

1 CORINTHIANS 2:2 AND 6:14

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Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians. Now lately I've been asking you to turn to chapter 7. But today we're going to take a break from our journey through this long chapter. On Friday we celebrated the crucifixion of Jesus, and today we're celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. And it's hard to think of anything that's ever happened that matters more than these two events. Now we could certainly say that the creation of the universe was very important. God made everything in just six 24-hour days. And on the sixth day he made human beings in his own image. But then a short time later another important event took place. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and plunged the human race into sin.

So for thousands of years people lived in perpetual rebellion against God. Occasionally there were godly people who loved God and walked in his ways. They include people like Noah, Job, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Deborah, Samuel, David, Elijah, Elisha, Hezekiah, and Daniel. But most of the people we read about in the Old Testament did not obey God consistently. They did not trust in God but in themselves or others. Many people even worshiped false gods like Baal. But thankfully God did not give up on the human race. He had a plan to save people from every nation on earth. We all deserve to be punished in hell for all eternity because of our sin. But God sent his only Son to die in our place, and then he rose again three days later.

So I thought it would be appropriate for us to pause and think about those two crucial events today. And we don't even need to leave our favorite letter to do that. We can stay right here in 1 Corinthians. There's a lot of teaching in this letter on both the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus. Now some of that teaching does come later in the letter. But we've already seen several references to the crucifixion and one reference to the resurrection in the first six chapters. And so today I want to focus on two of these verses in the first half of the letter. The first one is focused on the crucifixion, and the second one is focused on the resurrection.

So let's start with the crucifixion of Jesus. Turn to chapter 2 and verse 2 in this letter. Look at what Paul wrote in this short but powerful verse: "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." In this verse Paul was talking about what he did when he arrived in the city of Corinth. His focus was on the crucifixion of Jesus. And Paul emphasized his focus on this event in five ways here. First of all, he used the phrase "I decided." Now normally the Greek verb here just means "to judge." For example, it's used twice in John 7:24. Listen to what Jesus said in this verse: "Stop judging according to outward appearances; rather judge according to righteous judgment." So it's not always wrong to judge. We just need to make sure that our judgments are based on God's righteous standards.

But this Greek verb for judging can have other nuances as well. It can also have the idea of reaching a decision or coming to a conclusion. And we can see how this nuance is related to the concept of judging. When someone is judged, a decision is reached about whether that person is guilty of committing a crime. So we could say that judging someone is just a specific type of decision. Deciding is the more general nuance, while judging is the more specific nuance. And we can actually see both of these meanings in the same place. Listen to what Paul wrote in Romans 14:13: “Therefore, let us no longer judge one another. Instead decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in the way of your brother or sister.” So first Paul said that we shouldn’t judge each other as Christians. And he was talking about matters of conscience where we have freedom. But then Paul used the same Greek verb to tell us what we should do instead. We should decide not to cause our fellow believers to violate their conscience.

Now when we look at 1 Corinthians 2:2, it’s pretty clear that Paul was using the more general nuance here. He was saying that he made a decision to focus on the crucifixion of Jesus when he was in Corinth. This wasn’t something that just happened by accident. He was very deliberate about it. In fact, some Bible translations use an even stronger word here than the verb “decided.” The Legacy Standard Bible and the New American Standard Bible have the word “determined,” and the New International Version has the word “resolved.” Both of these translations help us to see the fact that Paul made a deliberate decision to focus on the crucifixion of Jesus in Corinth.

You know, we make decisions all the time. Most of them are not very significant. We decide what clothes to wear in the morning. We decide what to eat for our meals. We decide when we’re going to schedule an appointment. We decide what to buy when we go shopping. But once in a while we make decisions that are more important. We decide if we’re going to attend college. We decide what job to take. We decide where we’re going to live. We decide whom we’re going to marry. These decisions are important because they have a long-term impact on our lives. And Paul made a decision like that about what he would do in Corinth. He spent 18 months there, and his focus was on the crucifixion of Jesus. That topic permeated his ministry during that time. It had a huge impact on his life and the lives of those he ministered to.

But we can see a second way that Paul emphasized the crucifixion of Jesus in this verse. After he said the words “I decided,” he added the phrase “to know.” Now Paul could have easily used a word like “preach” or “teach” here. But instead he chose to use the word “know.” Now this doesn’t mean that Paul didn’t preach or teach about the crucified Christ. But he was going beneath his words here to focus on his thoughts. When he arrived in Corinth, his mind was fixed on the crucifixion of Jesus. And that topic was the foundation for all his preaching and teaching. That’s how important it was! So Paul was giving us an illustration of the fact that what we say and do normally flows from our thoughts. We can’t just expect our behavior to change and improve automatically. We need to start by changing our thoughts. That’s why Paul said in Romans 12:2 that we need to be transformed by the renewing of our mind.

But how do we renew our mind? The best way to do that is by filling it with Scripture. We need to be reading and studying God’s Word regularly. We need to be memorizing it and meditating on it. In Joshua 1:8 God told Joshua to meditate on God’s law day and night so that he could obey everything written in it. In Psalm 119:15 the psalmist said, “I will meditate on your precepts and think about your ways.” So we

need to be growing in our knowledge of God through his Word. As Psalm 119:11 says, we need to treasure God's Word in our heart so that we don't sin against him. Only then can we be transformed by the renewing of our mind. And when we fix our mind on things that really matter like the crucifixion of Jesus, it will have a profound impact on how we live.

Now let's look at the third way that Paul emphasized the crucifixion of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 2:2. He started by saying the words "I decided." Then he added the phrase "to know." And the next thing that he said was the word "nothing." He decided to know nothing among the Corinthians except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Now Paul didn't mean that he never thought or talked about anything except the crucifixion of Jesus while he was in Corinth. And we can prove this conclusion from Acts 18, where we learn about Paul's visit to Corinth. Verse 11 says that he taught the word of God to the Corinthians during his year and a half there. So it seems obvious that Paul didn't just teach about the crucifixion of Jesus. He taught about anything in God's Word.

So what was Paul trying to say in 1 Corinthians 2:2? I believe that he was just using hyperbole here. In other words, he was exaggerating to make a point. Jesus did the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount when he said that if our eye causes us to sin, we should gouge it out, and if our hand causes us to sin, we should cut it off. But removing various body parts won't actually solve our sin problem! The root goes much deeper within us. So Jesus was just using hyperbole or exaggeration. His point was that we need to treat sin very seriously and take extreme measures to overcome it. And here in verse 2 the point of Paul's hyperbole was that his main focus in Corinth was on the crucifixion of Jesus. There was nothing that mattered as much as telling people that Jesus was crucified. Paul certainly talked about many other things while he was in Corinth, but the crucifixion was front and center.

Now let's look at the fourth way that Paul emphasized the crucifixion of Jesus in this verse. He said that he decided to know nothing among the Corinthians except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Notice how Paul referred to Jesus here. He didn't just use the name "Jesus" all by itself. He added the word "Christ" as well. Let's talk about each of these words. The name "Jesus" is used almost 1,000 times in the New Testament, and we learn more about this name in the very first chapter of the New Testament. In Matthew 1 an angel told Joseph through a dream that he was to take Mary as his wife, even though she was pregnant. And in verse 21 the angel said that when she gave birth to her son, Joseph was "to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

So this name has a special connection to the theme of salvation. The English word "Jesus" is actually the Latin form of the Greek name "Iesous." And this name is the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Yehoshua," which we pronounce "Joshua." This Hebrew name simply means "Yahweh saves." Yahweh is God's name; it's used over 6,000 times in the Old Testament. In most Bibles it's translated with the word LORD in all caps. But a better way to represent this name is with the word "Yahweh," because that's probably how the name was pronounced. So the name "Jesus" refers to the fact that God saves. When Jesus came to earth about 2,000 years ago, he died to save us from our sins. He took our place and suffered the punishment that we deserved. In 1 Timothy 1:15 Paul said that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." That's the heart of the gospel right there!

So Paul used the name “Jesus” in 1 Corinthians 2:2, but he also used the word “Christ.” Now we tend to think of the word “Christ” as the last name of Jesus, but in reality it’s just a title. It’s actually a transliteration or a letter-for-letter equivalent of the Greek word “christos,” which is used over 500 times in the New Testament. It’s parallel to the word “Messiah,” which is a transliteration of the Hebrew word “mashiach.” Both of these words have the same meaning: “anointed one.” Now in the Old Testament there were three types of people who were anointed. The first group of people and the one that most Christians are familiar with are kings. For example, in the book of 1 Samuel we can see that Saul and David were both anointed by the prophet Samuel to be kings of Israel.

But kings weren’t the only group of people who were anointed in the Old Testament. We can see that priests were also anointed. For example, Leviticus 8:12 states that Moses anointed his brother Aaron as the first high priest of Israel. And God said in Leviticus 6:22 that when Aaron died, one of his sons would “be anointed to take his place.” But there’s one final group of people who were anointed, and they were prophets. For example, in 1 Kings 19:16 God told Elijah to anoint Elisha as prophet in his place. But Deuteronomy 18:15 teaches that one day God would raise up a special prophet. And Jeremiah 23:5 shows that a special descendant of David would rule as king and deliver his people. Psalm 110:4 shows that this future king would be “a priest forever according to the pattern of Melchizedek.”

And so there would be a special Messiah or anointed one who would fulfill all three of these roles. That’s what we should be thinking about when we see Jesus called “Christ” in the New Testament. He’s the supreme prophet because he always speaks God’s words. In John 12:50 he said, “I speak just as the Father has told me.” But Jesus is also the supreme priest because he offered himself as the perfect sacrifice once for all. Hebrews 10:10 says that “we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time.” And one day he will return and reign as the supreme king on the earth. Revelation 19:16 calls him the “King of kings and Lord of lords.” He’s worthy to save us because he’s our Messiah and the ultimate prophet, priest, and king.

Now let’s look at the fifth and final way that Paul emphasized the crucifixion of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 2:2. He said that he decided to know nothing among the Corinthians except Jesus Christ and him crucified. That pronoun “him” may not seem like a big deal, but Paul didn’t actually put a personal pronoun here in the original Greek. Instead he used what grammarians call a demonstrative pronoun. Normally it’s translated with the word “this,” but most English translations give us a personal pronoun when it refers to a person. However, I’m not very comfortable with that approach. The demonstrative pronoun is stronger than a personal pronoun, and so it conveys a certain amount of emphasis. It’s like taking your index finger, pointing at someone, and saying, “This person is the one I’m talking about.” That’s what Paul was doing here in verse 2. He was stressing that he was focused on Jesus Christ and this one crucified, not anyone else.

So we’ve seen how Paul emphasized the crucifixion of Jesus in this verse. But we haven’t actually talked about what it means to be crucified. The Greek verb here for crucified just means “to nail someone to a cross.” Now most Christians know the story of Jesus’ crucifixion pretty well. After all, it’s told in all four gospels in great detail. But many Christians do not understand the historical background behind this

event. The earliest recorded crucifixion in history took place during the sixth century B.C. when the king of Persia crucified 3,000 of his political enemies in Babylon. The Greeks later used crucifixion as well, and one of their leaders crucified Jews who refused to accept the Greek culture. But it was the Romans who perfected the practice of crucifixion as a means of putting people to death.

So crucifixion involved being nailed to a large wooden crossbeam, and then that cross was placed upright. You would basically hang there until you died. Under Roman practice the process started with being beaten. Then you would have to carry the cross to the site of your crucifixion. That doesn't sound so bad, but the cross was very heavy and difficult to carry, especially when you're in pain after your beating. But this practice also brought shame because you were carrying the instrument of your death. It was like digging your own grave. The shame was intensified further at the site of your crucifixion, where you were stripped naked and hung on the cross publicly for everyone to see. The point was to deter others from disobeying the Roman government.

Now when you were nailed to the cross, you would be attached by three nails. There was one for each of your hands and one for both of your feet together. The nails for the hands were actually put through the wrists to fasten you to the cross more securely. And this placement would cause excruciating pain, because the nails would press on your nerves that run through your arms to your hands. Then once you were put upright, all your weight would be supported by the nails. As a result you would experience pain shooting through your whole body. Because your arms were stretched out, breathing eventually became impossible unless you pushed up with your feet, which would cause incredible pain in your feet.

So crucifixion was basically a slow means of torturing someone to death. You could survive on a cross for up to four days. Death would eventually come when you could no longer push up on your feet to take a breath. Sometimes the time of death was accelerated by someone breaking your legs, which would prevent you from pushing up to breathe. But Jesus died on the cross before that could happen, because he wasn't just suffering physically but spiritually as well. Matthew 27:46 says that he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" The Father turned away from the Son because he took our sins on himself. We deserved to be on that cross, but Jesus died as our substitute. This is why Paul said in Galatians 6:14 he would "never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." The cross is the heart of the Christian faith. This cruel instrument of torture has ironically become the means of our salvation from the punishment of our sins.

But of course Jesus didn't stay dead. Three days later he rose from the dead! And Paul emphasized that fact in 1 Corinthians 6:14. Look at what he wrote in this verse: "God raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his power." Now the Greek word for raised is used 143 times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote 41 of them. But 20 of those occurrences are in this letter, and 19 of them are in chapter 15. So Paul talked a great deal about the topic of resurrection in chapter 15. Now this Greek word for raised sometimes just refers to standing up. It can refer to someone who was asleep or sick. For example, Matthew 8:14 mentions that Jesus saw Peter's "mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever." Then verse 15 says that "he touched her hand, and the fever left her. Then she got up and began to serve him." That phrase "got up" comes from our Greek word for raised.

But usually this Greek word refers to being raised from the dead. That's what it means in all 20 occurrences of the word in this letter. Let me show you the next place where Paul used this word. In chapter 15 and verse 1 he referred to the gospel, and then he proceeded to review it. Look at what he wrote in verses 3–5: “For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.” So there are four parts to the good news about Jesus here: he died, he was buried, he was raised, and he appeared. After he died, he was buried in the ground, and on the third day God raised him from the dead. Then he appeared to many people in order to prove that he was alive. The 12 disciples were just the tip of the iceberg. If we keep reading, we'll see that he appeared to another 500 people or so.

So the resurrection of Jesus was an established fact for the early church. It was recorded in all four Gospels, and it's mentioned in many of the letters too, especially Paul's letters. Romans 10:9 says, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” In Galatians 1:1 Paul said that he was “an apostle—not from men or by men, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead.” Ephesians 1:20 says that God “exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead.” In 1 Thessalonians 1:10 Paul said that we wait for God's “Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead.” In 2 Timothy 2:8 Paul said, “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead.”

Now some people have thought that the resurrection of Jesus doesn't really matter. After all, his death is what paid for our sins, not his resurrection. So couldn't he have stayed dead? The answer is no. Only the death of a perfect sacrifice could take away our sins, and only God is perfect. But a god who dies and can't come back to life cannot be the true God. The resurrection of Jesus proved that he is God and that he has power over death. So the resurrection was essential for our salvation, and that fact is certainly confirmed in Scripture. In Romans 4:24–25 Paul said that faith is “credited to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” So the death and resurrection of Jesus are a package deal. We cannot be justified or declared righteous unless they both happened.

Now Paul didn't actually mention Jesus by name in 1 Corinthians 6:14. Instead he used the word “Lord.” Now many people think that this word is a name, but it's actually just a title like the word “Christ.” The Greek word here is pronounced “kurios,” and it's used over 700 times in the New Testament. It can also be translated with the word “master.” It normally stresses the idea of authority, and so it shows here that Jesus is in charge and that we must submit to him. Now some Christians think that we don't need to trust in Jesus as our Lord to be saved. We just need to trust in him as our Savior, and then maybe down the road we can submit to him as our Lord. But that's not what Scripture teaches. Acts 16:31 tells us that we must believe in the Lord Jesus to be saved. Romans 10:13 says that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” So we can't receive Jesus as our Savior without also recognizing him as our Lord. We can't be saved without submitting to his lordship over our lives.

So the Lord Jesus provided salvation for us through both his death and his resurrection. But in 1 Corin-

thians 6:14 Paul didn't just focus on the resurrection of Jesus. He also talked about our resurrection, and he connected them together. He said that "God raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his power." So the resurrection of Jesus ensures that we will be raised from the dead as well. And Paul circled back to this point in chapter 15 and gave some clarification. Look at what he wrote in verse 20: "But as it is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."

Now what did Paul mean by the word "firstfruits" in that verse? This word points back to the Old Testament and the fact that the Israelites were to offer the first part of their harvest to the Lord. It pointed forward to the rest of the harvest that God would give them. And in the New Testament we see the same thing with the resurrection of Jesus. It points forward to our future resurrection and serves as a guarantee that our bodies will come alive. That's why Paul could say that Christians only fall asleep when they die. He was stressing that our physical death is only temporary. There is no doubt that we're going to be raised from the dead! That's a promise we can take to the bank.

Now when we make a promise to someone else, we can't guarantee that we will be able to keep that promise. That's because we're weak and limited in strength. We can't do anything that we want to do. But God always keeps his promises because he's all-powerful. He can do anything as long as it's consistent with his character. And Paul stressed this point as he ended his statement in 1 Corinthians 6:14. He said that God "will also raise us by his power." I love what Jeremiah said about God's power in Jeremiah 32. In verse 17 he said, "Oh, Lord God! You yourself made the heavens and earth by your great power and with your outstretched arm. Nothing is too difficult for you!" If God could create the entire universe out of nothing, then there's nothing too hard for him to do.

So God can keep his promise to raise us from the dead because he's all-powerful. He raised our Lord Jesus from the dead, and he can certainly raise us from the dead as well. And so we don't need to be afraid of death or grieve excessively when our fellow Christians die. After all, death is the pathway to a glorious future where there will be no more pain or sorrow. Instead we're going to live in the presence of Jesus for all eternity! So I want to encourage you today to live in light of our future resurrection. Let's look forward to the return of Christ and serve him faithfully while we wait. I love how Paul ended his long chapter on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. In verse 58 he wrote, "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." Let's close in prayer and ask for God's help to remain faithful to him.