

# Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: General

Scripture: 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:1-11

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

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## *That Which is of First Importance*

### **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:1-11 (ESV)**

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.

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. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

**Introduction** Every so often we need to be brought back to what is “of first importance.” “First importance”, is the BEDROCK, foundation ideas on which we stand. In our **nation**, that would be equality, opportunity, security and fairness. In our **families** it would be loving and setting yourself behind the needs of your fellow family members. In **schools** it would be the effective education of the students. In the **church** it is what calls us together and holds us together—it is our core beliefs, the things we have arrived at which are non-compromisable, essential and upon which we will not yield. You may not have thought all these through yet, and we may have some discussion about WHAT they are, if we have time.

I was reminded of this two weeks ago as I was in Dallas hanging out with a bunch of people who are not yet sure what “truth” is. Bob and Judy Pardon gave the keynote address about “forgiveness.”

In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15 the apostle Paul is nearing the end of this letter. It has been a long letter and now heading into chapter 15 Paul has written **6,014** words so far. This chapter will be one of his greatest compositions ever! But I

want to use it as an ENCOURAGEMENT and as an EXHORTATION and as a personal TESTIMONY, too.

He reminds them, the Corinthian Christians that he had laid out for them the most important ideas: they were four—

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

that he **appeared** to

1. Cephas (Peter)
2. then to the twelve
3. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time
4. Then he appeared to James,
5. Then to all the apostles.
6. Last he appeared also to Paul

Which is to say Jesus, by appearing over and over in public in a resurrected state, was authenticating His claims to identification as God's only Son, and as Messiah for Israel and as Savior for the world.

For Paul, at that time, writing to those particular Christian, these are that which was of "first importance." I want to share that this is what I seek to keep my own focus upon. As a pastor and indeed, even just as an individual Christian, I find these days that we can get so distracted by OTHER questions beyond what is "of first importance (in Greek: *en protois*)."

- I can get distracted by my own ego and interests.
- I can get distracted by people around me and what is going on in their lives and think my Christian faith is less than it is because they tell me as such.
- I can get distracted by politics. Another pastor told me recently he doesn't like the word "evangelical" any more because he doesn't want to be perceived as a "right winger." That distracts me as I ask myself, "well what do you not believe?" and I get all focused on all that stuff.
- I can get distracted by our performance as a church and how we compare to this church or that church.
- I can get distracted from that which is of first importance by other, secondary doctrines: premillennialism versus amillennialism, Presbyterian or Congregational, the Lord's Table every Sunday of once per month, cessation of sign gifts or continuation of sign gifts, and on and on and a lot of energy can be spent on this issues when the main thing, Paul wrote, is what is of first importance.

And I seek to keep the focus of this church on these four things too. In our church we can get distracted from what is of first importance by all kinds of things:

- Are we outward looking and seeking to reach the lost or are we inward looking and concentrating on sanctification?
- Do we put our money towards missions and outreach or do we save it up and stockpile it?
- Do we have a staff-led church or do we depend on volunteers for most of what we do?
- Are we all white or do we deliberately seek to add people of other ethnic backgrounds?
- Is power allocated among a few or among a lot of people?
- Do we connect with other churches or do we carefully maintain our distance from anybody but churches who are exactly like us?

In the first chapter of this same letter, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 1:10–17 (ESV)

***<sup>10</sup> I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. <sup>11</sup> For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. <sup>12</sup> What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." <sup>13</sup> Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup> I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup> so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup> (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) <sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.***

Paul says something interesting in verse 17: “Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the Gospel...” He knew what his gifts and calling were, and refused distraction by the little groups in the Corinthian assembly. His job was the stuff “of first importance” (*en protois*). His job was to know Christ and to make Him known. His job was to “deliver”

- Jesus’ death for sins
- Jesus’ burial
- Jesus’ resurrection
- Jesus’ appearances

## JESUS’ DEATH FOR SINS

This is one of the two ideas here which he undergirds with the phrase “according to the Scriptures.” I don’t know how important we think that is today but for Paul, being accused of being an agent of a cult, insisted that Jesus’ death was the fulfillment of the long-awaited Jewish belief that MESSIAH would die for sins. It was essential to him that Christianity was seen as a continuity with

Judaism, at least a Judaism defined by the Bible. He insisted that Christianity, this new Gospel, was NOT to be confused with the Judaism of his day with all the manmade rules of the Pharisees (of which he used to be one) and the traditions of men. But when it came to who Jesus is, and what He did in His atonement for sins, Genesis and Leviticus and the Psalms and Isaiah and all the rest! Psalm 22:1,7,8,16-18 (1000 BC), Isaiah 53:4-6 (690 BC), Zechariah 12:10 (519 BC) are a few that Paul would have had in mind...

And Jesus DIED. He didn't just pass out. He didn't fake His own death (although I don't know how anyone could even suggest that if you know anything about Roman crucifixion).

## JESUS' BURIAL

It is interesting to me that Paul add this little detail to the list "of first importance." They took the dead body of Jesus—not saying "ewwww" but lovingly, and put it in a tomb that had been donated. It was important to Mary and John and Joseph of Arimathea to bury Jesus' body. They could have done other things with it but in that case, they chose to bury it. And for a long time the tomb site was remembered and even revered by Christians in Jerusalem. Constantine's mother, Helena, (in the 300s), demolished a Roman Temple built over the supposed church that had marked the tomb site. In any event Paul considered the actual, literal burial of Jesus an important belief—testifying that Jesus was in fact, dead. You don't bury living people.

## JESUS ROSE THE THIRD DAY

Here is his most cardinal doctrine. He will spend the rest of the chapter, a long one, arguing logically, historically and theologically for its truth. Jesus did not stay dead. He rose. And He did so on the third day, according once again, to the Scriptures. In Paul's mind the Old Testament mandated that Messiah would become NOT DEAD on the third day after His death. On Day One he is dead. On Day Two he is still dead. Sometime on the third day he would become not dead.

If you go to any church in the future, ask them first "is Jesus still dead?" If they give any other answer than "No" do not attend a second Sunday in that church for it is not Christian. He is not still dead. He is alive. This is "of first importance". This is EN PROTOIS.

## JESUS' APPEARANCES (which are many)

Paul then tells the Corinthian Christians that Jesus' appeared, post-resurrection to a lot of people. ***to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.***

He showed up, post-death alive. This is the centerpiece of real Christianity. Do you believe that this happened? You cannot be a Christian in any sense if you are not convinced of this. You can't be a Christian theologically, philosophically, historically, internationally. I think churches which try to SAY they are Christian and don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ are not telling the truth. They can honestly be Unitarian or anything else they want to call themselves but belief in this is of "first importance" or, as Paul said, ***en protois***.

Whatever else we are thinking about, whatever else we are defining our church by, whatever else we struggle with, we are bound together by the things that are EN PROTOIS, of "first importance." Paul doesn't say GLOSSAS SEMASIS γλώσσας σημασίας "of only importance." But these are priorities 1, 2, 3 and 4 which define real Christians from everything else.

As we go into the second half of 2016 then into 2017 then into 2020, and some of you will go into 2050, remember these four things which are of first importance, whatever ELSE may come along in your life.

You will not be disappointed.

You will not find out it was a hoax.

You will not find a new way that can also get you to heaven.

You will not find out *there is no heaven*.

You will not find out that there is nothing after death.

You will see the Lamb of Glory, on His throne and He will be so fully alive and glorious you will beside yourself with joy like no joy you ever felt on this earth!

I see the king of glory  
Coming on the clouds with fire  
The whole earth shakes  
The whole earth shakes  
I see his love and mercy  
Washing over all our sin  
The people sing  
The people sing  
Hosanna  
Hosanna  
Hosanna in the highest [x2]