

## Standing Strong In The Faith

1 Corinthians 15:1-11  
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According to a recent study, “more than one-third of adults 45 and older feel lonely,” and “nearly one-fourth of adults 65 and older are considered to be socially isolated.”<sup>1</sup> Loss of social outlets can cause us to question who to believe when deciding if something is fact or just made up, fake news.

In her article titled “Why We Fall for Conspiracies,” researcher Christina Georgacopoulos notes that 19% of Americans believe the government was behind the 9/11 attacks; 25% believe the recession was caused by a small group of Wall Street bankers; and 11% believe the government switched to compact fluorescent lightbulbs because “they make people obedient and easier to control.”<sup>2</sup>

When you don’t have a strong foundation to stand on – socially, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually – it’s easy to get sucked into conspiracy theories and false beliefs.

In our New Testament lesson, the Apostle Paul is worried that the people of Corinth have been misled by the powers that are how and clinging to false beliefs. Corinth was a powerful, wealthy city in the Roman Empire and the center of commerce in Greece. It was full of educated people who were stressed by political and economic uncertainty.

This led many of them to join groups that were called “mystery religions,” complete with secret ceremonies that joined a person to a pagan god or goddess. One of the popular drama’s in Corinth told of the death and resurrection of Adonis, and an invitation to share in his triumph.

Paul was worried that the church he planted in Corinth would be vulnerable in such a misguided society. So he wrote to remind them of the message he proclaimed – the good news of Jesus Christ – which is the foundation of our identity as Christians, as brothers and sisters in faith, able to stand up to whatever the world throws our way.

“For I handed on to you as of first importance,” says Paul, “what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.” Cephas is another name for Peter.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.

<sup>2</sup> Christina Georgacopoulos, “Why We Fall for Conspiracies,” LSU, February 2020, <https://faculty.lsu.edu>, reporting on a University of Chicago study.

Paul knows that Christ's death and resurrection is of primary importance for anyone seeking the way, the truth and the life. And yet, what relationship do we have with the death and resurrection of Jesus? We all say we believe, but I suspect that if we sat around talking about it as a group, it would mean different things to different people.

I mean, do you truly believe in the resurrection of the saints, life after death? Do you have certainty about what that will be like for you? Does your belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus effect how you act, what you choose to believe what you cling to as true these days? If so, in what way? These are all tough questions without clear and easy answers.

Some believe the resurrection for us is a bodily resurrection. Others believe it's more spiritual. Does it matter which side you come down on?

Consider the following story of one husband who came to believe in a bodily resurrection. His wife had died and at the end of her funeral as the pallbearers carried out the casket, it accidentally bump into a wall.

A faint moan was heard from within. Quickly, they opened the casket and found the woman was actually alive!

She lived 10 more years, before her death. Once again, a ceremony was held at the same place, and at the end of the funeral as the pallbearers were carrying out the casket, the husband was heard to cry out, "Watch the wall!"

Are we raised bodily or spiritually, and what does it really matter? It matters a lot. The foundation of our faith is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the promise of a resurrection to eternal life for those who truly trust in the Lord.

"You are being saved," says Paul, "If you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you – unless you have come to believe in vain." You are being saved – if you hold firmly to the message, the message about Christ's resurrection as witnessed by Peter and the other apostles as well as "more than 500 brothers and sisters..." says Paul, "most of whom are still alive...."

Paul is saying that we have to trust – not only in Jesus – but we have to trust in one another. We have to trust those to whom Jesus has revealed himself. That is the foundation of the way, the truth and the life.

"Our society relies a lot on trust," says Dan Ariely, in his book "Misbelief: What Makes Rational People Believe Irrational Things." "It's like fish in water," says Ariely. "Fish don't notice the water ... because it's all around them. Trust is the same. Trust is all around us. Because of that, we don't often notice how big and important its effect is on our behavior. ... But the reality is that people who go down the Funnel of Misbelief," as he calls it, "lose trust, and they pay a price – and we, as a society, pay a price."

So, do you believe and trust the apostles and all the followers back then who assure us they really did see the Risen Lord? Because the foundation of our faith depends on it. It's not just some hope we cling to. No, if our faith is going to stand up to this world, we have to embrace one another as reliable witnesses, witnesses to the power and presence of the Lord.

What we proclaim about our faith – about the Lord – is important. Otherwise, Jesus wouldn't have bothered appearing to Peter and the others. His life, death and a heavenly resurrection would have been enough. But it wasn't. Jesus rose bodily and then proved it to his disciples so that we, today, can prove it to others in how Jesus shows up in our lives.

You see, we as a church truly are the body of Christ, the hands and feet and heart of Jesus. And all of us – no matter our age, size, education, or social standing – each and every one of us is important to the power and presence of the Lord.

Look at Paul. Paul calls himself “last of all, ... someone untimely born, ... the least of the apostles, unfit ... because (he) persecuted the church....” And yet, Jesus used this Pharisee-turned-apostle to build his church.

So, what does Jesus want to do in and through you to build up the church, to share the faith, to bring others into relationship with Christ? These are questions we should be asking each and every day.

Jesus needs us to be bringing people into the way, the truth and the life that is the body of Christ, the family of faith. Otherwise, they – and we – are in danger of succumbing to false beliefs and practices, rather than standing strong in God's plan and purpose. Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Gentle and ever compassionate God, help us to stay on the right path when so many people are trying to lead us astray. When others cry "wolf," help us to look to see if there really is danger before we start screaming, too.

Where there is genuine danger, help us to build defenses. Where there is none, help us to tear down the walls of separation and to build, instead, foundations of honor, trust, understanding and charity.

There is no need to remind you or ourselves of the dangers we face. We do need to be reminded about the direction we are trying to go, toward peace and cooperation within our country, peace and cooperation among the nations of the world.

You told us that the way is rough. Forgive us for being so surprised when we find that you are right.

Everything is changing around us. We easily get nervous and upset. When we are rattled, we do not always act with good judgment, so help us to remember a few facts that remain always unchanging.

You have made this world; you will win the final victory; you have put us here to do your work, and the heart of your work is charity, mostly toward people we don't like.

Keep these thoughts in our minds and we won't be so easily rattled. We pray all this focused on and relying upon the steadying hand of the Lord, who taught us to pray together, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**