

The Believer's Rule Of Life

Don Fortner | Added: Oct 10, 2023 | Category: Theology

Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ (Philippians 1:27).

We believe and preach salvation which comes to sinners as the gift of divine grace alone. We believe and preach that the grace of God in salvation is free, sovereign, irresistible and effectual. In doing so, I realise we are preaching that which is contrary to the pride of man, the wisdom of man, and the religion of man. The gospel we preach ascribes the whole of salvation to the grace of God and grants nothing to the free-will, the works and the merits of men. The gospel of the grace of God, which we cherish, places us in direct opposition to the churches, preachers, and religious leaders of the world around us.

The only redemption we have is the particular, effectual redemption of our Substitute, Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:13).

The only righteousness we have before God is the righteousness of our Substitute (Jeremiah 23:6).

The only acceptance we have with God, in time and in eternity, is the acceptance of our Substitute (Ephesians 1:6).

The only reward we will ever receive from God is the reward of an eternal inheritance, earned for us by the merits of our Substitute, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:11).

This is what I am saying: our salvation, our acceptance with God, our preservation, and our reward in heaven does not, in anyway, depend upon our works. There is no point between the gates of hell and the gates of heaven at which God looks upon the works of His elect, either good or bad, to determine what our relationship to Him will be, or how He will deal with us.

God looks upon His people in His Son; and seeing us in His Son, He declares that we are perfectly righteous at all times and for all eternity. Being in Christ, united to Him by faith, 'We are not under the law, but under grace'. Do you see what this is telling us? We are not justified by the law (Romans 3:20). We are not sanctified by the law (Galatians 3:3). We are not motivated by the law (2 Corinthians 9:7). We are not governed by the law (1 Timothy 1:5-9).

The law of God is not, in any sense, the believer's rule of life, be it the ten commandments given to Moses, or the ceremonial law of the old covenant, or the judicial practices of Israel. 'Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.' We have both fulfilled the law's requirements and satisfied the law's penalty in the Person of our Substitute, in the life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When critics hear us preach the gospel of God's grace and hear us affirm the believer's freedom from the law, they accuse us, as they did Paul, of being antinomians. They say things like, 'Such doctrine leads to licentiousness', and, 'If what you are saying is true, "Let us sin that grace may abound", and, 'If you believe that, then we can live any way we like, for we have no motive to serve God and no rule of life'. Their speech betrays their hearts. Such gospel-critics as these require the iron bars of the law to restrain them because inwardly they are raging beasts. Nevertheless, their accusations and insinuations are false.

True believer's do have a rule of life. Our rule of life is the gospel of Christ. This is what Paul shows us in Philippians 1:27. 'Only let your conversation be as cometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.'

The gospel of the grace of God in Christ is our rule of life, and it does not lead to licentiousness, but to true godliness. If I am a saved person, the only motive, the only governing principle I need to rule my life is the gospel of Christ.

The word 'conversation' does not merely refer to our talk and speech one to another. It signifies our whole course of life and behaviour in this world. The word literally refers to the actions and privileges of citizenship. We are to exercise our whole citizenship, all our actions as citizens of the New Jerusalem, as becomes the gospel of Christ. This is what Paul is saying. The law of Christ's kingdom is the gospel; the rule of our citizenship in Zion is the gospel of Christ.

Notice the difference between the exhortations of the legalists and those of the gospel. The legalist will have you to work in order to be saved, or to avoid punishment, or to earn some reward from God. But he who knows the gospel of the grace of God urges you to godliness, because you are saved. The legalist motivates his followers with fear and envy. The gospel

preacher motivates the Lord's people with gratitude.

Paul is saying to us, make your actions conformable to your position, live what you are! You profess to be saved by the gospel; you say you glory in the gospel, you say you desire to extend the gospel; then 'let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ'. He is saying, 'You are citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem; your salvation is absolutely secure in Christ; now act like men and women who are born of God'.

Love for Christ and gratitude for the gospel will motivate, rule, and govern the Lord's true people. Slaves must have the whip of the law to keep them in line, but loving children need only to be reminded of the generous inheritance their Father has given them to stir their devotion to Him and motivate their heart. Love is stronger than law. Grace is more powerful than guilt. Gratitude is more persuasive than fear.

What is the gospel?

There is but one gospel. You can catch Paul's definition of the gospel in two words. He calls it the gospel 'of Christ'. The gospel is Christ. If you know Christ, you know the gospel. If you do not know Christ; His Person, His righteousness, His redemption, and His exaltation, you do not know the gospel. Christ is the gospel (Romans 1:1-4).

Christ is the Author of the gospel. In the council chambers of eternity, the Son of God proposed to become the Surety of God's elect. In the fulness of time, He worked out salvation for as many as the Father had given Him.

Christ is the Matter of the gospel. It is impossible to preach the gospel without preaching the Person, the work, the offices, and the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. If Christ is preached in the fulness of His redemptive glory, the gospel is preached. If Christ is put in the background, the gospel is not declared. Jesus Christ the Lord is the sum total, the warp and woof, the heart and essence of the gospel (1 Corinthians 2:2). To preach the gospel is to preach: the glory of His person, the purpose of His incarnation, the perfection of His righteousness, the efficacy of His redemption, the meaning of His exaltation and the certainty of His return. Anything less is not the gospel!

The gospel is Christ's property. It is His gospel. It originated with Him. It was revealed and declared by Him. It glorifies His Person. It proclaims His work. It praises His accomplishments and it is the sweet savour of His name.

Christ is the finisher of the gospel (Isaiah 53:10-12). In the business of salvation Christ is everything. It is all His work and His work alone. He is the author and the finisher. He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is the first and the last. He is the beginning and the end. He laid the foundation stone and He will put the last finishing stroke to the work. Christ does not begin

the work then leave it for us to finish. He does it all!

Charles Spurgeon, the eloquent Baptist preacher, said, 'As His hand first tore away the sin which doth so easily beset us, and helped us to run the race with patience, so that same hand shall hold out the olive branch of victory, shall weave it into a chaplet of glory, and put it about our brow'.

Christ is the good news of the gospel (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). The gospel is the 'good spell', the 'good news' or the 'good message' of Jesus Christ. The gospel is emphatically good news! The gospel says, God and man are reconciled, sin is put away, righteousness is established, atonement is made, justice is satisfied, redemption is obtained, and grace is proclaimed.

Living in a manner becoming the gospel

It is my heart's desire to live in this world in such a way that my life shall both glorify the Lord my God and honour the gospel. I want to 'practise what I preach'. That being true, the rule of my life must be the gospel of Christ, which I preach. We do not live by the rules of religious tradition. We do not live by the rule of human opinion. We do not live by the rules of the law. But we do, we must, live by the rule of the gospel.

The gospel is very plain and simple. It is unadorned. It has no ornaments of intellectualism or ritualism. It is 'not with enticing words of man's wisdom'. Yet it is sublime in its simplicity. Let those who believe and preach the gospel be plain and simple people. Our adornment should be the ornament of true grace (1 Peter 3:3, 4).

Believers are transparent men and women, as was Nathaniel who was 'an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile'. We should be unsophisticated in our attitudes, ambitions, and our lifestyle. 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.'

The gospel of Christ is pre-eminently true. You and I must be truthful, honest men and women, both in our speech and in our business. A believer should never need to take an oath. His word should be as good as an oath. His 'yea' should be 'yea', and his 'nay' should be 'nay'.

The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is bold and courageous. There is a foolish sentiment today that people call 'Christian love' but it is an enemy to the gospel. It says, 'Never tell anyone they are wrong. Never say anything about other religions. Never denounce anything as heresy.'

Let people call us 'sectarians'. They may say that we are hard and divisive, but the gospel of Christ demands that we be bold and fearless. Hear what the Word of God says, 'He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned'. No compromise! No alternative!

The Lord Jesus Christ said, 'All that ever came before me are thieves and

robbers: but the sheep did not hear them'. The Apostle Paul said, 'If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed'.

I know this is strong language but if we would honour our God this is the way you and I must think and live. I must hold to everything I see taught in the Word of God. I will not even give up little pieces of truth. I must preach the gospel of the grace of God with emphatic clearness, denouncing as heresy everything that opposes it. I must live in the light of God and the sight of God as I believe I should live; and when men say their best or their worst about it, it shall be no more to me than the chirping of a cricket.

The time has come for those who know and believe the gospel to stand faithful, bold, fearless and defiantly for the gospel. The gospel of Christ gives a man backbone. It gives him firm ground upon which to plant his feet.

The gospel of Christ is gentle. Christ says, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'. A believing man must be a man; firm, bold, and fearless, but he must be a gentleman; tender, thoughtful, and kind. Someone said, 'He must have a lion's heart and a lady's hand'. There should be such a gentleness about us that little children are not afraid to come to us, and that the publicans and harlots are not driven off by our austerity, but attracted and invited by our mildness.

The gospel of Christ is full of love. He that loves is born of God. Without this grace, whatever we may think of ourselves or what others may think of us, we are really, in God's sight, as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals.

The gospel of Christ is a gospel of mercy. If you would live in such a way as is becoming of the gospel of Christ, you must be a man of mercy, a woman of mercy. Mercy is generous, forgiving, helpful, unselfish, and kind.

The gospel of Christ is righteous and holy. If you would live in a manner that becomes the gospel, you must live by principles of righteousness, truth, and holiness. Do what you know to be right. Avoid that which you know is evil.

The amusements and pleasures of this life, so far as they are innocent, belong to us as they do to other men and women, but when they become evil, or even doubtful, we must discard them. We have joys this world cannot know. We do not need to drink at that muddy river for which worldlings are so thirsty.

Do you want to know how you should live, what you should do, how you should dress, where you should go, and how you should treat your fellow-travellers in this world? Do you want to live in such a way that you honour God, glorify Christ, and adorn the gospel in your life? If you are a believer, I know these things are of real concern to you, for your heart is motivated

by love, gratitude, and grace. Let these gospel principles be your rule of life, but do not allow anyone to bring you again under the yoke of the law.

Our rule of life is the gospel of Christ. Obey the gospel and you will honour your Redeemer. Do that which is true and honest. Live boldly and fearlessly for Christ. Be a gentle person. Walk in love. Imitate Christ in mercy. Do what you know to be right.

Why should we live by the rule of the gospel?

There are three things that stand out in Philippians 1:27 as reasons for living by the gospel rule. First, we are motivated by gratitude. Second, we are inspired by love. Third, we are strengthened by faith.

Our lives should be governed by the gospel of Christ because we are citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem and heirs of eternal life. We should be devoted to the glory of Christ our Redeemer. The glory of Christ is the ambition, the desire, the motivating force of every believing heart.

We live by the rule of the gospel for the welfare of Christ's church and for the unity of our brethren. 'That whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit.' Paul is saying, 'If you will so live as men and women in a manner becoming the gospel of Christ, you will be a people of one heart and mind. Nothing can divide you.'

We must live by the rule of the gospel for the furtherance of the gospel. 'With one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.' We have but one purpose upon this earth. We must make known to all men the gospel of the free-grace of God in Christ. Let us strive together as one body, putting our shoulders to the work.

The pastor must strive together with his people, and the people with their pastor, for the faith of the gospel. The pastor's work is to preach and write and do the work of an evangelist. Your work is to bear constant witness to the truth of the gospel, support the preaching of the gospel, and pray for the success of the gospel.

'Let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.' Let us live by the rule of the gospel. Let us live to honour the gospel. And let us live for the furtherance of the gospel.

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