

1 Corinthians 15:1 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. 11 Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

THE ABC'S OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Dear Friends in Who Share A Living Hope in our Savior,

One of the coziest feelings in the world is sitting in a chair with a youngster and a book. My favorite book for those situations is right here. “Big A, little a, what begins with A? Aunt Annie’s alligator, A...a...A.” You can tell it is a fun book. I think most of our family can quote most of the book. When you read that book to a youngster, you also feel like you are doing something good, because it is an alphabet book. You are getting kids started right, and having fun—the best of both worlds. I can’t wait to read it to some young ones again!

There was a day when someone began to teach you the alphabet, the ABC’s, of the Christian faith. For some of us, it has been so long ago that we forget there was a day we didn’t know them. For 20, 40, 60 years we have known the truth and almost forgotten that once we did not know. If you can’t remember not knowing Jesus, it is its own blessing, and yet there are drawbacks. Drawbacks because we forget our natural state. And maybe we forget how big a gift we have in knowing God and his plan for us. It’s also a drawback because we might assume everyone is just supposed to know these basics.

It seems like the Corinthians had forgotten their ABC’s. —By the way, who are Corinthians? We call them the Corinthians because they were from a city in Greece called Corinth. Like people might be called New Yorkers or Atlantans. (I’m not going to try to guess what people from Rineyville might be called.) Anyway, it seems like the Christians in Corinth had forgotten their Christian ABC’s. And that is not a small thing! Not knowing your ABC’s and 123’s will limit your opportunities in this world. In a much bigger way forgetting your Christian ABC’s can cause you great loss, perhaps even the ultimate loss.

I. The Resurrection Is a Fundamental Truth

Listen to what Paul tells the forgetful Corinthians. As I read, I want you to take note of the Christian ABC’s: “*What I received I passed on to you as of first importance: 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*” (3-4). Did you hear that? Let me repeat it.

The “A” of the Christian faith is that on Good Friday Christ died because of our sins. He paid the debt of our sins. His death was tragic, but he accomplished the heroic. But that was Good Friday’s message, and so I quickly move on.

The “B” of the Christian faith, as Paul states it, is that Christ was buried. That is a minor point, but it substantiates points A and C. Jesus really did die. Witnesses corroborated this fact.

The “C” of the Christian faith, is ***“that [Jesus Christ] was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”*** That is what we celebrate today: Jesus rose from the dead on the first Easter Sunday. Easter is not a day for the advanced teachings of the Christian faith. It is a day to rejoice in the basics. The things that mean the most: Jesus rose from the dead, and we shall too.

II. The Resurrection Is a Truth the World Rejects

The unbelieving world looks at claims like these, and it scoffs. It scoffed in Jesus’ day and Paul’s day. Skepticism is not something new to the 20th or 21st centuries. This reading is from about 20 years after Jesus rose from the dead. Back then many doubted. And it made some of the Corinthian Christians doubt. Some of them seemed to have done what some Christians do now. They decided to leave all the miracle stuff to the side. They thought, “These are kind of embarrassing teachings. Let’s just concentrate on how Jesus taught us to be nice people, can’t we? Isn’t that the important thing?”

I hear it these days. Good Friday news coverage interviewed a man at a service. He said, “We have so much violence and negativity these days. We need to get back to the teachings of Jesus.” I don’t want to be overly critical of that man. We all know how news coverage is. They report what they want to report. You can talk for 5 minutes, but they are going to play the 7.5 seconds that *they* want to air. They don’t let you choose. And so when the news reported a man saying, “We need to get back to the teachings of Jesus” as the meaning of Holy Week, that may well have *not* been his main point. But it *is* how news editors think our Christian holidays should be summed up. The church is supposed to be a club of do-gooders on the side who kind of reign in the negativity. We are supposed to be the clean-up brigade, not binding people’s consciences with inconvenient truths from God.

Paul comes down hard on that sort of thinking. He says, “THIS is what is really important: Christ died for our sins. He rose from the dead. Easter is not about making the world a better place – though we hope we can do so. Easter is about Jesus and what he did. It’s about how *Jesus* rose from the dead. It’s about how he will one day raise our bodies from the earth with new life.

The world instinctively shies away from the supernatural, from the eternal. The unbelieving world always tries to box up Christianity in a place where it cannot pronounce God’s judgment on a sinful world. They don’t want to hear the fact that this world never will be a nice place. We Christians know that. And we know that the only true solution to this world’s problems is in the Savior from sin who rose from the dead one Sunday morning in 28 or 29AD.

In the face of this world which is always trying to kick Christianity off the island, Paul did something we cannot do. He appealed to the witnesses. In writing to the Corinthians who had their doubts, he wrote, “If you Christians are not willing to accept my word about a risen Jesus, look at all the witnesses. The Scriptures declared it in the Old Testament in passages like, ‘*You will not let your Holy One see decay*’ (Psalm 16:10). Jesus Christ himself, even though his disciples did not believe him, had not less than three times said that he would rise from the dead. Then there are all the eye witnesses of a risen Christ: the Twelve, Peter, James, other apostles, a group of 500.” Paul added, “Most of them are still alive, ask them! They will tell you the truth.”

Paul is telling them that if they really doubt the message about Jesus, they have the means to fact check him. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is of ***“first importance.”*** He says that without faith in the bodily resurrection of Christ, ***“you have believed in vain,”*** your faith is useless.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the bedrock of Christian faith. Without it there is no Christian faith.

III. The Resurrection Gives A New Outlook on Life

Jesus' resurrection is what makes the Christian faith different from every other faith of the world. Unlike everyone else, we have some place we are going beyond this world, and we have a pass.

Many people of the world think they are going nowhere. They think that the end of this life is the end of everything. For them, death is terror. It is the unavoidable end of all things. Or if death is not a terror and they embrace it, then life is meaningless. What is worse, at their moment of death, they will find out the truth about God's judgment.

Many more people believe they are going somewhere after death, but they do not have a pass. They have to pay their ticket, and they can never be certain if they have fully paid. The Muslim can never say he is sure that he is acceptable to his god. He believes that his good and bad will be weighed and hopefully the good will outweigh the bad. The Hindu believes that he keeps coming back to earth after death, hopefully slowly climbing the ladder of reincarnation if he does good, but slipping a few rungs if he does bad. The African looks forward to a shadowy abode of the spirits who must be fed by their survivors left on this earth. Even many Christians have a vague feeling that they cannot be sure about heaven. Maybe they have to make up for something. Maybe they will have to suffer first. Maybe God will hold something against them for eternity. Not only are these opinions unpleasant, they are untrue.

Go back to the ABC's. ***“What I received I passed on to you as of first importance: 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.”*** Easter is about the ABC's. It is truly a message of hope. In Jesus' resurrection all the uncertainty of the end of life disappears. Through faith in him, we too will enjoy that resurrection to life.

In the last century, there were two different times when there was this wave of optimism that seemed to engulf at least the Western World, if not the entire world.

One time was back in the first decade of the 1900's. There were so many inventions, advances in science and health that most people were sure that humanity's problems were near an end. Two world wars, the Great Depression and the nuclear threat obliterated that optimism.

It happened again in the living memory of many of us. With the end of the Cold War and a long economic expansion, the 1990's were a time of great optimism. Some claimed history was at an end! But the events of 2001 dashed that optimism.

Yet we humans are sure that if we just try hard enough, we will find the magic formula to end all the evils of this world. The Christian knows better. We understand that we live in a fallen world, irrevocably broken. Oh, some decades may be more peaceful and prosperous than others, but the effects of sin will last to the end of time. All human efforts will fall short of the promises.

But while the Christian is not unrealistically optimistic, he has rock-solid hope. Jesus' resurrection assures us that God has prepared a new and better life for us. As Jesus rose, we too shall rise. He promised, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.”*

Those are the ABC's of our Christian faith. May they be there in your heart, yes, even more firmly than those childhood nursery rhymes. Words that give you hope in every moment and event of your life. Amen.