

I literally have four minutes to solve a problem that has been around for two millennia. So if you have your Bible, grab them and turn to 1 Corinthians 15. In every testimony we've heard this weekend across all three campuses, the fundamental error is a misunderstanding of what the gospel is vs. what it's not. You can be just as much in bondage attending church every week as you can in jail or in drugs. You can be just as much in bondage, just as trapped, just as helpless and just as lonely religiously as irreligious. So I want to show you in this text what the problem is regarding a misunderstanding of the gospel. So that takes us to 1 Corinthians 15:1-5. "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you. . ." So right out of the gate, Paul is reminding Christians of the gospel. He's not talking to lost people; he's reminding Christians of the gospel. He does this habitually. It is the belief of the apostle Paul that Christians need the gospel just as much as unbelievers need it. And you'll see why here in a second. "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." So what was the word preached to them? Look in verse 3. "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." And then the rest of the text goes on to describe those who saw Him after His resurrection and the fact that they were still very much alive and that people could go to those who also saw Jesus alive to verify Paul's story.

Here's what I want to point out to you. Paul is saying that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and His resurrection is just as needed for the man who has been saved 20 years as it is for the man who has not been saved. So he's going to call people to constantly remember the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, that our right standing before God has nothing to do with us and everything to do with Jesus' cross. Listen to it. "You received it (past tense). . .by which you now stand (present tense). . ."

So now as you stand, is anybody in here perfect? No. But your right standing before God has to do with what? Christ, not you. ". . .by which you will be saved." That's future tense, future grace. What is your acceptance going to be based upon in the future? The cross. So Paul's message is, "Don't forget. . .don't forget. . .don't forget the cross." And He's going to do this over and over again to religious people throughout the New Testament. In Philippians, he's going to lay out a list of religious activities that would shame even those of you who have the Sunday school attendance pins that were like medals for kids. Paul would say, "Here is all my religious accolades," and then he calls them rubbish or the Greek word for "dung." He's going to say, "All this religious activity, in the end, is dung, it's junk, it's crud if I don't get Christ." So in Philippians, he's saying, "Who cares about religious activities if you don't get Jesus, if you don't love Jesus, if you don't get to walk and exult and know and worship Jesus? Who cares? It's worthless."

In Galatians 2:20-3:5, Paul comes off very frustrated. In verse 1, he actually says, "For those who think that circumcision is better, I wish they would just go ahead and emasculate themselves." It's just a strange, strange text in the Bible. . .that I love. Now he goes on to say, "Who bewitched you? Who tricked you? Who deceived you? What other gospel are you buying into now? You were saved before you did anything. God's pleasure and His love and concern for you existed when you were at your worst, and now you're trying to earn it?" You see, what Paul is addressing in 1 Corinthians 15, in Galatians, in Philippians, in Colossians and in all these great books of the New Testament is the fact that you and I are drawn to believe that Jesus Christ saves us and then we go out and earn the rest of it. It's a lie that men and women by

the thousands have bought into for 2,000 years. Paul is screaming about it to every church he planted in the ancient world, and that leads me today to scream at you about it. Our hope, our rest is found in Him and Him alone. He loves us and He is pleased with us. He is for us, and none of that has to do with us. So for everyone who walked into the water and said, "I'm unworthy of the love of God," yes you are. But that doesn't matter. That's what makes the thing so amazing and spectacular. You absolutely aren't worthy, you absolutely are unclean and you absolutely have no right to even say His name without Him making you explode. And yet what you get is love, patience and mercy.

The lady who gave her testimony at the 9:00 this morning said that her father would never go to church because we were all hypocrites. And he was absolutely right. Anytime anyone has ever said that to me, I'm just very quick to agree. I'm like, "I'm the pastor of the Village. I know. It's absolutely filled with hypocrites." But the truth is how spectacular is God that He loves such a rotten, hypocritical people, a people who continually betray Him, a people who continually do what they know is wrong at the expense of what they know is right, a people who constantly believe they are smarter than God and want to do things their own way and not His? And then God's response is what? Patience and love for those who believe.

Now there is a different type of hypocrite that I want to make clear you understand the difference. There is a hypocrisy that just intrinsically exists in all of us as we're being sanctified, as we continue to stand on the cross and on the sacrifice of Christ as our right standing before God, and there is a kind of hypocrisy that exists when you believe because, when you were seven years old, you mom and dad asked if you wanted to go to heaven or hell and you said, "I want to go to heaven." I've never met the seven-year-old who says, "Torture for eternity? Yeah, I'll do that. That's my choice." And so if that is you and that is your story and you have no real affection for God and there is no real life change, you're not a hypocrite. Because a hypocrite would mean that you believed and lived contrary to what you believed. You're a liar who has deceived yourself because you never believed, were never converted and have no real love for the Lord. And yet you think somehow that your attendance on a weekend is somehow going to save you. And if God is not merciful to you, you have a terrifying future in front of you. Because you can't trick God. You can't hide from Him, you can't hide your motives, you can't hide your heart and you can't hide your actions. He knows. And for those who are called children of God, He knows, He loves and He extends grace and mercy. And there is objective evidence of us receiving that mercy in repentance because of that kindness. Where there is no repentance, I think you have to wrestle with whether or not you're a believer in Christ.

So when we come in here, we sing, we clap and we celebrate lives changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, this is what we're celebrating. We're celebrating Christ, not us. Nobody who got in that water tonight said, "I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to have a passion for Jesus Christ. I'm going to have a passion for the Word of God. I'm going to quit doing this and start doing this." No, in His mercy, God opened up eyes, opened up hearts, revealed Himself in such a way that they were drawn in and now love Him. So we celebrate that that mercy was extended to us. And if it hasn't been yet, we ask God to extend that mercy to us.

So we celebrate that now at the end of tonight by celebrating the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ, which we have heard about, which we received, in which we now stand and by which we will be saved. And we do that by doing like they've done it all over the world for two thousand years, by taking bread and wine (or juice) and rejoicing that broken body and shed blood.

Let me pray for us. "Father, I thank You for grace and mercy and it being extended to us in the cross. I thank You that, for some of us, we have just been saved, for others of us, we are currently standing in, and some of us are putting our hope in You continuing to sanctify us and love us, despite the fact that some of us are really struggling right now. So we thank You for grace, and we exalt Your name that it's free, unmerited and we did nothing to get it, yet You extended it to us. All

the mystery around why You chose us and called us and love us can be dug into until You return and in the coming ages help us grasp and understand that. But for now, my hope is for those who maybe have some clarity for the first time in their life on what Christianity is. I pray that they would seek out a pastor to talk with, that they would seek out someone to speak with after. For those who are trying to earn their own righteousness, for those who consistently are trying to check off a list of things to do or not do, I pray that they would finally be released from a lifetime of trying to earn what is freely given in You. So we celebrate now Your broken body and shed blood. We celebrate that You love us, that You are for us, that You care for us and that You call us holy, spotless and blameless before You, by not action of our own, not because we are, but because in Christ You have said that we are. And so we celebrate You tonight in that. We love You. You are beautiful as we are about to sing. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."

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