

HOW TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

INTRODUCTION

What Is The Gospel And How Is It Applied?

Is the gospel only for the unsaved? No, the gospel is for the saved and the unsaved. Many people think the gospel is for non-Christians alone and has little or no relevance to the Christian once he is converted. The term gospel has a broad definition and, while it primarily refers to the reaching of the lost with the message of Christ, it also refers at times to those who are already saved.

“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. By this gospel you are saved (are being saved), if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain (1 Cor. 15:1-2).

The Apostle Paul emphatically declares that it is by the gospel that the Christian *is being saved* (present tense in the Greek). The gospel has saved and is still saving the Christian, and will do so until physical death or the second coming of Christ.

The Apostle Paul states it was his intention to preach the gospel to the Christians in Rome.

“I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome” (Rom. 1:14-15).

Apparently the gospel has direct relevance to the saved as well as the unsaved. The gospel preached to the unsaved teaches the sinner to go to the cross for salvation. The gospel preached to the saved teaches the saint to go back to the cross again and again to appropriate the salvation he already has in Christ.

THE GOSPEL IS GOOD NEWS

So what is the gospel? It is the good news. It is the good news that Christ died for sinners, that He redeemed them from the slave market of sin and set them free, that He reconciled them and changed them from an enemy to a friend of God, that He turned His holy wrath from them by satisfying His own righteous demands of the law against them, that He justified them by imputing the righteousness of Christ to them and declaring them righteous. *The gospel is all about the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and His resurrection from the dead.*

When we say “gospel,” we mean all that Christ did in His death and resurrection. The Christ who saved us from the penalty and the guilt of sin when we initially believed in Him is the same Christ who is saving us now from the power and the corruption of sin. There is a sense in which we as saints are still being set free, still being made a friend of God, still being delivered from God’s wrath, and still in need of Christ’s righteousness everyday. If we needed Christ to save us initially, how much more do we need Him now to keep on saving us?

“Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life” (Rom. 5:9-10)!

Surely this is not looking only at future salvation when we will be delivered from the presence of sin forever, but it includes present salvation in the moment by moment now. We have been delivered from wrath and are every second of every day being delivered from wrath. We have been reconciled, being changed from an enemy to a friend, and we are being reconciled to be made more and more a friend of God in our daily experience. We have been bought out of the slave market of sin and set free, and we are being set free daily by the blood of Christ. *The same gospel that saved sinners also sanctifies the saints.*

THE GOSPEL NOW

We are told in the Bible that we are to walk as Christians the same way we came to Christ for salvation. How did we initially come to Christ? We came *by grace through faith*. **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and that not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not of work, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).** How do we continue to walk the Christian life? We walk *by grace through faith in Jesus Christ*. **“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live (walk) in him. . .” (Col. 2:6).**

We came to Christ not just through faith but we came also by grace. It is important to note that the *cause* of salvation is Christ. The *means* to receiving this salvation is faith. The *result* or *end* of this process is salvation. In this formula, grace precedes faith. God’s grace causes our present salvation and faith appropriates this salvation. Without leaning on the pure grace of God through faith, we cannot live the Christian life. It is grace that gives us the power and motivation to live by faith. Faith responds to God’s grace, giving one the power and motivation to be obedient and produce a godly life of good works.

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good” (Titus 2:11-14).

THE GOSPEL EFFECTS

As Christians, we are to go constantly to Christ for forgiveness and cleansing. *Rightly stated, it is not the gospel that forgives and cleanses us but Jesus Christ based on His cross work.* The Christian constantly goes to Christ by faith to be filled with the Spirit and to be a partaker of spiritual power. If we truly trusted in Christ the first time, we are saved. **“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved . . .” (Acts 16:31).** Yet, salvation is for those who keep on believing in Christ. This is clearly seen in the use of the present tense in the Greek in some places where the word “believe” is used.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes (keeps on believing) in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16).

“Whoever believes (keeps on believing) in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him” (Jn. 3:36)

“I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (keeps on believing): first to the Jew, then for the Gentile” (Rom. 1:16).

“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes (keeps on believing) in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Holy Spirit . . .” (Jn. 7:37-38).

The sinner confesses his faith in Christ once for salvation. **“That 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” (Rom. 10:9).** Yet, the saint comes thousands of times in confession to Christ for cleansing. **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn. 1:9).**

Repentance is an act the sinner does once for salvation. **“But now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed” (Acts 17:30-31).** Yet, repentance is something a Christian does over and over again.

“Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy, not a because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.” (2 Cor. 7:8-10).

The gospel not only demands a once and for all believing, repenting and confessing of sin for initial salvation, but a repeated believing, repeated repentance and a repeated confession of sin based on the death and resurrection of Christ.

THE GOSPEL MISSTATED

The working out of the gospel practically is important to understanding the Christian life. The issue is what is the work of God in relation to the work of man in the present salvation process? There are five wrong ways at looking at the salvation process.

We work and then God works. This view says that man is given a freewill and God will not work until man first works by exercising faith. This would be a works system and lead to legalism in Christianity. The result of this thinking is a type of moralism in the Christian life – just try harder and everything will be O.K. between you and God. The “try harder” mentality leads to frustration and discouragement because no matter how much one tries, he cannot live the Christian life in his own strength. Ultimately, this view will defeat the Christian or make him a Christian Pharisee.

God works and we yield to God. This view says that God works sovereignly in the Christians life and it is his responsibility just to yield to whatever God is doing. Our contribution to the Christian life is to relinquish control of our lives to God. The key to Christianity is “to let go and let God” and He will give the Christian victory over all conflict and sin. This view makes a person very passive in his Christian walk as he waits for God to do something new or something more in his life. Ultimately, this view could make a person a “thrill seeker” or give a superiority attitude of arriving spiritually at a place where others have not yet come.

God works and we do nothing but believe. This view says that God works sovereignly and we do not have to do anything except to accept the will of God for us by faith. This view states all of Christian living is by grace, and if by grace, than we are in no way under any kind of law or works system. The theme is that we “are under grace and not law.” Ultimately, this view leads to libertinism and license in Christian living because it plays down human responsibility and plays up God’s sovereignty.

God works as we work. This view says that God works in the Christian as the Christian first works by faith. Again this is a works system where God is dependent on man before He can work. Ultimately, this view fans man's pride, making him think he can "wheel and deal" God.

We work as God works. This view is very close to the biblical emphasis because it sees the necessity of God first working before the Christian can do any work by faith. Ultimately, this view could tip the scale towards God's sovereignty and play down man's responsibility.

THE GOSPEL CORRECTLY STATED

The biblical emphasis on the relationship of God's work and man's work, as the gospel is lived out in practical living, is found in Philippians 2:12-13.

“Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

The biblical emphasis seems to be *God works and the Christian works*. Man is 100% responsible to work out his salvation, and God works 100% in the Christian. For sure, the Christian cannot work out his salvation unless God is working in him, but he is still to work out his salvation with fear and trembling. Augustine said it well, “Without God, we cannot. Without us, He will not.” There is a mystery between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Both are true. Neither is to be minimized.

The Bible is filled with the antinomy of sovereignty and responsibility. Mystery in theology is necessary sometimes because we cannot understand the divine workings of God with out finite minds. We accept the mysteries of the Trinity, the God-Man, Scripture written by both God and man, and God electing some to salvation and yet offering salvation to all men freely as it is offered in the gospel. We must also accept the mystery of divine sovereignty and human responsibility when it comes to stating our present salvation.

We have eternal life (Jn. 6:47), and yet we are to lay hold of the eternal life we already have in Christ (1 Tim. 6:12).

God plans our works (Eph. 2:10), and yet we are to work as Christians (Tit. 3:8).

God gives us faith (Phillip. 1:29), and yet we are to add to our faith works (2 Pet. 1:5-7).

The Christian is sanctified (1 Cor. 6:11), and yet he is to pursue sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3-8).

The Christian is holy (1 Cor. 1:30), and yet he is to seek holiness (Heb. 12:14).

The Christian is righteous (1 Cor. 1:30), and yet he is to have practical righteousness (Philip. 1:11).

The gospel is God's power in salvation not only for the unsaved but also for the saved. **“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God, for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16).** The Christian needs to be constantly reminded that the gospel is for him, and that he should lay hold of the forgiveness, cleansing, and power that is in the gospel; that is, in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The gospel is the same today as it has always been. There is only one gospel and it must be preached to saved and unsaved alike. The Apostle Paul was concerned that the Galatians were turning away from the gospel of grace that Paul had taught them to a religion of works by law. **“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all” (Gal. 1:6).**

So serious is it to preach the one, true gospel that Paul said those who do not preach it should be judged with damnation. **“As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned” (Gal. 1:9).** The true gospel is that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone. This gospel is for both the unsaved and the saved. The gospel teaches that the death of Jesus Christ has accomplished salvation, is accomplishing salvation and will finally accomplish salvation. *Any other gospel is a false gospel and is to be rejected.*

The Christian life rightly understood will cause one to glory only in Jesus Christ for salvation and nothing else. The Apostle Paul said it well,

“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14).

CONCLUSION

The rest of this study on “How to Live the Christian Life” is simply an amplification of the gospel as it relates to the Christian’s present salvation. What is taught from this point on defines and explains the practical aspects of the gospel as it relates to everyday living. May God use these lessons on the Christian life as a means to transform you day by day into the image of Jesus Christ.