

The Unwavering Church

The Good Life

November 16, 2025

Acts 10:1 - 11:18

Introduction

While in college (**SLIDE**), I was a member of FURMAN SINGERS. My 1995 spring break was spent on tour throughout the southeast. Each night, we'd perform at a church, and host families from those churches would keep us overnight. I had the same roommate every night, and by the fourth or fifth night, my roommate and I couldn't help but comment at the wide variety of people, homes, and gifting levels of hospitality that we experienced.

Now, many of our hosts were near retirement or had been retired, and so a common theme of conversation at the home each night was about whether or not they thought retirement was everything they thought it was going to be. Was it "the good life" that they had envisioned?

One surprising thing that emerged from those conversations is that there were many different definitions of what "the good life" really was.

- One retired couple decided to build a screened in porch off the back of their home. It was about 80 sqft and had sliding glass windows and a ceiling fan. They had stuffed it with plants and patio furniture. The husband's name (funny enough) was Eli Whitney. I recall sitting on the patio with him, sipping hot chocolate and talking about his retirement. He said, "Yes, when I realized that I was going to be home a lot more, I had to build a sanctuary. This is the good life back here."
- One couple near retirement had an absolutely massive home outside Wilson, NC. We came down for breakfast to a spread that made the Ritz-Carlton look shabby. The kitchen table overlooked acres and acres of a backyard that was half pasture, half-forest, and I noticed there were horses out grazing. "Do you ride," I asked. "No, I just like looking at them while I eat." That was his "good life."

(**TITLE SLIDE**) Everyone has their vision or version of "the good life." What is your good life?

- "The back of a cruise ship in calm seas at sunset — that's the good life."
- "The good life is a mountain cabin with a roaring fire and no cell service."
- "The good life is when everyone in the house agrees on what's for dinner and enjoys it."

We all have our version of the good life. That's when you've finally arrived. That's when you can have joy and peace.

You probably discussed this in your philosophy class, although I doubt they used the phrase, “the good life.” There, you would have asked, “What is the highest good?” In a theology class, you’d ask, “What is the chief end of humanity?” And over the millennia, different philosophers and religious leaders have answered that question differently.

- **(SLIDE) Stoics:** “Want what happens, and you’ll never be disappointed.” *Because peace comes from accepting fate and mastering desire.*
- **(SLIDE) Hedonists:** “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” *Because pleasure is all that matters, since tomorrow isn’t promised.*
- **(SLIDE) Secularists (Modern Self-Expressivists):** “Be true to yourself, and let no one tell you otherwise.” *Because self-determined freedom and self-defined authenticity are the good life.*

Body

So, what is your “good life”? What has to happen for you to truthfully say that you’ve finally arrived ... that you finally have certainty that you’re experiencing what life is truly all about?

This is the question that Paul is answering in the very first recorded sermon we have of his in the book of Acts. Paul is giving the biblical answer to that question ... the Christian answer to that question. The answer is found in vv. 38-39. **(SLIDE)**

38 Therefore, let it be known to you, brothers and sisters, that through this man forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you.

39 Everyone who believes is justified through him from everything that you could not be justified from through the law of Moses.

As you can see from this passage, the highest good ... the good life ... according to Christianity or the Bible is this: **(SLIDE) Faith in God that reconciles and restores you to God.** That’s the good life. That’s when you’ve arrived. *When you have faith in God that reconciles and restores you to God, that’s the good life. In a phrase — forgiveness of sins.*

Here’s what I want to accomplish in the time we have remaining.

- I want to make the case that forgiveness (reconciliation and restoration to God) really is the highest good.
- I want to make the case that this forgiveness is achieved by grace through faith.
- I want to invite you to live the truly good life.

Why Forgiveness is the Highest Good

(SLIDE) The reason that forgiveness is the highest good is because sin, guilt, and shame are our biggest problems, and nothing human beings have ever tried on their own has ever solved this problem.

Genesis 3 explains why we have sin, guilt, and shame. Adam and Eve sin against God and one another, and immediately experience shame and guilt. Suddenly, in their nakedness, they feel exposed and vulnerable and they immediately cover up and hide the truth of who they have become from God and from each other. They know in the depths of their being that there is something wrong with them, something they cannot justify. Now they are desperate to cover up, to control what others see of them, and to hide the truth of who they are even from themselves.

Ever since then, human beings have been “sewing fig leaves” to try and deal with our guilt and shame.

- Why do some of us work ourselves to death trying to prove we matter?
- Why do some of us say yes to everything, fearful of what saying “no” might lead to?
- Why do some of us never let anyone close enough to really know us?
- Why do some of us live to rescue everyone else’s problems?
- Why do some of us move in and out of non-committal sexual relationships?
- Why do some of us prefer followers over friends?

Those are all just modern-day fig leaves. Our perfectionism is a fig leaf. Our busyness is a fig leaf. Our image management is a fig leaf. Every one of them is an attempt to cover the same thing: the deep, gnawing sense that something inside us isn’t right and needs to be covered. That’s our sin, guilt, and shame. That’s our biggest need, and nothing we’ve ever tried on our own as ever solved this problem.

Philosophers have tried to fix this for us though.

(SLIDE) Karl Marx – “It’s not your fault; it’s the system.”

Marx looked at the world and saw suffering and inequality everywhere. He said the problem was the structure of society. We feel guilty because the system is unfair, so the cure is a revolution. Change the system and you’ll change the soul.

(SLIDE) Sigmund Freud – “It’s not sin; it’s your subconscious.”

Freud thought guilt was our inner desires colliding with society’s rules. So by doing the talking and work to understand ourselves, we can come to accept ourselves, and thereby be relieved of our guilt and shame.

(SLIDE) Jean-Paul Sartre – “Life has no meaning, so make your own.”

Sartre rejected God altogether. He said we feel guilt and emptiness because there’s no built-in purpose to life. So invent one. Be whoever you decide to be.

(TITLE SLIDE) All of these worldviews, philosophies, or systems are nothing more than ways we as human beings have tried to manage the noise that screams at us about our sin, guilt, and

shame. And living according to any of these philosophies will never lead us to the highest good ... to the good life ... to having true peace in our hearts and minds.

That is why I believe that FORGIVENESS is the highest good ... that it's the good life. Only forgiveness can completely remove the problem of our sin, guilt, and shame.

If your "good life" is anything else other than this, I submit to you that you are settling and will eventually find whatever it is that you are trusting in to deal with your sin, guilt, and shame will disappoint you.

Why Forgiveness Must be by Grace through Faith

Now, recognizing that forgiveness is the highest good, how do we get it? How we try and deal with our sin, guilt, and shame is one question, but once we recognize that we need forgiveness as our highest good, how do we get THAT?

The bulk of your Bible illustrates that the main way humanity has tried to deal with its sin, guilt, and shame is **through religion**. Paul, preaching to a Jewish audience in Pisidian Antioch, speaks to this in v. 39 – ***you could not be justified through the law of Moses***. And if any of us are counting on our church participation or religious works to absolve us of our sin, guilt, and shame, then Paul's message could not be more straightforward.

There's only one way to get forgiveness of sin and removal of guilt and shame. There's only one way to possess the highest good. It's in Acts 13:38-39.

... through this man forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you. Everyone who believes is justified through him ...

There are three things I want you to see.

(SLIDE) Forgiveness Comes Graciously and Exclusively Through Jesus

Why through Him alone? Because only Jesus has done what needed to be done. He lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died. The law of Moses could expose sin, but it could not erase sin. Religion can clean the outside; only Jesus can cleanse the inside.

When Paul says "through this man," he's contrasting Jesus with every other savior we try to construct — success, spirituality, or self-help. None of them can remove guilt.

Jesus is not one option among many; He is the only One who actually bore our sin and rose from the grave. If there had been another way, God would not have sent His Son to the cross. Forgiveness is found nowhere else because nowhere else has sin been paid for.

(SLIDE) Jesus Justifies Us Fully and Freely

Forgiveness through Jesus doesn't just restore us relationally to God. It also reconciles you to Him in a permanent way. The Bible's word for this is JUSTIFICATION. So, forgiveness through Jesus not only means that your debt is paid, but that as far as the Holy God is concerned, you are just as righteous as Jesus is. Forgiveness through Jesus doesn't merely wipe our record clean; it replaces it with Jesus' perfect record.

When Paul says, "Everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses," he's saying: "The law could show you the standard but could never make you meet it." It was like a mirror that revealed dirt on your face but offered no way to wash it off. Jesus, however, both reveals our sin and removes it. On the cross, He took the full penalty of our guilt — "the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). At the resurrection, He rose to clothe us in His righteousness. So now when God looks at the believer, He sees not failure but faith — not your record but Christ's.

That's why Paul uses the past tense in Romans 5:1: "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Justification isn't a process you work toward; it's a verdict God announces. Your identity is no longer "guilty trying harder" but "forgiven and free."

(SLIDE) Belief Is Trusting

Finally, Paul says, "Everyone who believes is justified." Notice the inclusivity of that statement: everyone. The door is wide open, but you must walk through it by faith. And belief in the Bible doesn't mean simply agreeing with what I'm saying. The Devil agrees with what I'm saying. It means entrusting your life to Him — staking your past, present, and future on His finished work. Faith is the difference between admiring a chair and actually sitting in it, between knowing Jesus died and resting in what His death accomplished.

You don't earn forgiveness; you receive it. You don't climb your way to heaven; heaven has come down to you. To believe is to drop the fig leaves, to stop performing, and to say, "Lord Jesus, I can't clean myself — but You already have." That's why Paul connects belief and justification so tightly. The moment you believe, Christ's righteousness becomes yours, and your sin becomes His — forever dealt with at the cross.

Conclusion/Application

So when Paul says, "Through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you," he's telling the truth our world most needs to hear: (SLIDE)

- Forgiveness is found only in Jesus — because only He bore our sin.
- Justification is granted fully through Jesus — because only He met God's standard.
- Belief unites us to Jesus — because only faith, not effort, can receive that gift.

So I invite you this morning to live the good life ... to the forgiveness of Jesus for your sin, thereby removing the pressing weight of guilt and shame. No philosophy of this world, no behavior modification of your own, no religious ritual, and no moral instruction will free you from your sin, guilt, and shame.

And if you read all of Paul's sermon here in Acts 13, you'll see that God has spent centuries putting into place forgiveness in Jesus. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are not just factual; they are also fulfillment. The death and resurrection of Jesus is His plan. It was His idea. He spent centuries getting ready for it. He promised it so that you would recognize His hand in it when it came. Trust him because my word has been fulfilled in him. He is no isolated miracle. He is the climax of a history of prophetic miracles. I trust Jesus for forgiveness not just because of His factual, historical reality, but also because God's centuries of prophecy and preparation show the truth of his provision for forgiveness.

So, trust in Jesus. You have everything to gain when you do, and everything to lose if you don't. There is everything to gain—eternal life with God, forgiven and accepted, and there is everything to lose—eternal judgment, guilty and rejected.

I stand before you therefore not as one who is perfect, but as one who is forgiven through Jesus Christ and freed from condemnation. I invite you to join me and the hundreds of others in this congregation.

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