

## The Gospel (The Good News)

Do you know that God loves you? He can't help Himself. He is love. And He created you to love because you were made in His image, like every child bears their parents' image. He created us to be His children, to be in a relationship with Him, where He is our loving Father who provides for us, protects us, cares for us, guides us, teaches us, and unconditionally loves us. There is one big problem, though. Humans lost their relationship to God. Instead of loving God and others, they love themselves. Human selfishness destroys us and those around us. The good news is that God still wants that perfect loving relationship with us. He made a way to bring us back to Him.

Though humans were created in God's perfect loving image, the first humans brought sin into the world. Sin means going against God's way, living for ourselves instead of living for Him. It's human nature to be selfish. We are born that way. Our selfishness leads to sin, and sin leads to eternal death, or separation from God. God loves us, and wants to be in relationship with us, but He is holy and can't be joined with sin. He is also just, and the punishment for sin is death; he can't just ignore our sinful ways. To free us from our fate, He intervened Himself. He sent His Son, Jesus, to live on Earth. By doing this, He showed Himself to us, so that we could know Him and could see how to live. Jesus, fully human and fully God, lived without sin. He faced temptation and conquered it by the Spirit of God living in Him. Blameless, He was accused falsely and sentenced to death on a cross. He died, taking our punishment for our sin. He came back to life, as He had told His disciples He would, rising up from the dead on the third day. Jesus gave His life up for us. We give our lives up for Him. One way Christ-followers show this surrender is by being baptized. To be baptized means to go under the water, burying our old lives just like Christ died and was buried; and rising up out of the water just like Christ arose, with new life, the life of Christ. We are washed clean by Christ's blood, by Christ's sacrifice for us. We are forgiven and set free because Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. Christ's life in us by the Spirit is a life of righteousness, which just means doing what is right in God's eyes. What that looks like is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Christians no longer seek to live selfishly for themselves, but seek to live with God each day, talking to and listening to Him, obeying and serving Him.

How do we get all this? By faith. We just have to believe and ask Him. He makes us His children so that we can approach Him freely as a loving father. We receive that gift by faith. We can live right. It's a gift that we receive by faith. We can pray to Him confidently. It is a gift we receive by faith. We can have saving, healing, provision, protection, freedom from sin, life forever in heaven. They are all gifts from God that we don't deserve but are ours through faith. We can't earn any of these things. There is no method to receive any of these things. We just receive them as gifts from our loving Father.

The goal of the Christian is to know Him. Seek Him first in your day, before anything else, above anything else. Read His Word, the Bible. Do it to get to know Him, to fall in love with Him, again and again and deeper and deeper, or for the very first time. And as you get to know Him, you will understand His love for you, and you will love Him with all your heart, mind, soul, and

strength. And that love will pour over into loving others. And that is what it means to live as a Christian, to love God and others.

Jesus promised that we would have trouble in this world. The Christian's response is to thank God! Trouble turns us to Him. It reminds us of His working in us and through us. It produces endurance and character in us. It demonstrates His overcoming life in us. He is trustworthy and faithful and that is a cause for rejoicing.

If this is all new to you, know that Jesus offers all this to you, by faith; it's just a gift. Ask and you will receive. If you call yourself a Christian, but you find that you're not showing love and generosity toward others, not experiencing joy and peace in your life, not living right and clean, then know there's more to the Christian life. Seek Him; He promises to be found. Choose to give up your old life; let it die, so that you can be raised to new life in Christ, now and forever.