

Paul begins and ends this morning's text with an interesting contrast: 1 Corinthians 15:1, "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which ***you stand.***" And then 1 Cor. 15:20: "Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have ***fallen asleep.***" Did you catch those two important phrases? "You stand" and "have fallen asleep." Both describe Christians like you and me ***standing*** and ***falling*** but Paul's message to us today is that what ***enables*** us to stand will be crucial in *whether* and *how* we fall.

Paul had already warned the Corinthians in chapter ten, verse twelve, "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall". And here again in chapter 15, Paul is concerned that they might fall. "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand." (v 1). So why does Paul need to "remind" them? Because, just like small children working on their hand-washing skills, these Corinthian Christian keep forgetting. They're neglecting the Gospel Paul preached to them. They've been lured away from the basics.

They're not arguing against or denying the Gospel. No, they're just setting it off to the side to be accessed on a rainy day. But that's dangerous! That's how forgetting happens. People fall when they fall asleep—either literally fall asleep or just fall asleep at the controls.

Let's not have any dozing off and driving into the ditch. Let's have no oblivious talking on the cell phone while strolling across a busy street. Let's not slip on black ice while looking at a second-story Christmas decoration. Falling is not good.

3. How do we avoid falling? By being ***awake***. And Paul tells us how Christians are woken from sleep. It's by attending to the ***basics*** of the Gospel: "For I delivered to you as of ***first importance***"—first importance, the basics—"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." Here fallen asleep is used in the sense that they have died and are waiting to be wakened by Jesus at the Resurrection. "Then," Paul continues, "(Jesus) appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me" (vv 3–8). So those are the basics: (1) that Christ died for our sins, (2) that he was buried, (3) that he rose from the dead, and (4)

perhaps best of all, that he appeared.

Jesus really did die with a body just like yours, and He did it for your sins. Those who buried Him really did put His body into a hole in hard stone. That very same body **did** rise. This is all well and good but could easily be chalked up to an imaginative myth except for these two facts: (1) this all happened according to the Scriptures, and (2) he appeared to a lot of people on several occasions. There were witnesses. This would hold up in a court of law. You can stand on it.

You probably heard the Creed in your mind's ear in the first few verses of our reading. We say the Creed often- every Sunday in Worship. We say the creed so often in order to remind ourselves of the **basics** and, in so doing, stand. The basics are what you and I need to stand.

If today's Epistle lesson sounded familiar to you, it's likely because this is almost always read in every Easter morning service. So, why do we have this reading today? It's obviously not Easter! It's a cold morning in February! We have this reading today, because maybe, just maybe, we might mumble through the Creed now and then. We just **might** nod nearly napping when we hear again—and again—of Christ dying and rising for us. Or we may even fall asleep. Do you think you stand?

Where can this go? Listen to Paul reprove the Corinthians: "Some of you [in Corinth] say that there is no resurrection of the dead" (v 12). Have you left your senses?! There is a high cost. You really need to think twice about this. You see, if there is no resurrection from the dead, then Christ did not rise, and if He didn't rise you have trusted our preaching, which would be false because we have been preaching that Christ **did** rise from the dead! Do you see the dilemma? Even worse, your faith would be misplaced, and you would still be in your sins. And what about your loved ones who have "fallen asleep" in Christ? "Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished," Paul says (v 18). What hope would there be for them?

The capstone, the finishing touch, of Paul's argument is that our entire Christian faith is futile, and all this church business is just silly, **if** Christ did not rise. He says it this way: "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied" (v 19). What's left if Christ didn't rise? Not much, other than some nice sentiments and some good-deed-doing. And that's about it! But remember, we have one driving concern here, and that is that we and our loved ones who have fallen asleep in Christ **will be raised from the dead too**.

Oh, and by the way, even as Paul was scolding the Corinthians—which he

had to do a lot—he could not hold back the hope. Did you catch the contradiction when he said, “Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (v 18)? You see, if you’re asleep, you’ll wake up. Jesus’ disciples made that point once, when their friend Lazarus had died (Jn 11:12). Well, that’s the point Paul is making here in our text: “In fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” That’s verse 20, which is where he’s been taking us from the beginning.

Do you see? The basics—Christ’s very real death and burial for our sins, His very real resurrection, His letting us know how real they are by appearing to so many people—those basics are what we need to **stand**. And if we stand, we will someday **fall asleep in Christ**. And when you fall asleep in Christ, you will **wake up** in Christ and you stand in Christ forever, never to fall.

Jesus gives us those basics in abundance. He gives them to us for our comfort. He gives them to keep us strong, rock-solid strong in this saving faith until life everlasting! Yes, it is good always to hold on to the basics of our faith! Amen.