

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

The following is from a transcript of CNN's Larry King Live, which aired June 20, 2005. Larry's conversation that day was with Joel Osteen, pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, TX. Lakewood Church has the largest attendance of any church in the USA: 43,500 for 2009 (See [Source](#)). View the complete CNN Transcript [Here](#)

KING: Is it hard to lead a Christian life?

OSTEEN: I don't think it's that hard. To me it's fun. We have joy and happiness. Our family -- I don't feel like that at all. I'm not trying to follow a set of rules and stuff. I'm just living my life.

KING: But you have rules, don't you?

OSTEEN: We do have rules. But the main rule to me is to honor God with your life. To [live] a life of integrity. Not be selfish. You know, help others. But that's really the essence of the Christian faith.

KING: That we live in deeds?

OSTEEN: I don't know. What do you mean by that?

KING: Because we've had ministers on who said, your record don't count. You either believe in Christ or you don't. If you believe in Christ, you are, you are going to heaven. And if you don't no matter what you've done in your life, you ain't.

OSTEEN: Yeah, I don't know. There's probably a balance between. I believe you have to know Christ. But I think that if you know Christ, if you're a believer in God, you're going to have some good works. I think it's a cop-out to say I'm a Christian but I don't ever do anything ...

KING: What if you're Jewish or Muslim, you don't accept Christ at all?

OSTEEN: You know, I'm very careful about saying who would and wouldn't go to heaven. I don't know ...

KING: If you believe you have to believe in Christ? They're wrong, aren't they?

OSTEEN: Well, I don't know if I believe they're wrong. I believe here's what the Bible teaches and from the Christian faith this is what I believe. But I just think that only God [will] judge a person's heart. I spent a lot of time in India with my father. I don't know all about their religion. But I know they love God. And I don't know. I've seen their sincerity. So I don't know. I know for me, and what the Bible teaches, I want to have a relationship with Jesus.

Before we begin, allow me to say that honestly don't know enough about Pastor Osteen's teaching to know whether this conversation accurately represents him or not. Maybe he was having a bad day. Maybe Mr. King caught him off guard. I don't know. The views he expressed are, however, representative of a growing number of American pastors, church leaders and churchgoers, so they make a convenient "sample text" to compare with what we'll read in 1 Corinthians 15 today.

So what's up? What's the essence of the Christian faith? Is it honoring God with your life? Living a life of integrity? Not being selfish? Helping others? Can you love God, be sincere and ignore Jesus altogether? The whole heaven and hell thing – is that a misguided or outdated question, as many church-attending people now think and many church leaders, authors and speakers would now contend? In the first part of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul helps us to understand this issue more thoroughly. We'll approach this section by asking two important questions and then making two important distinctions.

- I. Two Important Questions:
 - A. What is the content of the gospel message?
 - B. What does it mean to preach the gospel?

- II. Two Important Distinctions:
 - A. The difference between *relativism* and *relevance*
 - B. The difference between the Christian *faith* and the Christian *life*

The gospel is a message that has to be preached, believed and held fast so that people will be saved.

- I. Two Important Questions:
 - A. What is the content of the gospel message?
 - i. 15:3 **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.** As it says in the book of Isaiah:

*Isaiah 53:5-7 NKJV*⁵ *But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.*
⁶ *All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*
⁷ *He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.*
 - ii. 15:4 **He was buried, and ... He rose again according to the Scriptures.**

*Psa 16:9-10 NKJV*⁹ *Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope.*
¹⁰ *For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.*
 - iii. 15:5-8 **He was seen (v.5) ... He was seen (v.6) ... He was seen (v.7) ... He was seen (v.8) ...** and these witnesses have passed this message down to us. This message was communicated by preaching.
 - B. What does it mean to preach the gospel?

In this short passage Paul uses two different words, both translated as “preach”.

- i. 15:1 & 2 ***euaggelizō*** to bring good news, to announce glad tidings

- ii. 15:11 **kērussō** to *herald* (as a public *crier*), especially divine truth (the gospel):—preach, proclaim, publish.
- iii. So the gospel is a message of good news about Christ’s death for our sins and his rising from the dead. It needs to be communicated verbally (i.e., in words) in order for others to understand and believe it.

First Corinthians 1:20-21 NKJV ²⁰*Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?* ²¹*For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.*

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II. Two Important Distinctions:

A. The difference between *relativism* and *relevance*

- i. Some of you may be thinking right now, “OK, Dave, you’re losing me. What in the world are you talking about?” That’s why we need to explain this.
 - 1. As far as anyone can guess, *relativism* was first clearly expressed by Plato in about 360 B.C. in his hypothetical dialogue *Theaetetus*. His characters say the following:

“... Things are to you such as they appear to you, and to me such as they appear to me ...”
“... Things appear, or may be supposed to be, to each one such as he perceives them ...”

You can read the whole dialogue here: <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/theatu.html>

- 2. We might paraphrase those statements by saying, “Something is true for you if you truly believe it. If I perceive a matter differently, then truth for me will be different. We can each have and each believe our own truth.”
- 3. So what might that sound like in action in the 21st Century A.D.? It might sound something like this:

KING: What if you're Jewish or Muslim, you don't accept Christ at all?

OSTEEN: You know, I'm very careful about saying who would and wouldn't go to heaven. I don't know ...

KING: If you believe you have to believe in Christ? They're wrong, aren't they?

OSTEEN: Well, I don't know if I believe they're wrong. I believe here's what the Bible teaches and from the Christian faith this is what I believe. But I just think that only God [will] judge a person's heart. I spent a lot of time in India with my father. I don't know all about their religion. But I know they love God. And I don't know. I've seen their sincerity. So I don't know. I know for me, and what the Bible teaches, I want to have a relationship with Jesus.

4. Is this important? I would suggest that it is all important. Let's read verses **15:1-2 & 8-9** again.
 5. Paul was not always a Christian. He became one after seeing the risen Christ. Paul preached this message to the Corinthians when they were not Christians hoping that they would believe the gospel and be saved. The gospel is not just for "Christians", but for people of all faiths so that they can come to know Jesus just as Paul and the Corinthians did.
- ii. The Bible does not affirm *relativism*, the idea of multiple, incompatible truths. The Bible does, however advocate *relevance* in preaching the gospel.
1. If something has relevance it is applicable, appropriate, pertinent, related. It makes sense in the desired context.
 2. Paul made sure that he made the gospel relevant to his hearers. He did that by living in a way that people could identify with. He made sure his life made sense, so that his message would be more easily received.

First Corinthians 9:19-23 NKJV ¹⁹For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; ²⁰and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; ²¹to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; ²²to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. ²³Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.

3. When Paul says, "I do this for the gospel's sake", he means that the communication of the gospel is his ultimate goal. He will only flex so far to be relevant. He will never rob the gospel message of its content because he wants to see people saved by believing it.

B. The difference between the Christian *faith* and the Christian *life*

- i. Let's go back once more to our opening dialog:

KING: Is it hard to lead a Christian life?

OSTEEN: I don't think it's that hard. To me it's fun. We have joy and happiness. Our family -- I don't feel like that at all. I'm not trying to follow a set of rules and stuff. I'm just living my life.

KING: But you have rules, don't you?

*OSTEEN: We do have rules. But the main rule to me is to honor God with your life. To [live] a life of integrity. Not be selfish. You know, help others. **But that's really the essence of the Christian faith.***

King asked a question about the Christian “life”. Osteen said some things that were right on the money: We have joy and happiness. The main rule is to honor God with your life. To live a life of integrity. Not be selfish. Help others.”

- ii. Here’s where we have to make our distinction: An atheist can live a life of integrity. An agnostic can help others. Anybody can say they have joy and happiness under the right circumstances. None of this makes them Christian. Furthermore, some Christians are sadly lacking in these positive traits that should, ideally, be part of their daily, routine existence.
- iii. While the Christian faith and the Christian life should never be separated, they are not one and the same thing. At rock bottom, the Christian *faith* has mostly to do with **what we believe** – the content of the gospel; the Christian *life* has mostly to do with **what we do as a result of those beliefs**.
- iv. The gospel message clarifies the Christian faith. The Christian life verifies the Christian faith.

The gospel is a message that has to be preached, believed and held fast so that people will be saved.

Conclusions:

1. The gospel is really very simple. In its bare bones version we find it in **15:3-4**.
2. This message needs to be preached, believed by the hearers and held on to in order for them to be saved.
3. To be *saved*, or we might say, “to be a Christian”, you have to believe the gospel. We don’t believe that any faith is good enough as long as you are sincere. If your faith in Christ is real, then that is truly enough to get you saved, but that is only the beginning.
4. If you intend to be a mature and growing Christian, a fruitful Christian and/or a relevant Christian, there is much more to come. And that “much more” will come, by the grace of God, if you hold fast that word which was preached to you.
5. Let’s read again what Paul said in verses **15:9-11**.
6. Then, finally, Paul’s concluding words to us in **15:58**.