maturity we are striving to reach. Paul's statement in verse's 1 and 2 is meant to convey all of that, because in this new life we've entered, some will go forward, some will stagnate and some will start well and then fall backward. The majority of the Corinthians fell into one of the second two categories, and to correct that situation, Paul wrote this letter we've studied over the last several months.

Journeys, races and warfares are ongoing ventures; they are not just one-time events followed by waiting till we get to heaven.

Jesus left no one in any doubt that if they were going to put their faith in Him; if they were going to become His disciples, they were in for trouble; life would become a test of endurance. It would be a battle with God's enemy all the way to the end.

Now, why did I bring that in? Because that is what's being addressed at the end of vs. 2, “. . . if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.”

“Holding fast” to what the Lord has taught us and brought us into can be something we fail to take seriously, and the result is what the Greek word for “vain” tells us. The word is “eike”, and it has . . .

. . . two general meanings, one referring to their being no cause or reason – in other words, without purpose, groundless. The more common NT

meaning (as in our passage in 1 Cor. 15:2) refers to that which is of no avail, to no purpose or in having no real value and failing to achieve a desired result.

Ray Stedman describes it like this;

Just this week I heard of a very prominent leader of a church, an elder, a respected man who has been a faithful Christian for a long time, but slipped away from what he had held his faith to be, and fell into moral evil in his life. This has raised the question of whether he has believed in vain or not. There can be a mechanical conformity to Christianity that never sees any need for discipline, for Bible study, for prayer or for fellowship. It merely goes for what it can get out of it. That is believing in vain. Jesus said that will not hold up in the tests of life. When the crisis comes it collapses and fails.

That description of “believed in vain” reminded me of the parable in Matthew 7 of building our house on sand versus building it on a rock. The Corinthians were building their Christian lives on the superficiality of spiritual infancy, so when the winds and storms came, that house would crumble to the ground.

As we saw in our study of Hebrews, God is going to close our generation with a powerful shaking of both the earth and the heavens; and when He does, it will become apparent to all how much of our lives have been built on Christ (that which is built by the Spirit, not by human hands) and how much has been built on Christianity (which is man-made).

(Heb. 12:25-27) See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.” Now this, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made (as in made by man), that the things which cannot be shaken (things that have their source in Christ) may remain.

All of the Corinthian believers had, at some point, come to “stand” on the gospel that was preached to them, but not all of them continued in the faith. And they weren’t the only Christians to stop short of God’s purpose for us. Again, this is an

issue of *pressing on to the place of spiritual maturity* in this life; it is *not* an issue of salvation, we are fully and eternally accepted in the Beloved; (2 Tim. 2:13) “(Even) if we (become) faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.”

We aren’t saved because *we* are good – we are saved because *He* is good. In vs. 2 we read, “. . . by which also you are saved, if you hold fast . . .” No one is required to continue to “hold fast” to anything to be saved. That would be salvation by works; salvation is by faith alone and is a one-time, instantaneous justification before God which can never be broken. It’s an *unconditional* covenant that depends only on the faithfulness of God.

The form of the word translated “saved” in vs. 2 is in the present continuous tense and should read “you *are being* saved”. Here’s a lexicon definition;

This refers to a continuing process, and states that this element of salvation is an ongoing process or state of "being saved". This contrasts with the aorist tense, the act of faith unto salvation, which describes a single, completed action in the past.

Salvation includes more than initial justification; it also involves the ongoing sanctification of the new believer. We *have been* saved from condemnation and we *are being saved* from the dominion of sin as we are conformed to the image of Christ through spiritual growth.

In 1 Cor. 15:3-4 we see the one passage in scripture that is used more often than any other (with the possible exception of John 3:16) that defines and simplifies the gospel;

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: 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 . . .

I have always found it fascinating that rather than simply speak of Christ’s death and resurrection as the foundation of our salvation, *two times* Paul adds, “. . . according to the scriptures.” I want to briefly tangent on that for a few minutes. I just want to do all I can to reinforce the reality that besides the Living Word Who tabernacled among us 2000 years ago, the book you are holding your hands, the “written word” that Jesus says points us to Him, is the most valuable, prized

possession God has ever given anyone is this world. It's not just a blueprint for the best way to live this life.

I'm going to re-share Dr. L.S. Chafer's introduction to his work on Systematic Theology to help reinforce what I'm trying to say;

Theology is the study of God's thoughts. Theology, the greatest of the sciences, has fallen upon evil days. Between the rejection and ridicule of it by so-called progressives and the neglect and abridgment of it by the orthodox, it, as a potent influence, is approaching the point of extinction. . . . The unchanging emphasis in the Scriptures upon doctrine, which subject is referred to in the New Testament more than forty times and is that to which a Christian is to 'take heed' stands as a silent rebuke, whether heeded or not, to all modern notions which belittle the importance of dogmatic theology, and also stands as a corrective to those who neglect any part of it.

The present situation is not one of passing moment. As well might a medical doctor discard his books on anatomy as for a preacher to discard his books on theology; and since doctrine is the bone structure of the body of revealed truth, the neglect of it must result in a message characterized by uncertainties, inaccuracies, and immaturity. . . . To the preacher is committed a responsibility of surpassing import. Men of other professions are tireless in their attempts to discover the truths and to perfect themselves in the use of the forces belonging to their various callings, though these are in the restricted field of material things. The preacher is called upon to deal with the things of God, the supernatural and eternal.

No substitute will ever be found for the knowledge of the Word of God. That Word alone deals with things eternal and infinite, and it alone has power to convert the soul and to develop a God-honoring spiritual life. There is a limitless yet hidden spiritual content within the Bible which contributes much to its supernatural character. . . . Acquiring the knowledge of the spiritual content of the Bible is a life task. The great preachers who have moved the hearts of men with divine power have been saturated with the Bible truths secured through a first-hand, daily study of its text. General facts of human learning may be acquired by the usual means, but spiritual

truths are apprehended only as taught to the individual heart by the Spirit through diligent study and prayer.

Now, let me share a series of scriptures that reinforce what Chafer wrote;

(2 Pet. 1:3) His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.

(2 Tim. 2:15) Study to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

(Prov. 3:13-15) Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; for her rewards are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and *all the things you may desire cannot compare with her.*

And we can see in Jer. 29:13 that the Lord does not open this treasure-house of knowledge in God's Word to those who are merely curious, but *only* to those willing to dig deep for that treasure; "You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with *all* your heart."

Knowing God is the most important thing in this life. Our highest priority is to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord; and that's only possible through the scriptures.

We've seen in the past that Paul was set forth as a pattern for us on how to live this life and of how we can know what God's priorities for us are;

(Phil. 4:9) The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

(1 Cor. 4:16-17) I urge you to imitate me. For this reason, I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.

Listen to this author's *description* of Paul's priorities; his comments are based on Phil. 3:10, "My determined purpose is that I may know Him."

There are few words in his writings which reveal how committed to the Lord Jesus this man was. The whole context is one consummate outpouring of his

heart to the One whom he said had "apprehended" him, and he focuses all in a brief half sentence: "That I may know Him." The impressive thing about this expressed ambition is the time at which it is made. Here is a man who has had a revelation and knowledge of Jesus Christ greater than any other man up to that time. That knowledge began when, as he said, " . . . it pleased God to reveal His Son in me." That beginning devastated him, and sent him into the desert to try to grasp its implications. Later he had been " . . . caught up into the third heaven and shown unspeakable things, which were not lawful to be uttered." Between, and around those two experiences, there is evidence of an ever-growing knowledge of Christ. Here, after all that, near the end of his life, he is crying passionately: "That I may know Him." The very least that we can say about this is that the Christ in view outstrips the greatest capacity and comprehension of man. This stands in such tremendous contrast to the limited Christ of our recognition and apprehension! How very much more there is in Christ than we have ever seen!

And Sparks added this;

(1 John 5:20) "We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him." It is of the greatest importance for the Lord's children to recognize fully that, above all other things, His object is that they should know Him. This is the all-governing end of all His dealings with us. This is the greatest of all our needs.

As just a quick reminder; even the Lord, when He was tempted by Satan, didn't simply exercise His authority and command the enemy away. Jesus responded to each temptation with "It is written" and He quoted a verse, showing all of us how Satan is defeated. There is something about the written word, when it's accurately applied, that has a supernatural power beyond what may realize.

Ok, end of tangent. We'll go back to our context in 1 Cor. 15. But it never hurts to be reminded of the importance of seeing everything as being " . . . according to the scriptures".

Now, in verses 5 through 8 Paul defends the testimony of Christ's resurrection and then opens his own heart and shows us the humility in the inner man of Paul;

He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

According to Deut. 17:6 and 10:15, and then reaffirmed in Matt. 18:16, God's requirement or standard for establishing the truth of an event requires two or three witnesses. To use legalise for this, which several systems of justice rely on to validate a report, it would be something like this;

The requirement for multiple witnesses serves to:

- 1) Increase reliability: Multiple testimonies increase the likelihood that the information presented is accurate and truthful.
- 2) Prevent injustice: Having more than one witness can help prevent wrongful accusations or convictions based on a single, potentially unreliable, witness.
- 3) Establish credibility: When multiple, consistent testimonies are presented, it strengthens the credibility of the claim.

Ok, that all makes sense. And of course, believing that someone has been resurrected would definitely need some serious consistency in eye-witness testimony. So, what does the Lord do? Vs. 6, "After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren." And that doesn't include James and the apostles.

Only people who for personal reasons or because of demonic blindness, could completely ignore the testimony of over 500 people.

We won't take time tonight, but if you look at every time the gospel was preached in the book of Acts you'll see that the emphasis wasn't on the Lord's death; it was on His resurrection. That was for two reasons: First, the resurrection was the Father's sign of approval signifying that the death of His Son satisfied the justice of God in relation to the payment for our sins. When Christ cried out "It is finished!" - it was.

And the second reason for that emphasis was that the resurrection represented the setting aside of one entire race of humanity, the Adamic race, which had been

rejected, judged and buried in Christ; and the resurrection was the birth of a new race, a new species, which in Rom. 8:29, Paul said that Christ was the Head, and by resurrection, the First-born of this new creation.

Then Paul shows us something vital about himself. If we really understood how deep in Paul's soul this was ingrained and how much suffering and self-revelation it took to create that kind of self-image in him, maybe then we'd be starting to understand why we are going through what we're going through, and where God wants to take us in terms of becoming the kind of people who genuinely express the "meekness" of our Savior.

Vs's 7-8 . . . last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle . . .

The literal meaning of "born out of due time" is a little surprising. It's a phrase built on the Greek word "ektroma" from "ek" meaning "out" and "titrosko" meaning ". . . to cut or excise out, to suffer abortion, to miscarry or of one born prematurely". The picture of each of those phrases is that of a life that was unable to sustain itself.

In his lexicon, Thayer explained Paul's use when we wrote;

. . . Paul is saying that he is as inferior to the rest of the apostles as an immature birth comes short of a mature one, and is no more worthy of the name of an apostle than an abortion is of the name of a child.

Ray Stedman had a unique way of illustrating what Paul meant by this based on how he came to Christ and what happened after he was saved; here's what he wrote;

Had Paul written his spiritual biography, the title would have not been Born Again, it would have been The Miscarriage, or something like that. This is what he thought of himself because of the way he came to the new birth. He is thinking of the twelve apostles as being born in a very normal way. When they heard the word of the Lord, they began to believe it. Gradually it developed in their minds and hearts until they came to the place where they believed it totally. In this way their spiritual birth followed a normal pregnancy that could be observed developing. But Paul's experience was not

like that. It was abnormal; it was sudden; it was very precipitous and unexpected. That may account for the fact that Paul had a difficult time in his early Christian life. When somebody is prematurely born he does not just leap out and handle life like a normal baby. He is cared for specially; he is nurtured in private; and it is a long time before he begins to function normally. And this was the case with Paul. He was born again on the Damascus road, but it was such a sudden, precipitous thing it took a long time for him to adjust his thinking and get it in line with this fantastic event that had occurred. That is why he spent three years in Damascus and Arabia and another seven years in his home town of Tarsus before he got it together and was ready to begin his great ministry of teaching and preaching all around the world. The Spirit of God led Barnabus to go down to Tarsus and find him ten years later.

As we all know, the other apostles spent 3 ½ years with Christ and then began their public ministry at Pentecost. Paul, on the other hand, had to unlearn Judaism and be reshaped from being a Pharisee to being a bondsman of the One he rejected. He had to become a fellow citizen of heaven with the same people he had committed his life to persecuting and killing.

That took time and a lot of pain, both external and internal. But the result was that Saul of Tarsus became Paul (which is a Latin name, by the way, which means “little”, “small” or “humble”).

Sometimes I wonder what it will take to move each of us from what we were to what we need to be to genuinely see ourselves as Paul saw himself. For us, we have to “unlearn” Christianity” in order to “learn Christ”.

The Bible calls this process, “crucifixion”; it’s the crushing of the natural man (religious or otherwise) so he can be replaced by the new man, which is made in the image of Christ. The principles taught in passages about picking up our cross are all pointing to this one goal; having the life of Jesus manifest through our mortal flesh (2 Cor. 4:11) “For we who live are always delivered to death (crucified) for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”

This is what God’s chastening is all about, and I love the way this author described the intended outcome of all God’s training of His children;

When one asked a philosopher what the great God was doing, he replied, "His whole employment is to lift up the humble, and to cast down the proud. . . there is but one road to God – humility; and all other ways would only lead astray, even if they were fenced in with all virtues . . . the true way to discover humility is not to stoop until you are smaller than yourself, but to stand near a higher nature that will show you what the real smallness of your greatness is. True humility is not an abject, groveling, self-despising spirit; it is but a right estimate of ourselves as God sees us. Humility is the ability to feel ashamed when you tell people how wonderful you are. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

In vs's 10 & 11 Paul tells us something that goes much deeper than we might think the first time we read this;

By the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

It seems simple and genuine; Paul is giving all the glory to God for whatever Paul became. But it opens up a theological paradox that people have been wrestling with for centuries. Here's what I mean. I'll read two familiar passages that, at least on the surface, seem impossible to reconcile;

(Gal. 2:20) It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God . . .

Sparks, Miles Stanford, Evan Hopkins (the founder of the Keswick Movement) and many others have built a huge amount of their teaching on the "Not I, but Christ" theme of how this life is to be lived. We are vessels indwelt by the Lord and He lives His life through us. The less there is of us, the more others will see of Him; which is the goal of what it means to live a crucified life. Everything we do is "dead works"; only that which *Christ* does *through* us has eternal value.

We've studied all those things numerous times and there are obviously a large number of passages in the Bible that support this.

But then there's this:

(Phil. 4:13) I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

This isn't just Christ living His life through an available vessel; this is *us* doing things, but doing them in His strength. That's seems slightly different than "It is no longer I who live".

I know why authors have tried to balance these; and I'm grateful for their efforts. The "Not I, but Christ" group are trying to protect us from legalism, from being drawn back into any system of "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not". As our Lord Himself said in Matt. 11:28 (Amplified Version) "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy-laden and overburdened, and I will give you rest. [I will ease and relieve and refresh your souls.]"

The people He was addressing were being crushed by all the laws that the Pharisees were burdening them with – Christ came to bring us freedom from that whole system.

So, I appreciate what the authors are doing in trying to emphasize the grace of God over the Law by showing us that Christ is all and all.

But at the same time, we have to remember that God is not replacing us with Himself; we are *not* being eliminated from the equation, we are still very much involved. What the Lord is doing is developing a new type or species of human that, instead of living out from their own resources, they will learn, over time and struggle and experience, how to move in God's will, but it will be how to do so fully tapped into *His* strength. In other words, we aren't being *replaced* by Christ, we are being shaped into His image. All these tests and trials are to renew our mind, to change the way we live and think, but they are also meant to build in character, courage, determination and endurance - into *us*, to form *us* into something we weren't before- as well as show us in what way the Lord is the Source of our lives.

(Rom. 5:3-4) Tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

(Jas. 1:3-4) The testing of your faith produces patience; and let patience have its perfect work, that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

It's true that only the indwelling Spirit of Christ can accomplish this in us, but it doesn't eliminate us; it perfects us. It's the removal of the dominion of the flesh, not removal of who we are as members of the new creation.

I don't see all of these passages we looked at as being an 'either/or' problem. I see them as teaching us that allowing our old life to govern us has to be rejected, or as Paul puts it in Col. 3:5, it has to be "... put to death"; which is something the Lord enables us to do through suffering, as we see in 2 Cor. 4:11, "(We) are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake ..."

Here's an excellent explanation I found on this;

When we say that Christ's life has come into us to displace ours, what do we mean? We do not mean that this life of the Lord Jesus has come into displace our personality. When I speak of our fallen life, I do not mean the human personality as such. I mean the poison which permeates our personality, the poison of sin which has degraded and defiled and distorted our humanity.

It is not that this new life of the Lord Jesus comes in to take the place of our personality, to take the place of our faculties created by God, but it comes in to take the place of the sinful life which is operating in our personality and employing our faculties. The vessel is the same but the contents are different – the same vessel, the same person, the same faculties, but the contents are different. No longer this sinful element, but the holy nature of the Lord Jesus Christ filling and permeating.

Our Father is not seeking to abolish us as human beings and have the Lord Jesus replace us. He is seeking to restore us as human personalities so that we may be the vehicle through which Christ will express Himself. Therefore, you find that whenever God gets hold of a man, instead of abolishing his personality, He makes it what He intended it to be.

Redemption is the *recovery* of the man, not the *destruction* of the man. And when the Lord Jesus in us is brought to the place He is aiming for, there will not be an atom of the old life left, but the man will be left – glorified in union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, since Christ in us has to become the Source of our new life, we have to learn, experientially, how to live fully dependent on God's grace to form us into vessels fit for the Master's use; available to receive and draw from the Lord's indwelling Life, but *also* being reshaped into people who, as members of this new humanity, have Christ-like character and integrity. In other words, "recreated" in God's image with Jesus of Nazareth being both the indwelling Source and perfect Representation of that image.

By the power of the One Who lives in us, and through the suffering orchestrated by His wisdom, we are being shaped into His likeness.

Now, listen again to our verse in 1 Cor. 15:10; "by the grace of God I am what I am . . ." There is an "I" and there is an "am": *I am* something, or we could say, "I am becoming something"; as we see Paul's *next* words in vs. 10; "His grace toward me was not in vain; but *I labored* more abundantly than them all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

It wasn't only Christ who was at work, Paul "labored", and he did so, "more abundantly than them all". *But*, that only happened because ". . . the grace of God was with me."

Christ was absolutely the divine Source of Paul's life, but Paul also took all his experience, and all that Christ had worked into his soul over time, and he brought that to bear on everything he did.

How else could he tell us, as he did in 1 Cor. 7:25, ". . . I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment (lit. advice) as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy?"

We know Christ is trustworthy; but Paul is also being made trustworthy. The Potter is the Master and Shaper of all that represents His Son, and the clay is the result.

In my understanding of this, the invisible Spirit within us is the Source of the image of Christ we are being conformed to in terms of character and nature. As that transfiguration takes place over time, we become the visible expression or manifestation of the invisible indwelling Christ.

It kind of reminds me the passage in Rev. 4:10 where the 24 elders are said to cast their crowns the feet of the Savior. They earned the crowns or they wouldn't have

received them; as we've seen before, crowns are rewards, not gifts. But more than anyone else, those who have crowns will understand that it was grace, and grace alone, that made that possible.

Again, that's why Paul said, "I am what I am". He's more than an empty glove on Christ's hand; but what he is, is completely "by the grace of God."

When we understand what the Lord is after and we have an idea of how He intends to get us there, the one thing that undergirds all we do is the realization that this is a walk of faith, never faith in ourselves, always in Him. What He's begun, He will complete.

Since we're about out of time for tonight, I'll close with a true-life discovery of how a person can have the kind of faith that can carry them through the training and battles we face; and as you'll hear, it's *not* by striving to increase our faith. This is Hudson Taylor's testimony about his struggle with this;

I felt the ingratitude, the danger, the sin of not living near to God. I prayed, agonized., strove, fasted, made resolutions, read the word of God more diligently and sought more time for meditation and prayer; but all without effect. Every day, almost every hour, the consciousness of sin oppressed me. I knew if I could only abide in Christ, all would be well. But I could not. Each day brought its register of sin and failure and of lack of power. To will was indeed present with me, but how to perform? I found not. Then came the question, Is there no rescue? Must it be this way to the end, constant conflict and instead of victory, too often defeat? I hated myself.; I hated my sin; And yet I gained no strength against it. I felt I was a child of God: his spirit in my heart would cry, "ABBA Father!" But to rise to my privileges as a child of God, I was utterly powerless.

I strove for faith, but it would not come; I tried to exercise it but in vain. Seeing more and more the wondrous supply of grace in Jesus, the fullness of our precious Savior, my guilt and helplessness seemed to increase. Sins committed appeared as trifles compared with the sin of unbelief which was their cause, which could not, or would not, take God at his word. Unbelief was, I felt, the worst sin in the world; yet I indulged in it. I prayed for faith, but it did not come. What was I to do?

When my agony of soul was at its height, a sentence in a letter, was used to remove the scales from my eyes, and the Spirit of God revealed to me the truth of our oneness with Jesus as I had never known it before. But how to get faith strengthened? Not by striving after faith, but by resting on the faithful One. I have striven in vain to rest in Him; I will strive no more. Has He not promised to abide with me, never to leave me, never to fail me?