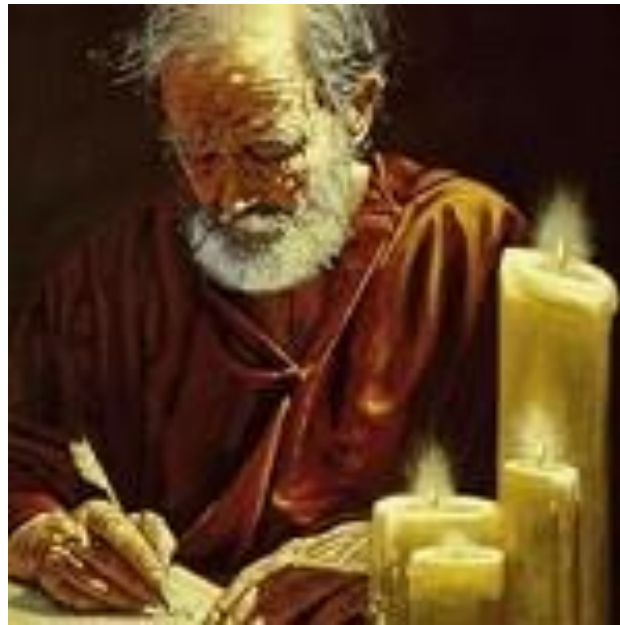


# Basic Training Bible Ministries

presents

## The Gospel According to Paul the Apostle



*“I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise ... I am ready to preach the gospel ... For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith’ ... according to my gospel ...” Rom 1:14–17; 16:25*

**Western Pennsylvania Conference  
Abundant Life Church, Uniontown, PA  
October 6–8, 2017**

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## **Introduction**

This study will conclude a series of studies on the message of the Gospel in Scripture. By previously looking at the Gospel as proclaimed by Noah, Moses, Abraham, David, Isaiah, and Jesus, we see that the “good news” of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ is the central and greatest theme in the Bible.

Because of progressive revelation, the message is clarified and finalized in the writings of the Apostle Paul. As a result, the message which Paul called “*my gospel*” (Rom 2:16; Rom 16:25; 1Ti 1:11; 2Ti 2:8) is not only much more complete, but also more doctrinally focused.

## **I. The Gospel According to Paul**

*“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 ... 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.” 1Co 15:1–4*

By Paul’s own declaration, this is the sum total of the Gospel message, insofar as the objective facts are concerned. Yet, in this simple statement, there are seven great doctrinal truths, which are explained and amplified throughout the New Testament.

### **A. Crucifixion—“Christ died”**

To the Apostle Paul, the cross of Christ was the foundation and the central focus of all that he taught. One recent survey found that there are an average of ten references to some aspect of the Gospel message in every chapter of the epistles. Not only this, but the crucifixion of Jesus Christ illustrates every doctrine of the Bible. It is no wonder that Paul, writing to the Corinthians, said, “*I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*” (1Co 2:2)

**B. Substitution**—*“for our sins”*

The story of the fall of mankind into sin is recorded in Genesis chapters 2–3. The entrance of sin into the human race brought misery and death (Rom 5:12; Rom 8:18–23). Since spiritual death—separation from God—was the ultimate penalty of sin, mankind could do nothing to save himself. Only by the willingness of Jesus Christ to enter the world and go to the cross in our place could mankind be redeemed.

**C. Resurrection**—*“He was buried, and ... He rose again”*

The story of the resurrection of our Lord is the highlight of the Bible (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20). If the crucifixion is history’s darkest night, where men rejected the love of God with murderous hatred, then the resurrection morning is the sunrise of a new and glorious day! The matchless power of the grace of God triumphs in a new and eternal morning (Lam 3:13–27)!

**D. Confirmation (Prophecy)**—*“according to the Scriptures”*

Every aspect of the closing moments of the life of Christ are clearly detailed in the record of prophecy. Hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of years before He came, the birth, life, ministry, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth were meticulously recorded. There are over 300 specific prophecies that were fulfilled by His coming. So overwhelming is the evidence from prophecy that many men like author C.S. Lewis, scientist Peter Stoner, and journalist Lee Strobel were won to faith as they considered the overwhelming proofs of prophecy.

**E. Salvation**—*“which also you received ... by which also you are saved”*

The truth of the “good news” about Jesus Christ is the assurance of our eternal salvation. It is eternal truth, presented in its historical setting, with more than sufficient evidence to convict and convince any humble soul. The strength and security of our salvation does not depend on the greatness of our faith, but on the unimpeachable truth of what we believe. Strong faith is not based on what we can “work up” within ourselves. Faith is strong when it trusts in the One who is invincible!

**F. Security**—*“in which you stand”*

Salvation is nothing but an empty promise without eternal security. If we are not saved from sin and death for all eternity—once for all—then we are not saved at all! In the words of Jesus speaking of those who trust in Him, *“they shall never perish”* (Joh 10:28) truly means “never, ever”! The soul that rests in Him rests securely on the Rock of Salvation that cannot be shaken.

**G. Consistency**—*“if you hold fast ... unless you believed in vain”*

There are those—particularly preachers—who love statements like this. I call them “preachers of insecurity,” who use texts like this as a club: to beat and

subdue their congregations. If we believe that the Bible is a unit, that as truth it cannot contradict itself, then we must find the consistency of such passages with the promises God gives to those who believe, *“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”* (Luk 12:32).

We will take each of the above seven aspects of the Gospel according to Paul and consider them individually. Each of them is filled with the promise, comfort, and hope that only the good news of Jesus Christ can bring to sinful men.

## **II. The Crucifixion of the Christ**

*“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died ... according to the Scriptures.”* 1Co 15:3

### **A. The Historical and Doctrinal Priority of the Cross**

Contained in the little phrase, *“first of all,”* is a truth of great importance. Paul always gives the place of priority to the work of the cross. To the Corinthians, he wrote: *“I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified”* (1Co 2:2).

The cross of Christ stands at the crossroad of human history, and apart from an understanding of its significance, history makes no sense. From a doctrinal point of view, no truth of Scripture could stand if the cross is eliminated from the Bible story:

- Where would we see the righteousness and holiness of God if not fulfilled at the cross?
- How would we know of the love of God or His mercy and compassion?
- How could we account for His omniscience and omnipotence, if He knew mankind would fall, yet failed to provide the redemptive solution?
- Since the Gospel message—the coming of the Person of Jesus Christ into the world and His death on our behalf—is the central message of the Bible, what would be left of the revelation of God?

Remove the cross of Christ, and history and Scripture would be desolately empty!

### **B. The Revelation of God and Man**

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ reveals the character of God (in all that is meant by “holiness”) and the character of man (in all that is meant by “depravity”). Fallen and depraved mankind, unable to escape from God and given the opportunity, would murder his own Creator, rather than be confronted with his sin. We do not understand our own sinfulness unless we

see ourselves in the Romans who mocked Him, in the crowds who chose Barabbas over Him, and in the Pharisees who taunted Him.

### **C. The Love of God Conquers Human Hatred**

On the cross, the nature of God is seen in the humility, majesty, and compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ. No human mind—unaided by the Holy Spirit’s revelation—could have imagined the crucifixion. The Lord Jesus displayed the majesty of total control on the cross.

Jesus declared that the words we utter are the true revelation of the condition of our heart (Luk 6:45). James confirms that to control the tongue one must be perfect (Jam 3:1–12). Under extreme provocation or affliction, we might speak words we later regret. Yet, on the cross, the Lord Jesus uttered seven sayings that demonstrate His total mastery of the situation and His uncompromising love for mankind (Joh 3:16).

### **D. The Seven Sayings from the Cross**

Each of these statements is rich and deep with spiritual/doctrinal significance:

1. *“Father, forgive them,”* Luk 23:34  
This is the word of **redemption**. At the same time He was dying for our sins, He prays for forgiveness for those who murdered Him.
2. *“Today you will be with Me in Paradise,”* Luk 23:43  
This is the word of **promise**. Only He who bore our sins could assure us of salvation, on the basis of faith alone.
3. *“Woman, behold your son ... [son,] behold your Mother!”* Joh 19:26–27  
This is the word of **obedience**. Faith supplies power to fulfill duty. Eternal focus does not remove earthly responsibilities of love.
4. *“My God ... why have You forsaken Me?”* Mat 27:46; Mar 15:34  
This is the word of **substitution**, as the Savior bears our sins. The *“wages of sin is [spiritual] death”*—separation from God (Gen 2:17; Rom 6:23). Jesus must drink the cup of wrath fully.
5. *“I thirst,”* Joh 19:28  
This is the word of **condescension**. It is a pitiful cry from a dying man, from the Lord of glory, who humbled Himself to become humanity (Phi 2:5–11).
6. *“It is finished!”* Joh 19:30  
This is the word of **victory**. The price has been paid, salvation for mankind is secure, and the forces of Satan are defeated (1Jo 3:8b; see also Col 3:14–15).

7. “*Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit,*” Luk 23:46; Psa 31:5  
This is the word of **trust**. The Lord Jesus, as a man, lived by faith. He went to His grave, trusting the Father to raise Him (Act 2:25–30).

### **E. The Inescapable Verdict of the Cross**

There is a reason mankind seeks to “*suppress the truth [of the cross] in unrighteousness*” (Rom 1:18). This is because, confronted by the story of the crucifixion, mankind has no place to hide. In the face of the infinite love of God, mankind displayed his true nature. The ultimate criminality of sin is that, confronted with its guilt, man’s sinful nature would rather murder his Maker than acknowledge his sin.

In the Garden, Adam and Eve sought to cover up their sin and then to hide from their Creator (Gen 3:7–8). Sin had reaped its own wages of spiritual death (Gen 2:17; Rom 5:12), and the effect of spiritual death was a fear of God. This fear was a reaction against His holiness, which man instinctively knew must result in physical, and finally, eternal death (Heb 2:14–15).

Later, when Cain stood self-condemned in the face of Abel’s righteous faith, he reacted by killing his brother (Gen 4:1–8). This murderous intent has been a dominant theme of human history as prophets, apostles, preachers, and faithful believers of all ages have paid the price of faithfulness to God, as illustrated in Jesus’ parable of the vineyard (Mat 21:33–40).

When the Son of God finally came into the world—as the living embodiment of the love of the Father—the malice of this world could not be restrained. At His birth, there was no room at the inn; and in the end, the only place this world had for Christ was on the cross. Nothing more completely demonstrates the sinfulness of sin than when the most self-righteous of men murdered their own Maker. This is why our world does everything it can to suppress the story of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **The Doctrine of Unlimited Atonement**

1. The crucifixion is the historical vindication of both the love and the justice of God. On the cross, God’s love for all mankind was fully demonstrated, and His justice, in fully judging sin, was accomplished. Only the doctrine of unlimited atonement is worthy of both the love and the justice of God.
2. If God did not judge all sin, He is not just. Yet, if Christ was judged for all sin, then salvation must be provided for all mankind. This is precisely what the Bible tells us (Joh 3:16; 2Co 5:14–15, 2Co 5:21; 1Ti 2:5–6; 2Pe 3:9; 1Jo 2:2).
3. The justice and the love of God stand or fall together at the cross. If either is partial at the cross, then neither is upheld as trustworthy.

4. Mankind has an inborn sense of justice that is part of being made in the image of God. Thus, Abraham confronted God on the issue of justice when praying for Sodom (Gen 18:23–25), saying, “*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*”
5. Paul tells us that even the heathen have an inborn sense of justice, “*the work of the law written in their hearts*” (Rom 2:15).
6. This is why, at the cross, God acted in such a way that no unbeliever will ever be able to bring a charge of injustice against God (Rom 3:25–26). When Paul says, “*that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus,*” he is looking ahead to the final judgment (Rev 20:11–14).
7. At the final judgment, all unbelievers will have the evidence of the infinite love and justice of God set before them, so that they see themselves to be “*without excuse*” (Rom 1:20b; Rom 2:1). They will stand condemned, not because God did not “elect” them, but because they refused to believe in His Son (Joh 3:18–21), who—by the love of God—died for them.
8. It will be this overwhelming evidence of God’s love and justice that will cause “*every knee [to] bow*” and “*every tongue ... confess*” (Isa 45:25; Phi 2:10–11).

God must prove Himself—even to the unsaved—to be just (Rom 3:21–26). Men have an inborn sense of justice, which is part of being made in the image of God (Rom 1:14–16). Abraham even “rebuked” the Lord, based on his sense of justice (Gen 18:22–25). In the final judgment, it will be this proof—that God was fair to all mankind—that will cause “every knee to bow and every tongue to confess” (Phi 2:5–11).

### III. The Substitutionary Death of Christ

*“Christ died for our sins ...”* 1Co 15:3

#### A. Great Truths in Little Words

The little word “*for*” in our text is critical, for it speaks of what was done “in our stead” and “on our behalf.” The Greek word *huper* is a word of substitution. It means that Jesus willingly went to the cross as a substitute for us. His scourging and crucifixion was **vicarious** in that one man, Jesus Christ, took the place of every member of the human race on the cross and bore our just penalty—spiritual death (Gen 2:17; Rom 5:12).

#### B. The Healing Power of the Cross

*“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith ...”* Rom 3:23–25 (emphasis added)

In the finished work of Christ at the cross, all the divine remedy for the spiritual death of mankind has been provided. There are more aspects to this than can be covered here, but let's consider at least six provisions:

1. Redemption, Rom 3:24  
This is the full payment of the debt of sin.
2. Imputation, 2Co 5:21  
This is imputation both of all sins to Christ and of His righteousness to all who believe.
3. Propitiation, Rom 3:25; 1Jo 2:2  
God was satisfied with the work of Christ on behalf of all mankind (Isa 53:11).
4. Expiation, Col 2:14  
The curse of sin, and all its penalties, was removed at the cross. In this sense alone, the world was “[reconciled to God] *not imputing their trespasses [sins] to them ...*” (2Co 5:19).
5. Justification, Rom 5:1  
Based on the imputation of Christ's righteousness to those who believe, God is able to declare them “righteous” in His sight.
6. Reconciliation, Rom 5:9–10; 2Co 5:19  
To be reconciled to God means to have a wholly new relationship to Him as His beloved child (Eph 1:6). This is what David meant, “[He] *heals all [our] diseases ...*” (Psa 103:3).

### C. The Undeniable Evidence of Victory

*“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.”* Heb 2:9

The resurrection of Jesus is the third great miracle of His humanity (first incarnation, then crucifixion, and finally resurrection). As surely as He died for every member of the human race, so also He was raised for each one. His resurrection is proof that death has been conquered, and that the life of God—eternal and abundant—is available to all mankind. We will see much more on this in our next section.

### D. The Universal Scope of the Cross

*“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved ...”* 1Ti 2:3–4

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ died on behalf of all men (Heb 2:9). We are further told that God is not willing that any should perish (2Pe 3:9). Paul makes it clear in 2Co 5:19 that the reconciling work of Christ was universal in scope. In the above text, we are told that “*God our Savior*” desires “*all men*”



*to be saved*” (emphasis mine). The use of “*all*” in the context (five times in the Greek), leaves no room for ambiguity.

God’s grace is an open invitation to the world to enter eternal life. The myopic view of Calvinism is demonstrably false in most points, as also is Arminianism. Both are human attempts through human logic to reason out the mystery of the plan of redemption. Both present God in terms that would be considered monstrous if applied to the Lord Jesus in His incarnation.

No passage could be clearer than Romans chapter 5 of the universal impact of the cross. After citing some of the privileges and power that come from faith in Christ (Rom 5:1–5), Paul then launches into an extended defense of what is theologically called “unlimited atonement.” Note that Christ died for all “*ungodly*” and “*sinner*s” (Rom 5:6–7). Furthermore, He reconciled all who were “*enemies*” (Rom 5:10), not in the sense of removing man’s hostility to God, but by the fact that God’s righteous claim for penalty has been removed. Obviously, this reconciliation must be received by faith (Rom 5:11; Eph 2:8–9).

The section from Rom 5:12–21 compares and contrasts the sinful impact of Adam and the saving effects of the Word of Christ. The primary point is that just as Adam’s sin affected all mankind, so also the work of Christ provides the way of escape from wrath for all men (Rom 5:18).

Note that, five times, Paul speaks of salvation as a “*free gift*” of God, which comes up again in Rom 6:23. A free gift cannot require the payment of a “*price*” as John MacArthur and others believe. It can only be received, and that only by faith (see Rom 5:17).

#### **E. The Marriage of Grace and Faith**

*“And therefore it [faith] was accounted to him [Abraham] for righteousness ... it shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of [not “for”] our offenses, and was raised because of [not “for”] our justification.” Rom 4:22–25*

According to Heb 2:9, the Lord Jesus “tasted” death for every man (the verb *geuo* means “*to experience to the full,*” *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*). He did this “by the grace of God,” which is offered to all mankind. The Holy Spirit never ceases to work to convict every soul of its need for Christ (Joh 16:7–11). Note that it does **not** say, “He will convict the **elect** of sin, righteousness, and judgment,” but “*the world*” (Joh 16:8). That is the same “*world*” loved by God, and for whom Christ died (Joh 3:16; 2Co 5:19).

The grace of God cannot be approached by those who seek to earn or merit its blessing. Such arrogance is an insult to the cross of Christ. Its cost/price surpasses the wealth of the world, and is infinite in value. It is arrogant to think that **we** would be willing to “*pay the price of eternal life*” as MacArthur loves to say (*The Gospel According to Jesus*, pg. 155; *Hard to Believe*, pg. 11).

There is only one way grace can be received and that is by the poverty of spirit called “faith” (Mat 5:3; Luk 4:18; Joh 1:13; Rom 5:17). Faith is the outstretched hand of the destitute beggar, having nothing to commend him and nothing to offer. It is the desperate cry of the publican, “*God be merciful to me, a sinner*” (Luk 18:13). God’s grace extends an open invitation to all; only those with no claims of personal worth or goodness will come.

Grace and faith are the perfect match of all that is loving and compassionate in God and all that desperately lacking in man. In the matchless grace of God and the humble response of faith, we have a true “Cinderella story,” where the Prince of Heaven offers His priceless love to the scorned, lonely, and overlooked soul, dressed only in the rags of its own poverty and shame.

#### **IV. The Glorious Resurrection**

*“And ... He was buried, and that He rose again the third day ...”* 1Co 15:4

##### **A. Is the Grave the End, or the Beginning?**

The burial of the Lord must be seen in light of the resurrection. It is in light of the grim darkness and hopelessness of the grave that the victory and power of the resurrection is seen. That Jesus was buried proves that He was dead. When the centurion, who had no doubt observed countless crucifixions, pronounced Jesus dead, there was no fear of contradiction (Mar 15:44). If there was any question, the spear in His side settled the matter (Joh 19:34).

Job, in his anguish and affliction, asked the most critical question ever uttered, “*If a man dies, shall he live again?*” (Job 14:14). If the answer is “No,” then this life is all there is, and it is essentially meaningless. Then, the tenet of Buddhism, “Everything is nothing”—which I heard uttered long ago in a temple in South Korea—is the sum of life. It is only in the resurrection of Christ the Lord that immortality has any meaning.

##### **B. The Revelation of Immortality**

*“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory, forever and ever. Amen.”* 1Ti 1:17

Toward the end of his life, Paul seems to reflect on themes that are not as prominent in his earlier writings. One of those themes is “*mercy*,” particularly as it related to himself (1Ti 1:13, 1Ti 1:16; Tit 3:5). But even more so, he seems to dwell on the idea of immortality. This is the quality of the endless life of God, consisting of a power which makes death and the grave appear to be weak and insignificant by comparison (Act 2:24).

But how could we fathom the immortality of God apart from the resurrection? It would be, at best, a nebulous concept, which we could not comprehend—something beyond our experience. In the last of his epistles, Paul likes to speak of “*God our Savior*” (1Ti 1:1; 1Ti 2:3; 1Ti 4:10; Tit 1:3; Tit 2:9; Tit 3:4). In reality, we could never truly know God except by the revelation of Himself to us in the character of Jesus Christ. In response to Philip’s request to “*show us the Father*,” Jesus responded, “*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*” (Joh 14:9). In His earthly life, Jesus revealed to us the character and the personality, of the Father. But only by His resurrection could we observe the meaning of immortality.

### C. **The Abolition of Death**

*“... our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel ...”* 2Ti 1:10

When we speak of abolition, we think of the freeing of those who have been enslaved. The greatest work of liberation in all of history was accomplished by the Lord Jesus, who by His death and resurrection has brought “*liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound*” (Isa 61:1).

According to Paul, apart from the resurrection of Christ from the grave, we would know neither life nor immortality. For until we enter into eternal life through faith, the existence on this Earth is nothing but a living death. We are, in reality, “*dead while we live*,” with the certainty of the grave looming over every moment of trivial happiness or enjoyment (Heb 2:15). With the resurrection of Jesus Christ, not just the fear of death, but the very power of death, is forever abolished for those who trust in Him.

### D. **Hail to the King!**

*“... He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.”* 1Ti 6:15–16

Paul writes these words to Timothy as a challenge to faithful service, looking to the coming of the Lord (1Ti 6:14). He links the majesty and authority of

Jesus Christ to His victory over the grave. He alone, as a human being, possesses immortality. It is inherently His, as God, but was purchased at the cost of the cross, in His humanity.

As Paul demonstrates in Phi 2:5–11, the degree of the exaltation of the humanity of Christ is in proportion to the degree of His condescension and humility. He, who willingly took the lowliest place in history, is now exalted to the highest place of power and authority in the universe.

Looking beyond the resurrection, we see in His ascension to glory the honor bestowed on Him by the Father, “*Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool ... rule in the midst of Your enemies!*” (Psa 110:1; Heb 1:13). The book of Hebrews is the one book in the New Testament that dwells on the theme of the ascended glory of Jesus Christ.

#### **E. Seated with Christ**

The reason this is such an important topic for us to consider is that we cannot hope to display to the world the “*blessed hope*” (Tit 2:13), much less the victorious power of our position in Christ, unless we can view life from the perspective of His present session at the right hand of God.

*“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”* Col 3:1–3

#### **F. Our Blessed Hope**

*“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus ... then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore, comfort one another with these words.”* 1Th 4:14, 1Th 4:17–18

The truth and conviction of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of the hope of our own future resurrection. One of the reasons that 1 Corinthians chapter 15 is the longest, single passage in the Bible on the topic of resurrection is that some believers in Corinth had been deceived into denying that Christ rose from the dead (see 1Co 15:12). We will deal with this issue in due time.

Here, Paul tells the Thessalonians that our hope of future resurrection with the saints rests on faith in the death and resurrection of Christ. Not only our own resurrection, but our reunion with believing loved ones who have already

died, is assured by the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ. Not only this, but we are sustained in our trials as we are:

*“looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Tit 2:13*

## V. **The Confirmation of Prophecy**

*“... according to the Scriptures ...” 1Co 15:3–4*

### A. **By the Mouth of Two or Three Witnesses**

So important is this point that Paul stresses it twice for emphasis. Actually, the phrase encompasses all three events: the crucifixion, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Paul was trained as a Pharisee and was familiar with the fundamental principle of the Mosaic Law: that every fact must be established *“by the mouth of two or three witnesses”* (Deu 19:15; 1Ti 5:19). Not only does this hold true in a courtroom setting, it is a good rule to keep in mind when it comes to the interpretation of the Bible. Everything that falls under the heading of *“sound doctrine”* (Tit 2:1) can be verified, at the minimum, by *“two or three witnesses”* from the human authors of the Bible.

### B. **The Miracle of Prophecy**

*“Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testifies beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.” 1Pe 1:10–11*

Prophecy is the product of a cooperative effort between the Spirit of God and human authors. It is paradoxical, in the sense that it could never have happened except by divine revelation; yet at the same time, it required diligent preparation and dedicated study on the part of those whom God chose to record it. On the one hand, no one is worthy of being the recipient of the prophetic Word. On the other hand, God revealed truth to those who were seeking it. Not only this, but the human writers of Scripture labored to study and understand each other!

### C. **Prophecy Proves God Is!**

*“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” 2Pe 1:20–21*

The value of prophecy cannot be overstated. As we will see, it was the foundation of Paul's gospel. The point of this passage is simple: prophecy could not exist unless it were given by God. When Paul twice affirms that the coming, death, burial, and resurrection was "*according to the Scriptures,*" he is not only pointing to the historical facts of what occurred, but also reminding us that these events were foretold in the written Word of God—many of which were the record from thousands of years in the past. Who can tell the future but God, who is omniscient?

Even the early apostles affirmed the message they proclaimed by the confirmation of written prophecy. In his initial message, on the very day of Pentecost, Peter confirmed each of the events Paul presents in 1Co 15:3–4, and he does so using prophecy (see Act 2:22–36). He does this by quoting Psa 16:8–11 and Psa 110:1, both of which were written by King David, one thousand years before Christ came! Later in his message on Solomon's porch (Act 3:22–26), Peter quotes Moses, from Deu 18:15–22, which was written at least 1,400 years before Jesus came. In the book of Isaiah alone, there are more references to the incarnation, life, ministry, betrayal, scourging, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection than we could possibly deal with in this study. And yet all of these prophecies from the Old Testament simply set the stage for some of the most amazing prophecy ever given—and it was given to the Apostle Paul.

#### **D. The Mystery of the Gospel**

*"Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith—to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen"* Rom 16:25–27

This text is not only a "mouth full," it is mind-boggling in its claims. We do not have time or space to deal with all facets of this passage. But three truths must be highlighted from this amazing Scripture. Paul introduces each of these with the same phrase, "*according to ...*" This phrase introduces a gauge or standard by which to measure:

1. First of all, Paul spoke of "*my gospel,*" not just because he believed it, or loved it. This is a claim of authorship. Paul made it clear elsewhere that the Gospel he preached did not come from any of the other apostles (Gal 1:11–12). The reason for this is that, again due to progressive revelation, none of the other apostles knew it in the fullness that it was given to Paul. God revealed to Paul—by direct revelation from Jesus Christ Himself—

the fullness of the Gospel he preached. This was done during the time he secluded himself in Arabia (Gal 1:15–18).

2. Secondly, Paul calls the content of this revelation “*the mystery kept secret since the world began.*” That can only mean that until it was revealed to Paul, no other human being knew it (with the obvious exception of the Lord Jesus Christ, who definitely anticipated it). And this explains why the Gospel according to Paul is unique, and has peripheral differences and distinctions from what we read in the gospels—particularly true of the “Synoptic Gospels” (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

Why do you think the Gospel of John has such a different approach and theme from the first three gospels? It is because John, who wrote his gospel much later, was able to look back on his time with the Lord in the light of what he had learned from Paul’s complete revelation. This is also the secret to the simplicity of John’s gospel. In Eph 3:4–9 and Col 1:25–27, Paul reveals the fact that the subject of this revelation was the formation of the Church as the Body of Christ, and the specific instruction—Church-Age doctrines—which we would need to fulfill the purpose of God for our Age. Isn’t it interesting that John alone records for us the teaching in the Upper Room (John chapters 13–17), all of which was aimed at the future Church?

3. The third great truth is that Paul’s gospel, including newly revealed truth, was based on “*the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith ...*” (Rom 16:26). Just what is the command Paul has in mind here? It would have to be in keeping with this new revelation—the mystery. It would also be aimed at “*obedience to the faith*” (Rom 1:5) which is the theme of the book of Romans (compare these two verses, which we call “bookends”). The only single commandment that meets all these criteria is the command which we call “the Great Commission” in Mat 28:18–20. It was Paul’s God-given mission to prepare the Church for its world-wide mission of the evangelism of the lost and the edification of the saints!

## **VI. Salvation: The Romance of Redemption**

“... *the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received ...  
by which also you are saved ...*” 1Co 15:1–2

The greatest love story ever told is the story of redemption. Never in history was One so exalted and desirable drawn to shower, with love undeserved, those who are so miserable. We cannot even make the claim that we are “*dark, but lovely,*” like the Shulamite woman (Sos 1:5), for we are, spiritually, unlovely and our souls black with sins.

## A. The Shepherd Lover

In the beautiful Song of Solomon, we not only have a true story of the love of this king for the shepherdess called the Shulamite, but we also have an analogy of the love of Christ for fallen and lost mankind. Throughout the story rings the praises of the Shulamite maid for the excellencies of Solomon. The ancient Hebrew interpretation of the book was that Solomon, in order to win her affections apart from dazzling her with his royal splendors, disguised himself as a humble shepherd. Yet, even in this disguise, he could not completely conceal his inherent dignity and majesty.

What a picture of the Lord Jesus, who came to this Earth as the Good Shepherd, clothed in meekness and humility, yet glorious in His inherent nobility! The Shulamite could never fathom what Solomon saw in her, though he told her repeatedly. In the same way, we question how the Lord Jesus could ever truly and deeply love us, yet He also tells us times without number in the pages of the Bible.

## B. A Story Too Good to be True—Yet It Is!

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Joh 3:16 (emphasis added)*

The little word “so” is highlighted in the quote above for a reason. It is probably the most overlooked word in the verse—perhaps in the Bible. In the first place, it is placed first in the verse in the Greek, giving it the place of prominence and emphasis. To read from the Greek, the verse begins, “So loved God the world ...”

Further, the word “so” translates the Greek word *houtos*, which is a demonstrative pronoun meaning “in this manner” or “in such a way.” It is stressing, at the beginning of the verse, the uniqueness of the love of God. This is due to the unconditional and all-encompassing nature of God’s love for the world that He made such a sacrifice—His only begotten Son—on our behalf.

Jesus tells us that the love of God encompasses “*the world*.” Some try to mitigate this statement by saying that God loved the “world of the elect.” This is total nonsense, as is obvious that the “*world*” of Joh 3:16 is also one and the same “*world*” of Joh 3:17 and Joh 3:19. Because the scope of God’s love, and the extent of Christ’s sacrifice are universal, Jesus is able to say, “*whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*”

There are those, of course, who still hold to the idea of “limited atonement” based on their distorted view of “election” and “predestination.” However,



consider what such a view does to this text. If Christ was given only for those already chosen, then the “love” is immediately and vastly diminished. While it is true there are “*few who are saved*” (Mat 7:14; Luk 13:23), it is not due to any limit in God’s love. Paul’s statement that “*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*” (1Ti 1:15) encompasses all mankind. And how could we possibly square the truth that “*God is love*” (1Jo 4:8, 1 Jo 4:16) with a God who does not love all those He created?

### C. Compassion or Cruel Joke?

*“Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” Mat 9:35–36*

A simple reading of this incident suggests that the love and compassion of the Lord Jesus, the “*good shepherd*” (Joh 10:11), was for all of the multitude. This is strengthened by the fact that He was healing “*every sickness and every disease among the people.*”

However, I recently heard a message where a pastor, speaking on this passage, spoke of the compassion of Jesus, then immediately couched it in terms of “the elect only” mentality. Nan, who was with me at the time, commented that instead of compassion, it sounded more like a cruel joke. Jesus, by this teaching, is made to look loving and compassionate, but really only caring for those for whom He chose to show compassion.

Since I have introduced the topic, let me briefly give my view on the Doctrine of Election. I present this with the *caveat* that, when dealing with the divine decrees, we all know only the surface of the mind of God as it is revealed to us. I take a very simple approach, which appears to be accurate to me.

First of all, the Lord Jesus Christ is the first One ever called “*Elect.*”

*“Behold, My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him. He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.” Isa 42:1*

This election took place before history began. In the mind of God, Jesus Christ was “*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (Rev 13:8; see also 1Pe 1:1–2). God planned for the crucifixion of Christ to save fallen man before man ever existed! In knowing Christ as “*the Savior of the world*” (Joh 4:42), God the Father—who lives in the eternal present—also knew, without fail, all who would believe in Him throughout history. Because He is the

“*Elect One*,” they are called “the elect,” just as He is “the Son of God,” and we who believe are called “sons of God.”

At the same time that the Father chose the Son, the “*Elect One*,” to be “*the Savior of the world*,” He also chose all those who would be saved, as they were “*in Christ*” already in His mind.

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places **in Christ**, just as He chose us **in Him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.”* Eph 1:3–4 (emphasis added)

To me, this makes what has become a very complicated and convoluted doctrine very simple. It also delivers us from what I believe is the very dishonoring idea concerning divine sovereignty—as held in Calvinism—which holds that God does **not** love the whole world, Christ did **not** die for the whole world, and salvation is **not** possible for the whole world. My conclusions are based on very simple statements of Scripture, which require no intricate interpretations:

1. “*God so loved the [whole] world*,” Joh 3:16.
2. Jesus Christ died for every member of the human race, Joh 3:16; Joh 4:42; Heb 2:14–15.
3. God desires that all be saved, 1Ti 2:1-7; 2Pe 3:9.
4. The Gospel is “good news” for the whole world, Mat 28:18–20.

I realize that there are many who follow the theory that if it is not complicated, it is not good doctrine. I leave them to their folly. The things God most wants us to know are things He makes most clear and simple.

#### **D. The Compelling Love of Christ**

*“For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus; that if One died for all, then all died [in Adam]; and He died for all, that those who live [believers] should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.”* 2Co 5:14–15

In the mind of the Apostle Paul, the reception of the love of Christ, through faith in the Gospel message, should have a life-changing effect. To be the recipient of such love is to be compelled to share that love. As surely as all mankind is spiritually “*dead in trespasses and sins*” (Eph 2:1), it was necessary that Christ “*died for all*,” a phrase Paul repeats twice—to make the point. If, therefore, we are “*compelled by the love of Christ*,” we “*live for Him*” by manifesting that love—both in word and deed—to the whole world.

As we read through the entire context of the above quote (2Co 5:14–15), we find that Paul further expounds on what he means that Christ “*died for all*,” in 2Co 5:19–21:

*“... that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word [message] of reconciliation ... For He [the Father] made Him [the Son] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”*

I see no way to read this without accepting its universal application. More to the point, it calls on each of us to play our part in this Age to do all in our power—compelled by His love—to reach a lost world for Christ.

## **VII. The Solid Rock of our Security**

*“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand ...”* 1Co 15:1

### **A. Standing on the Rock**

Paul is writing to Corinthian believers, and he wants to affirm that what they had previously believed was the basis of their continuing spiritual security. Why was this so important? It is because, as we will see, some of them had been led astray from their original faith. Yes, believers do sometimes get led astray!

The phrase, “*in which you stand*” speaks of the standing of the believers in Corinth before the throne of God. It is the perfect tense of the verb *histemi*, speaking of a past completed action having present continuing results. To be justified before God, by faith in Jesus Christ, is to stand perfected forever in Christ. While our state, or practice, is subject to change, our standing is never subject to change. Our conduct always has an effect on our fellowship with God, but never alters our relationship as His children. As His children by faith, we will be disciplined for disobedience, but we will never be cast out (Joh 6:37).

Bear in mind that Paul is writing to the Corinthian believers, whom he calls “*saints*” (1Co 1:2), who are “*in Christ*” (1Co 1:30), and to whom he says, “*But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God*” (1Co 6:11). These believers—the fruit of his labors in Acts 18—he also calls “*carnal ... babes in Christ*” (1Co 3:1). In the church in Corinth, there were:

- divisions and contentions (1Co 1:10–11),
- accusations and judging against Paul (1Co 4:3–5),

- arrogance and pride (1Co 4:6–9, 1Co 4:18),
- sexual immorality (1Co 5:1–2; 1Co 6:18),
- law suits against one another (1Co 6:1–6),
- abuse of liberty (1 Corinthians chapter 8),
- idolatry (1Co 10:14–22),
- rebellion by the women (1Co 11:1–16),
- abuse of the Lord’s table, drunkenness (1Co 11:17–22),
- service without love (1Co 13:1–10),
- abuse of spiritual gifts and ministries (1 Corinthians chapter 14),

and—to top all of that off—some of them had accepted the false, gnostic teaching that Jesus did not rise from the dead (1Co 15:12)! Yet, Paul never once doubts their standing in Christ!

## **B. Perfected Forever**

This dichotomy of truth—our position and our practice—is expressed well in Hebrews 10:14:

*“For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.”*

Having been imputed with the righteousness of Christ (Rom 4:22–24), we stand perfect in God’s sight, even though practically we continue to be “sanctified,” or purified, as we grow in grace and truth (1Pe 2:2; 2Pe 3:18).

In fact, it was the Apostle Paul, through the revelation given to him, who most fully developed and clarified the distinction between position and practice, and affirmed most strongly the doctrine of our eternal security. The most comprehensive phrase in all of Paul’s writing—and apparently his favorite—was “*in Christ*.” While all who trust in Christ are always “*in Christ*,” we still need to be exhorted to “*walk worthy*” of Him (Eph 4:1). To be “*in Christ*,” is to possess all that He possesses, and to share in all that He is (1Co 1:30; Eph 1:3).

## **C. Complete in Christ**

*“For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.” Col 2:9–10*

In the above text, the words “*fullness*” and “*complete*” are from the same root word. They point back to Col 1:19, where Paul says, “*For it pleased the Father that in Him [Jesus Christ] all the fullness should dwell.*” Christ Jesus is the embodiment of all the goodness and greatness of God. And “*in Him*” we have been “fulfilled” by all of His “*fullness*.” When the Bible speaks of being

*“filled with [by] the Spirit”* (Eph 5:18), or *“walk[ing] in [by] the Spirit”* (Gal 5:16), it is speaking of our practice reflecting our position. By faith we “yield” to the indwelling Spirit of God to live out the life of Christ in us (Gal 2:20). This is true biblical spirituality.

#### **D. Seated with Christ**

*“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God ... for you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”* Col 3:1, Col 3:3

If there is any passage that puts the issue of our security in Christ to rest, this is it. Paul declares that to be “in Christ” not only provides us with all that He has, but also that we share all that He intrinsically is; it means that we are so united with Him that we—positionally—are now sitting with Him *“at the right hand of God.”*

For those who believe the error that Christians can somehow “lose” their salvation, consider this: To be seated with Christ at the Father’s right hand means that if one believer were to lose their salvation, Christ Himself would have to be cast out of Heaven! This is why, when Paul speaks of the scope of the plan of redemption in Rom 8:29–30, he speaks of a finished work:

*“For whom He foreknew [believers], He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”*

All of these actions were determined in the plan of God in eternity past. They will not be completed—from our perspective—until eternity future. But to God, who lives in the eternal present, they are done! As difficult as it is for us to wrap our minds around all of this, it is all included in the victorious shout of Jesus from the cross.

*“It is finished!”* Joh 19:30

It is in light of Paul’s strong conviction of the security of our salvation that we now address the most perplexing of his statements regarding the Gospel that he preached.

#### **VIII. Have You Believed in Vain?**

*“... if you hold fast that word which I preached to you— unless you believed in vain.”* 1Co 15:2

I can almost picture the preacher frothing at the mouth as he begins to shout, “How many of you have believed in vain? Some of you think you are saved, you believed in Christ, but you didn’t hold fast, you believed in vain! Some of you think you are saved, **but** you didn’t surrender all, you did not make Jesus Lord of all, therefore you believed in vain!”

Tragically, I have heard these very arguments—more times than I can count. It would be humorous if it were not so tragic, demonstrating how Arminianism (which believes you can lose your salvation) and Calvinism (which says if you don’t persevere you were never saved) actually come to the very same conclusion. That conclusion is that you can’t possibly be sure whether you will make it to Heaven or not.

Our world is filled with what I call, “preachers of insecurity.” They question everyone’s salvation (except their own), based on a criteria that is not found in the Bible. I have heard, from the time I trusted in Christ, statements such as: “If you have evil thoughts, you are probably not saved.” “If you are still continuing in sins you committed as an unbeliever, you are not saved.” Just recently I heard, “If you are not in your Bible every day, I question whether you are saved.” It goes on and on.

My question is, “How could Paul know all of the sins being committed among the believers in Corinth, and still speak of them as saints?” And that brings us to the immediate question, “What did Paul mean by the phrase, ‘*unless you believed in vain*’?”

#### **A. Context, Context, Context**

*“Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” 1Co 15:12*

Remember that the Corinthians were Greeks. In Greek philosophy and mythology, the body was seen as a prison, which limited and hindered the soul. Death was seen as a release from this prison, with all its demands and aches and pains and afflictions. This made it easy for them to fall for this false teaching—probably from gnostic sources—that questioned the physical resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

#### **B. Defending the Resurrection**

This is why having presented the essence of his Gospel message (the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ), Paul goes into a lengthy defense of the resurrection (1Co 15:5–11). Jesus was seen and touched after His resurrection by the original apostles, by over 500 believers, and last of all by Paul himself. These witnesses all testified to the truth of His resurrection.

Since some in the Corinthian church were denying this historical event, Paul leads them to consider the implications of their denial (1Co 15:13–19). He presents them with five consequences, which would be true, if Christ did **not** rise. I will put them in the logical order:

1. If there is no such thing as resurrection, then Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead, 1Co 15:13.
2. If Christ is not risen, then Paul, and the other apostles, are “*false witnesses*,” 1Co 15:15.
3. If Christ is not risen, those who have died trusting in Christ “*have perished*,” 1Co 15:18.
4. If Christ has not risen, we have hope only in this life, and “*are of all men the most pitiable*,” 1Co 15:19.
5. If Christ has not risen, then our faith is in vain (we “*believed in vain*”), for we are still in our sins (1Co 15:14, 1Co 15:17).

Three different words are used in this passage, all of them relating to the idea of something being “*in vain*.” However, they present different aspects of the same concept. They carry Paul’s argument from one level to the next, until he reaches his final point. In 1Co 15:2, the word “*vain*” is from the Greek adverb *eike*, which means “without cause, without basis.” It describes belief in something that is without foundation. If the resurrection is a hoax, there would be no firm foundation for our faith.

Then, in 1Co 15:14, we have the word “*empty*” (NKJV), which translates the word *kenos*, meaning “empty, without substance.” If the resurrection is a myth, then our faith is without any substance. We are holding to an empty Gospel, with only empty promises. Paul’s point is that if you remove the resurrection from the Gospel message, you nullify the effect of the cross. There is no longer proof of the victory of Jesus over sin and death.

The third word is found in 1 Co 15:17, and is from *mataios*, which means “void of result, vanity, to no avail.” If Jesus Christ did not rise from the tomb, then the logical conclusion is that our faith is futile, for we are still in our sins. In that case, truly, we are of all men most miserable, for we have trusted in a false hope, we have “*believed in vain*.”

### C. As the Sun Drives Away the Mist

*“But now Christ **is** risen from the dead, and **has** become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep ... for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” 1Co 15:20–22 (emphasis added)*

With this triumphant note, all doubt and fear are removed. If you have believed in Christ, you cannot have believed in vain, for you have believed the truth. It

is important to make clear that it is the crucifixion of Christ that purchased our “so great ... salvation” (Heb 2:3). However, the assurance of Christ’s victory over sin, death, and Satan (1Jo 3:8) is His resurrection. Paul makes this clear in Rom 4:25:

“... [Christ] *was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.*”

What Paul is saying is that just as our sins were the cause for the crucifixion, so the certainty of our justification, having been completed, was the cause for the resurrection. It is the cross that justifies the believer; it is the resurrection that proves that the work is finished.

#### **D. In Adam or In Christ?**

*“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.”* 1Co 15:22

This is the ultimate question of life. All mankind is divided into two groups: those who are “*in Adam*” and those who are “*in Christ*.” All who are in Adam are spiritually dead, those who are in Christ—through faith alone—are now spiritually and eternally alive. Every soul must consider the question: “Where are you spiritually?” Your position will ultimately determine your eternal destiny—whether in the presence of God or under the wrath of God (Joh 3:36).

Those who believe the Gospel message, trusting Christ as their Savior, are placed “*in Christ*” by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1Co 12:13). It is a supernatural work of God that occurs the moment of regeneration, or new birth (Joh 3:3, Joh 3:7; Tit 3:4–7). Those who choose, in the free exercise of their God-given volition, remain “*in Adam*,”—spiritually dead, separated from the God who loved them and sent His Son to the cross on their behalf. Jesus Christ died for their sins, He paid the debt they could not pay, but they refuse the “*free gift*” of God (Rom 5:15–17; Rom 6:23).

#### **E. The End of the Gospel Story (1Co 15:50–58)**

*“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed ... then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’”* 1Co 15:51, 1Co 15:54

This passage parallels 1Th 4:13–18 and speaks of the translation of the Church at the end of this age, which we call the “Rapture.” While the word “Rapture” does not occur in Scripture, it comes from the Latin translation of “*caught up*” (1Th 4:17), which is from *rapere*.



Not all Church-Age believers will die, because those at the very end will be raptured, in “*a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*” (1Co 15:52). At “*the last trumpet*” (a possible allusion to it occurring on the Feast of Trumpets), the dead in Christ will be raised and the living will be transformed, we will “[put on] *immortality*,” that is, the very resurrection life of Christ (1Ti 6:16).

At that moment, sin and death will be conquered through the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and God the Father, “*who gives us the victory*” of salvation (1Co 15:57), by grace through faith. This is the assurance that is the birthright of every soul that trusts in the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the confident hope of every believer.

And what gratitude can we show for such unmerited grace? How is it possible to give thanks to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, for such a deliverance? Paul tells us, in one simple verse:

*“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable,  
always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that  
your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” 1Co 15:58*

#### **F. Ambassadors for Christ**

*“For the love of Christ compels us ... Now then,  
we are ambassadors for Christ ...” 2Co 5:14, 2Co 5:20*

Each and every one of us is called to be an ambassador for Christ. We all are empowered to be ministers of reconciliation to this lost and dying world (2Co 5:14–21). Every child of God—through faith in Jesus Christ—is indwelt and empowered by the Spirit of God, as a living witness and example of the love of God and the grace of Christ. We have been commissioned to abide in Christ, bear much fruit, and glorify our heavenly Father (Joh 15:7–8). That commission carries the “debt” and obligation to take this “Gospel according to Paul” and spread it throughout the whole world (Mat 28:18–20; Rom 1:14–17).

With the coming of Jesus Christ into the world, we now have the final word from God (Heb 1:1–3), a message that has been interpreted for us by the revelation of the mystery of this present age by the Apostle Paul.

In no other age are believers placed “*in Christ*” and “seated with Him” at the Father’s right hand (Col 3:1–3). In no other age does the “*fullness of the Godhead*” reside within those who believe (Col.1:19; Col 2:9–10). We possess the infinite and unlimited resources of the treasury of Heaven (Eph 1:3), “*the unsearchable riches of Christ*” (Eph 3:8).

The parable of the talents (Mat 25:14–30) should cause each of us to ask ourselves, “How well have I invested my Master’s wealth?” We should each bear in mind that one day we will stand before His Mercy Seat, though it is also called “*the judgment seat of Christ*” (2Co 5:10). At that time, we will give an account to Him of our lives (1Pe 4:5). Then, He will graciously remove from us all that is unworthy, and reward us for all that brings glory to Him (1Co 3:10–15). Although there will be tears at our loss, there will surely be great joy at our gain. This is why it is both judgment seat and mercy seat.

Let us live now to bring greater glory to Him, and greater rejoicing in ourselves. The time is short, let us redeem what time we have!