THE GOSPEL:
What It Is and How it is the Key to Discovering God's Vision for Your Life

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firstchristian CHURCH HELPING PEOPLE FIND AND FOLLOW JESUS

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What is The Gospel?

The Greek word for "good news," *euangelion*, once described how a victorious general sent messengers to announce his triumph and let citizens know to celebrate because the war was over! In a similar way, Scripture declares that "Christ died for our sins" and "was raised on the third day" (1 Corinthians 15:3–4), securing a finished victory over sin and death on our behalf!

From the start, the biblical storyline traces creation in Genesis 1–2, humanity's fall into sin in Genesis 3, and God's promise of a Redeemer who would "bruise" (or "strike," or "crush," i.e., deal an eventual death blow to) the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). Jesus Himself is that Redeemer who "became flesh" (John 1:14), perfectly "fulfilled the law" (Matthew 5:17) required by God's holiness, and therefore fittingly bore our penalty at the cross (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 2:9-10, 17-18; 4:14-16). His resurrection proves that "death no longer has dominion" (Romans 6:9-11, 14) over those who believe and it announces the *good news* that, in Christ, God has fought our battle against sin, evil, and death *for us!*

The gospel isn't *good advice* for how to live to please God and save your soul but the *good news* of what God has already done in Christ to satisfy God's holy standard and give you a place in His forever family—for all who believe are "no longer condemned" (Romans 8:1) and become "sons and daughters" (Galatians 4:5)!

Sin: Why We Need The Gospel

People sometimes wonder, "Why did Jesus have to die?" or "What was this battle He had to fight?" He had to die because of—and was in a battle against—our sin and its pervasively destructive effects.

According to the Scriptures, “sin came into the world through one man” (Romans 5:12), and we all share in that rebellion, making us “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). We often shrug off our wrongdoing, but because God’s holiness demands perfection and He wants us to share in His presence and glory, sin is a barrier so serious that “your iniquities have made a separation” between you and Him (Isaiah 59:2).

Sin is like a corrosive acid: even a small amount can destroy precious things. In the same way, what we might dismiss as a “minor sin” or “white lie” is nonetheless destructive in God’s sight. Your sin is a moral offense to a holy God—and because He is holy, just, and deserving of glory and perfect obedience—He must punish evil. Not to do so would be injustice to His character and would result in a cheap grace that doesn’t save because it doesn’t satisfy His just wrath against sin (Isaiah 53:4-6; Nahum 1:2-3; Romans 3:23-26; 1 John 2:1-2).

Ultimately, that our need for perfect satisfaction for sin has been met by the sinlessness of Christ highlights God’s love and grace for us, as Romans 5:8, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” He personally paid the debt our sin creates so we don’t have to!

Grace: Righteousness is a Gift, Not Earned By Works

Most belief systems teach that we must earn divine favor, as though we were climbing a ladder to reach God. By contrast, Scripture says “by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing” (Ephesians 2:8). God’s approval—our righteousness in His sight—is a gift we receive, not a paycheck we earn.

Romans 4:5 spells it out clearly: “And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.” Notice these three vital truths:

- “To the one who does not work” – No amount of personal goodness can pay the infinite debt of sin against a holy God. It would be like trying to settle a trillion-dollar debt with the pennies in your pocket. This means that the good news applies to those who know they need God’s righteousness and who do not put faith in their own works.

- “…but believes in him who justifies the ungodly” – Because we understand that our human work doesn’t work, we trust that Christ’s sacrifice handles our guilt.

- “…his faith is counted as righteousness.” – When we believe in Christ, God credits us with His perfect record—as though we’d lived His flawless life! That’s *good news!*

When Jesus cried, “It is finished” (John 19:30), He was declaring that the debt of sin was fully satisfied—nothing more remains to be paid. That’s *good news!* And even though our hearts naturally drift back to self-effort and self-condemnation, the cross reminds us that Christ “became sin … so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). As Romans 8:1 puts it, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Receiving The Gospel: By Repentance and Faith

In Acts 16:30-31, when the terrified jailer asked, “What must I do to be saved?” and the apostles answered plainly, “Believe in the Lord Jesus,” we see the two responses, often appearing side-by-side in Scripture, that exemplify what it means to receive the gospel.

1. *Repentance* – Turning from sin and self-rule. Given the context, the jailer's question is evidence of a desire to turn from sin that is rooted in a proper fear of God and is expressed in Romans 3:23, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Repentance is a turn of surrender that acknowledges our utter dependence upon God's mercy and rejects the notion that we can fix ourselves.

2. *Faith* – The apostles' answer—"believe in the Lord Jesus"—emphasizes Christ as the object of faith. John 3:36 adds the element of eternal life as the result of faith: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life." Genuine faith is more than mental agreement; it's entrusting yourself entirely to the righteousness of Christ, like boarding a lifeboat and leaving behind the sinking ship of self-salvation.

The moment we turn from sin and toward Christ in faith, God declares us righteous, adopts us into His family (Romans 8:15–17), and grounds our acceptance not in our performance, but in Christ's! Again, that's *good news!*

Living The Gospel: Not A Diving Board; It's the Whole Pool

While some treat the gospel like a diving board—the means of getting into the Christian life—Jesus tells us to abide in Him (John 15:4), making clear that the *good news* of new life is the entire pool in which the Christian lives, grows, and abides every day! Paul said it this way: "I have been crucified with Christ … now it is Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

This ongoing transformation means keeping the gospel front and center to remind us that nothing can add to Christ's finished work. In John 15:9, Jesus Himself invites us to live in the truth of His love:

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love." The reason we can remain in the Father's love is because of the Son's perfect life that is obtained by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:4, 8). Because the Father loves the Son with fullness of holy love and accepts His obedience as our righteousness, God's grace means He could not love you more than He already does right now!

This means that when we identify with Christ and begin to understand the depth of His unconditional love and abounding grace, our obedience is not motivated by fear nor gaining further credit with God, but rather, obedience that is gratitude for grace. When guilt or arrogance resurfaces, we combat it by remembering that "we have peace with God" (Romans 5:1) through Christ who "humbled" Himself for us on the cross (Philippians 2:7-8). Because the gospel frees us from striving for acceptance from God, we fight sin, love others, and serve God out of gratitude and joy, not fear or self-righteous effort (Galatians 5:13). You must dwell on such gospel truth daily—over and over again—for it is the only way to drive out fear, unbelief, and temptation.

Conclusion: The Gospel in A Nutshell

The *good news* is that Jesus died instead of us. He took our punishment and offers us His righteousness instead of eternal death and hell apart from the grace of God's sustaining presence. Through repentance and faith, we enter into a reconciled life with our Creator and anticipate the day Christ returns to "make all things new" (Revelation 21:5).

Until that day, we live in the love and grace of the gospel knowing that the same Lord who "died for all" (1 Thessalonians 5:10) and rose victorious is at work in us—transforming our hearts and anchoring our eternal hope. Indeed, this is truly *good news!*

The 7 Habits: Discovering God's Vision for Your Life

If you aren't learning and applying the gospel in a Christ-centered, God-exalting, Spirit-empowered, and Word-saturated church, you need to be, for the church is the God-designed context for your growth!

At First Christian Church, we believe that putting into practice a Christ-centered personal vision is the best way to build and strengthen people, marriages, parents, families, churches, and a community for long-term human flourishing. So we made the 7 Habits a clear, practical, and personal ministry strategy of "Discovering God's Vision for Your Life!" that will put you on a trajectory to become the community-building producer God created you to be!

Habit 1: Engage in Worship.
A well-known Christian music educator and writer about worship says that "nobody does not worship." In other words, everybody everywhere is always bowing down to and being formed into the image of something or someone. That's why we say that "worship is a soul-shaping habit!" When we gather weekly (and not "weakly," see Hebrews 10:25) to name the truth and grace of God with singing, prayer, and learning from His Word (Acts 2:42-47; 20:7), we more deeply treasure His love and are increasingly formed into His image.

Habit 2: Serve on the Team.
Everyone needs to experience the missional synergy of serving on a team where their gifts are meaningfully used and appreciated for their unique contribution! Our Serve Teams are a critical part of making effective and fruitful ministry happen (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Habit 3: Connect in a Life Group.
You don't stumble across life-sustaining Christian relationships; you create them! And even a couple hours of worship and serving on Sunday mornings isn't enough to develop the deep and lasting friendships we all really need (Ephesians 2:19-22; 3:17-19; 1 Peter 2:5). So we define "meaningful participation" as regular investment in "The Big 3," the first three Habits of Engage in worship, Serve on the team, and Connect in a Life Group because this is the threshold for when and where life-sustaining relationships happen.

Habit 4: Pray and Study the Bible.
Practicing corporate prayer, cultivating individual pray-ers, and studying God's Word are habitually, deeply, and widely integrated into every nook and cranny of church ministry (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Jude 3).

Habit 5: Pursue Generosity.
While it can be hard to implement, it's an easy-to-understand formula that produces a beautiful picture of the gospel and radical personal transformation: Give first. Save second. Live on the rest. When we pursue generosity as part of a local church that pools its resources (1 Corinthians 16:2) and embodies God's grace to us in Christ, it allows us to do more together than separately, extends the Kingdom of God, teaches us to treasure a salvation we don't deserve and could never earn, and witnesses to God's generous love that pursued us "while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8).

Habit 6: Identify with Christ.
This habit involves the realizing of one's new life in Christ in two ways. It means (1) formally and publicly declaring one's faith in Christ alone by baptism (Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21) and entering a sanctifying relationship with a local body of believers in membership (1 Corinthians 12:12-13), and (2) learning to live, day by

day, from who we are “in Christ,” as those trusting only in His completed work on the cross on our behalf.

Habit 7: Tell the Story.
At First Christian Church, just about everything we do happens in gathered environments intended to equip you to tell the story of the work of God in your life. This means evangelism, proclaiming the gospel, living as a witness, embodying the love of God, speaking fullness of grace and truth, and finding ways to insert the story of God’s work into everyday conversation. When we understand God’s grace and treasure His love for us in Christ, we spread the good news to others (Mark 5:19-20).

To learn more about the 7 Habits check out fccgreene.org/7habits. To talk to someone about the gospel or your relationship with God, visit fccgreene.org, or call/text 423-639-0126—we’d love to talk with you!



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