

**Faithful Remembering**  
**1 Corinthians 15:1-11**  
(Sermon Notes)



Have you ever had a Christian leader or pastor in your life tell you that you should read the Bible? We likely all have. Have you ever struggled to read your Bible? We also likely all have. Whether it's getting into the habit of reading, finding the time, or just understanding what we're reading, there always seems to be struggles to it. We've all been there, and here's how I know - because I've been there.

When I was younger, I was taught that I should be reading the Bible. But I had this conception of Bible reading, that no one taught me, that it had to be more than one chapter a day, if you were a "good Christian", it had to be in the morning, and if you didn't learn anything new you were likely doing it wrong. I would be wrought with guilt if I didn't read what I thought was enough, didn't learn anything new, or heaven forbid, missed a day. I also remember feeling insecure and guilty that I didn't always know some of the stories that my peers knew. This led me to read the Bible solely for the purpose of gaining knowledge and gaining information. I wanted to read the Bible just to say that I had, and just to learn the stories that seemed like other people knew better than myself. Engaging our heads in learning what the Bible says and teaches is certainly of value, but it's not the only thing we need. We need to engage both our head and our hearts. God desires us not to just retain information, but desires a relationship with us. There will be no standardized test of all you ever learned on earth when you get to heaven. When I started to grasp this idea of engaging my head and my heart, it unlocked joy and life. When we have both, that's what can lead to the abundant life of Christ. I started to read the Bible, not simply to gain information, but also to grow in my relationship with its author. My natural tendency is still to read for information, but engaging my head and my heart is much more of a practice in my everyday life now. I have a better understanding that both are needed. Paul is going to show us why engaging both head and heart are important for remembering what God has done. He is wrapping up his letter, and he wants the Corinthians to understand and remember that **faithful remembering requires engaging both your head and your heart.**

# 1. What is the Gospel?

## a. Exhortation toward faithfulness

- i. Chapter 15 comes right off the heels of a couple chapters on order in the worship service. Paul has just brought them back to kindergarten and told the Corinthians not to interrupt, to take turns, and not to be a distraction. The purpose of the church is for edification, for building up the body of believers. We turn the page to chapter 15, and he continues in his exhortation, this time reminding them why they are even gathering in the first place, to remember what Christ has done for them in the gospel.
- ii. Paul begins this new section by reminding the Corinthians of a couple things. He is reminding them not only of the gospel, but their identity in the gospel. We've been reminded throughout the whole letter that the melodic line is this idea that we are "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1:2). Paul, here, continues to remind the Corinthians of this truth.
- iii. Paul urges the Corinthians to hold fast to the gospel in which they stand. In the gospel, which they received (15:1-2). The problem in the Corinthian church was pride. Paul is pointing them back to the reality that they have *received* this salvation. It isn't anything they've done, or accomplished that has saved them, it's all about what God has done for them and in them. Paul is going to continue this theme later in the passage as well when he points to the grace of God in his life

## b. Believed in vain?

- i. This may seem like a confusing phrase for Paul to throw in there, one that can maybe trip us up. What is believing in vain? What if I believed in vain? The focus of this phrase is on the phrase right before it, "if you hold fast...". Believing in vain is a picture of not holding fast to the gospel that Paul preached to the Corinthians. We can look to other Pauline letters to help clarify what belief should look like.
  1. **Rom. 10:9-12** - "because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him."
  2. The fruit of this belief is going to come out in the way we live our lives. Another Pauline letter can help us here as well. **Gal. 5:22-25** - "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another."
- ii. The language of this verse, and specifically the word, "vain" gives us a picture of what it means to believe in vain as well. The word translated, "vain" (εἰκῆ), means "without purpose, to no purpose, without careful thought, without due consideration, and in a haphazard manner."<sup>1</sup>

## c. Gospel defined

- i. Paul is rooting his explanation of the contents of the gospel in history. His pattern for explaining the gospel is a simple one. Christ died for our sins, and Jesus' burial was proof of that. Christ rose from the dead, and his appearance to others was proof that he rose. He is also rooting his explanation of the gospel in the Old Testament scriptures. Christ died and rose in accordance with the scriptures. Since Paul doesn't quote a specific Old Testament passage, he is referring to those truths fulfilling the Old Testament as a whole. It was part of God's plan from the very beginning.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew David Naselli, "1 Corinthians," in Romans–Galatians, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. X, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 370.

- ii. Paul says the gospel is of first importance. In most of Paul's letters, sizable portions are given to rehearsing the gospel truths. Paul reminded the Corinthians that he also received it just like they did.
- iii. Gospel misconceptions
  - 1. The gospel is something that just happened in my past
    - a. This comes out in moral therapeutic deism, where we just live a good life, because it makes us feel good about ourselves, and we think that God isn't actually a part of our everyday lives. He saved us, sure, but he isn't actually a part of my life now. This misconception leads us to believe that God doesn't want anything to do with us after he saved us. This misses the importance of the present, and holistic significance. It misses the fact that God desires a relationship with us in the here and now, and wants to change and shape the way we live our lives in the present. It also misses the future promises of being with God for eternity, and the fact that our eternity starts now, it isn't something that we get later down the road.
  - 2. The gospel is something that I only occasionally need in the present
    - a. This misconception can lead us to legalism and pride, and thinking that what we do for God is what makes us right with him. We live our lives in a way that we think pleases God, and this is what leads him to bless us. We think that we only need the grace of God when we mess up really badly. This misses the done-ness of the gospel that ensures the security of our future. It also misses the constant need to grace in every aspect and dimension of our lives. We as Christians live in constant need for God's grace, it isn't an occasional thing. We were saved by grace, and we need God's grace in every aspect of our lives.
  - 3. The gospel is primarily about what will happen in the future
    - a. It treats our relationship with God just as fire insurance, or just as a means to get out of hell. It doesn't change or shape the way we live our lives in the here and now. We go on living however we want to live, because as long as we trust Christ for our future, we'll be okay, right? This makes our relationship with God transactional. It treats our relationship with God as something we do for God in order for him to get us out of hell and separation from him. Much like the misconception of it being primarily about the past, it also misses the importance of the present and holistic significance. God desires to transform our lives in the here and now. Trusting in Christ is not just about where we will spend eternity, it's about a life defining relationship with him starting today.
- iv. The gospel is part of the past, present, and future reality of a Christian's salvific experience. It is the plan set forward by God before the foundations of the earth were crafted. One author puts it this way, "It (the gospel) is the tangible life of God flowing into every nook and cranny of our everyday life."<sup>2</sup> Our past is settled, our present is secure, and our future is certain. We can stand firm and hold fast because Jesus is the one maintaining our righteous standing before God for us. We do not need to strive to maintain our standing before God because Christ has done that work for us. The ultimate end of all our fears is death, but Christ has defeated death in his resurrection.
- v. Paul is reminding the Corinthians of this truth, and the truth that it should be the gospel that informs every aspect of their lives. And because it affects and informs every aspect of our lives, we never stop our need for the gospel truth in our lives. The gospel truth that we have been saved by grace through faith is not a one time truth. We need that truth every single day. The gospel is not good news for unbelievers but good news for all people. This is why we need to preach the gospel to ourselves every single day, and remember the gospel often.

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<sup>2</sup> Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 90.

## 2. Remember the Gospel often

- a. Peter's story
  - i. Peter was a person they admired. Some knew him, but some didn't. You may remember him from earlier in the letter as one of the Corinthians favorite teachers. Who is someone in your life you helped lead you to Jesus from afar? Who is someone you don't really know or have a relationship with, but has been influential in your walk with Christ? Peter's story helps to remind us that people have gone before us, and God has placed those people in our lives that helped point us to the story of Jesus in our lives.
- b. The saints
  - i. Paul points to James, the disciples, as well as 500 people that Jesus appeared to. When he says that some who saw Jesus are still alive, Paul is essentially telling the Corinthians they can go confirm the resurrection with these people. It would be a pretty rash claim to make if it were untrue. Who are people that God has placed in your life that help remind you of what God has done? The saints' story reminds us that God has placed people in our lives to surround us and push us closer to Christ each and every day. The saints point us to the broader reality of the reminder that they're not alone. The gathered saints are around us and we're all on the same journey for the same reason.
- c. Paul's story
  - i. Paul is a close to home person. They know him. They have a relationship with him. It's someone who has been a leader, guide, and mentor in their lives. Who is someone like that for you? It may be someone different in different seasons.
  - ii. The language of being untimely born, least of the apostles, and the grace of God is strong here, and it's pointing to Paul's humility. He says things like he is untimely born, least of the apostles, and by the grace of God he is what he is. This isn't a ho-hum statement, as if Paul were trying to get us to feel bad for him, or point to a false humility. This is a grand statement. It is only by the grace of God that Paul is what he is. Grace changed Paul beyond recognition, it changed him by transforming him from within. John Newton says, "I am not what I ought to be. . . . Not what I might be. . . . Not what I wish to be. . . . I am not what I hope to be. . . . [But] I am not what I once was, a child of sin, and slave of the devil. . . . I think I can truly say with the apostle, 'By the grace of God I am what I am.'"<sup>3</sup> A summary of Paul's story as told by Paul can be found in **Acts 22**. Paul sees what he did to the church of God (persecution), and he sees what Jesus did for the church (die for it), and that's what leads him to this place of humility. And this grace toward Paul was not in vain! It's not in vain toward you either. We need to preach this to ourselves every day. Paul's story reminds us that our salvation isn't determined by how much good or bad we've done, but it's all about God's grace in our lives.
  - iii. Paul working hard
    1. The ultimate enemy of death has been defeated, so all other enemies are stripped of their power over us. We as believers are enabled now to work harder. Not for personal gain or for building our identity or security. We already have gained our identity (**1:2**). We don't even work hard from our own power, but it is the grace of God that is with us (**15:10**). Everything we do to strive to remember the gospel in our lives is from the outflow of what God has already done in our lives. Paul isn't working hard to gain this grace, he's working hard because of this grace. The same is true for us. If Christ has been raised, that should change everything. It should change the way we view ourselves, the world, our neighbors, creation, and history.

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<sup>3</sup> John Newton, Letters by the Rev. John Newton of Olney and St. Mary Woolnoth (London: Religious Tract Society, 1869), 400.

#### d. Rhythms of remembrance

##### i. Gather in worship

1. This passage in 1 Corinthians comes right on the heels of Paul discussing order in the gathered worship space. This is why he's reminding them of the gospel, because of its importance in the lives of the Corinthians, specifically in the life of their local body of believers. The gospel is of first importance for us as we gather together in worship. The gospel isn't just about your personal relationship with God, although that's certainly part of it. We gather week after week to point each other to what Christ has done on the cross.
2. Why do we sing? To fix our eyes on the only one who has the power to save us, and to give him praise and adoration for his saving work on the cross. We sing because God alone is worthy of our worship. The words that we sing remind us of Biblical truths and gospel truths that are transformational and formational in our lives. Why do we greet one another? We greet because it's a recognition that there are other people on this journey with us, and we desperately need one another. We lean in together each week on Sunday as we then go out together and scatter to wherever God calls us to in the week. We were made to worship, and when we gather we put our focus back on where it's supposed to be, on Jesus. We remember what life is really about, and who it is about. Gatherings are a crucial time in the life of a disciple. Everything we do is formational, and our prayer when we gather is that we would have life defining encounters with the presence of Christ. When we lean in together in the gathered worship space regularly, it launches us into fuller and deeper lives of worship. Are you engaging both your head and your heart when we gather in worship together?

##### ii. Communion

1. Remembering what Christ has done for us on our behalf is a central part of communion. "Perhaps it should be enough for us simply to exhort one another to remember God's grace. But God in his kindness, knowing how frail we are, knowing how battered by life we can be, also gives us physical reminders of his grace in water, bread, and wine."<sup>4</sup>
2. We celebrate communion together because Jesus told us to, so that we would remember! What are we remembering when we take communion? We remember Christ's death in our place, and his blood poured out on our behalf. Our sin was laid on him, and his righteousness is laid on us. Are you engaging both your head and your heart when we take communion together?

##### iii. Connect in groups

1. Part of living in the realities of the gospel is bearing one another's burdens and sharing tough stuff together. It's holding each other accountable, and praying with one another. Two way accountability is not just about the sin in our life, although that's part of it. It is also about encouraging one another, sharpening one another, and spurring one another to faith and good works. You won't grow unless you have people that know you well and can speak into your life. It's about hard truths and great encouragements. All throughout the week smaller groups connect together, whether it's a connect group, men's or women's bible study, a huddle, a cafe group. When you're connecting with other believers in smaller groups, are you intentionally leaning in? Are you sharing tough stuff, praying together, bearing each other's burdens? We connect in groups to do all these things, and we connect in groups to remind each other of the gospel truths in our lives. Are you

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<sup>4</sup> Tim Chester, "10 Things You Should Know about the Lord's Supper," Crossway, January 23, 2020, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-the-lords-supper/>.

engaging both your head and your heart when you connect in smaller groups throughout the week?

iv. Repentance/silence, solitude, reflection

1. Sometimes we can view repentance as a one time thing that gets us past the guilt of our sin so we can move on with our lives never to struggle again. We can sometimes expect a peace or a rest from the awareness of our sin, and maybe a rest from our need to repent. Repentance isn't a one time thing, though. It is practice and a habit that we as Christians should be in. It's not about making us feel guilt or shame, but about delighting and connecting with God. God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance (**Rom. 2:4**). Sometimes repentance looks like spending intentional time in silence, solitude, and reflection, engaging both your head and your heart. Other times it looks like being in a two way accountability relationship, confessing sins to one another. God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins (**1 John 1:9**). Are you engaging both your head and your heart when you practice repentance?