

“How Do We Behave?” Romans 1:16-17 Shane Hatfield 8/1/21

Last week we looked at the first question which is ‘Why do we exist?’ and we said we exist because of God’s transforming grace. It is His free, unmerited, undeserved grace that reconciles sinners to Himself, to each other, and to creation. It’s His grace that transforms us so we can be a loving gift for the Son and so we can experience God’s love.

Well, this week, we’re going to begin to answer another question, and that question is ‘How do we behave?’ This is going to be a three-part answer. How we behave is embodied in our core values. Core values are the values that exist inherently in a body or an organization. They are essential to that organization. They are vital. They give the identity to the organization. So, after talking to many of you in the congregation and discussing the history of our church, the first core value that our elders identified was gospel centrality, the idea that we focus on the gospel. So, that’s what we’re going to look at tonight from Romans 1:16-17. Hear the word of the Lord:

“¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

All men are like grass and their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of the Lord doesn’t. It stands forever. So, let’s listen to it.

Patrick Lencioni tells a story of an airline company that was fanatical about their culture and their values and one of the values that they identified that was important to them was humor. They were so serious about humor that they would not hire anyone that couldn’t laugh at themselves or at the world around them. They were unashamed of this value. They were willing to suffer for it and be persecuted for it. They were willing to even go against their customers if it upset them.

There was one time when it did. There was a frequent flier who was angry because one of the flight attendants made a joke during the pre-flight safety check, and so, she wrote a letter to the CEO and she told the CEO how mad she was. She couldn’t believe that a flight attendant would make a joke at a time like that. So, when most CEOs get a letter or email like this, they are probably going to do what I would do which is apologize and say, ‘We take safety very seriously, and we will discipline that flight attendant and we will make sure that she never makes a joke like that again, and we promise you there will not be jokes during the pre-flight check.’ But that is not what this CEO did. He wrote the lady an email that said three words: “We’ll miss you.” That’s all the email said. No promises, no assurance, no rebukes, nothing. “We’ll miss you.” Now surely, they take safety very, very seriously. All airlines do. But they also do not compromise on their core value of humor. They know that it is essential to their organization. They are unashamed and they are willing to be persecuted for it.

So, let me ask you, what are your core values? What are the things that are essential to you that you will not compromise, that you’re willing to be persecuted for? Is it work? You’re passionate about your work. Or is it family? You want to have a loving and caring family. Is it your hobbies? You love to play and spend your money and your time on your hobbies. Is it sports? Is it seriousness? I’m not a funny guy, I like to be serious about things. It’s good for me to be around people that are funny, but I take seriousness very seriously. If you want to know

what your values are, you can look in two places: your time and your money. Those two areas will show you your values.

What are the values in the church? What are the things that we value? We look at our time and our money and I'll tell you, I'm really excited that our money goes to ministries like Global Golf. Sarah's doing fantastic work. There was a girl on the OSU golf team this year that professed faith in Christ and was baptized in her local church thanks to the ministry of Sarah. Yes! Praise the Lord! And you guys participated in that, because we support her. Well, the value of *the* church, and the value of our church, the core value that lies at the heart of Christianity is the gospel. It is inherent, it is essential, and it is unchanging. We exist because of God's grace and that grace is manifested in the gospel. Because the gospel is central to Christianity, it is the core value of our church. So, how do we behave? We focus on the gospel. We are unashamed of it, and we are willing to suffer for it. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, we want to keep it the central focus of our church.

So, we're going to look at three questions tonight. What is the gospel? What does it do? How do we receive it? Young kids, if you want something to keep track of tonight, you can count the number of times I say 'gospel.' I'm going to say it a lot, so see if you can keep track of it. The first thing we want to talk about is: what is the gospel? Paul says in verse 16: "I am not ashamed of the gospel." The gospel is good news, not good advice. The gospel is an announcement about what has been done, not what we must do.

Think about it this way, our family has been watching the Olympics a lot. You guys have probably been watching the Olympics as well. We'll watch it at night and then the kids know that overnight, you know, it's in Japan so a lot of the competitions happen in the evening, so they know in the morning we can get up and check the results. So, every morning we get up, we go to the internet and we look for the good news of the Olympics! We're hoping that the Americans got another medal. We want good news! We want an announcement that victory has been achieved. What we don't want is good advice. We don't want to go to ESPN in the morning and there to be a headline that says, 'You should watch less Olympics and you should go out and exercise more.' That would be good advice, probably, maybe. But we don't want that! We want good news.

This word, gospel, in the Old Testament, describes good news of someone being rescued or delivered from peril. Then in the New Testament, this word is associated with a proclamation, something that is being announced. So, it's an announcement about the good news of God delivering people from their peril. A theologian, D.A. Carson says that "The gospel is not a code of ethics, a set of wise sayings, or a systematic theology, although it's the ground for ethics, wisdom and systematics. It is an announcement about the good news of being rescued from peril."

Rescued from what? We're rescued from the sin and misery of this world. So, ever since the fall, this world that we're in has been broken and it has been under a curse. Sin has broken it. That sin and that curse has destroyed all of our horizontal relationships. It has destroyed our relationships with ourselves and with others and so we feel shame, and guilt, and fear in all of our relationships. It has destroyed our relationship with creation, so creation doesn't behave the way it's supposed to. That's the reason why we have death and sickness and aging. It's broken all these horizontal relationships. But the main problem is not our broken horizontal relationships, the main problem is our broken vertical relationship. Sin has separated us from God, and so, we need to be reconciled to God. We need to be rescued from our alienation to Him

and we need to be brought into a right relationship with Him. What the gospel does is it announces this good news that God has reconciled us to Himself.

J.I. Packer describes the gospel with three words, it's very simple, an easy way to remember it: God saves sinners. That's the announcement. The gospel announcement is that God saves sinners. The 'God' means that the triune God of the Bible, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, use their love, their wisdom, and their power to rescue us. The Father planned salvation, the Son achieved salvation, and the Spirit applies salvation. 'Saves' means that God is the one who does the work. God has done everything necessary for salvation. He calls, He plans, He justifies, He sanctifies, He glorifies. It is His work from beginning to end. 'Sinners' means that God rescues us as He finds us: guilty, condemned, broken, lost, rebellious, and powerless. The gospel is an announcement that God saves sinners, like us. He reconciles us to Him.

I once heard a pastor describe it this way, He said that during World War 2 there were some Jews who were in a concentration camp, and the Nazi soldier that was guarding them left. When he left, he accidentally left his walkie talkie, so the Jewish prisoners grabbed the walkie talkie and they took it with them and they hid and they began to listen to messages over the walkie talkie, and what they heard amazed them. They heard about the day when the allied forces had stormed the beaches at Normandy, and they defeated the German forces and they captured key victories all over the European coast. They realized that even though conditions in the concentration camp hadn't changed, that the war was over, that victory had been won, and they began to live in the concentration camps as if the victory were already won, and the battle was already over.

It's a great illustration of the gospel. Through the person and work of Jesus, God has already done everything necessary to win the battle. He has won. He is victorious. In the gospel, we hear that announcement that God has saved us through Jesus, and as we believe it and apply it to our lives it changes the way that we live. So, what is the gospel? The gospel is the announcement that God saves sinners through Jesus Christ.

So, why do we focus on it? We focus on the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. The word that Paul uses here for salvation is a broad work that means complete deliverance. It means that we have been rescued from this state of peril and brought into a place of safety and security by God. It means that the gospel is the power of salvation for all of life. It's the power for our justification. Justification is not a word that we use very often in popular culture. Justification is a means to make something right. So, the word righteous is an adjective that means to be right. The word justification, or justify, means to make right, or to righteous-ify, as one of my professors said. So, to justify something means to make it right. But we don't use that, what we talk about is being complete, being whole, being enough. You might even see stuff on social media that says, 'You are enough.' Right? What they're talking about in that moment is being righteous. Inherently we know we're not enough even if we say we're enough. If we are really enough, would we have to do a social media post saying we're enough? Probably not. That's a tangent.

But what we do is we try to use the things of this world to try to make ourselves enough, so things like food and exercise, politics, even religion, sports, music. We use all these things to try to make ourselves right, and we create laws around these things to try to make ourselves right. What are we trying to do? We're trying to justify ourselves. The problem with all of these things is they are false gods, and they are false ways of justifying ourselves, and saving ourselves. They create laws that we can't keep and standards that we can't meet, and they

constantly put us on a performance treadmill that we can't live up to. How do you try to justify yourself? How do you try to make yourself right?

Well, a few years ago there was a study at Penn University. They were trying to figure out why they were having a rash of suicides on their campus. They had six suicides in about a thirteen- or fourteen-month span. What their research revealed was that their students were putting on what they called "the Penn face." The Penn face was this face that let everybody know that I'm fine, I'm okay, I've got everything together, I'm flawless and it's easy. Researchers said that "the Penn face" is the practice of acting happy and self-assured even when sad or stressed and it comes from the perception that one has to be perfect in every academic, co-curricular, and social endeavor. You had to have effortless perfection. What they found was that this face that they were wearing all the time was causing incredible mental health issues with their students on campus. It was destroying them. They looked fine on the outside but on the inside, they were dying.

It's easy to pick on people out there and say, 'Oh yeah, they've got those problems. They justify themselves, but I don't do that. I don't struggle with that. Let me ask you this, Christian, do you have a Sunday face? Do you have a face that you put on when you walk in this sanctuary that lets everybody know, 'Hey, I'm happy. I'm fine. Everything is okay. I've got it all together.' Do you have a spiritual resume that you're building through your church activities? Do you have holy hints that you like to drop that let everybody know just how well you're doing spiritually, when all the time you're really dying inside? Non-Christians aren't the only people who try to justify themselves. We try to justify ourselves as well.

What the gospel does is it's an announcement that God saves sinners by justifying them, by making them right through the person and work of Jesus. All these false gods, all these false laws that we use to try to justify ourselves are perverted forms of God's law, and Jesus kept God's law perfectly because we can't. By believing in Jesus, we're enough because Jesus is enough. We're complete because Jesus completes us. We're justified because Jesus justifies us. We're righteous because Jesus was righteous. This gospel rescues us from the performance treadmill of trying to justify ourselves and all of the sin and misery that comes from that, and it gives us the joy and peace of being justified based on Jesus. The gospel is the power for our justification.

The gospel is also the power for our sanctification. So, sanctification is the process of growing more and more like God, of growing in holiness. In a secular culture, we use words like self-improvement or growth. We just want to change or transform ourselves. Maybe you've heard this, it seems like I've heard this a lot recently, 'I want to become the best version of myself.' Which is not a bad thing! We all need to grow and change, right? It would be really sad, I'm almost forty, it would be really sad if I was a forty-year-old man that acted like a twelve-year-old still, right? So, some change and transformation is good. The problem is that our false gods of politics, religion, sports, food, all those things promise to change us, but they are all dependent on our power and our ability to execute them. If they start with us and our knowledge and our power, then it is going to end with us. So, let me ask you this, how are you doing with all your efforts to change yourself? How are you doing with your effort to fix your besetting sin?

Martin Luther was a protestant reformer, and this passage was instrumental in changing his life. He was a monk. He was a perfect monk. He did everything right. He prayed. He fasted. He taught. He read. He served. But he knew he was unholy, and he felt like he wasn't close to God. That way didn't work. So, he tried another way! He tried the way of self-help. He tried charity and sobriety, chastity, poverty, obedience, fasting, vigils, he did it all! I'm exhausted just

reading it! And it didn't work. So, then he tried confession. He would go and confess his sins all the time, sometimes daily, even up to six hours he would spend in a confessional confessing his sins. He would confess every little trivial sin that he had to the point where one of the guys in the confessional said, 'Man, come back when you actually have some real sins to confess.' Wouldn't that be nice if Steve said that to us when we went and talked to him about our sins! I'll never say that to you guys. Didn't work. He tried the mystical ladder. He tried surrendering himself and giving himself up wholly and completely, but nothing would work because all of his religious effort was inhibited by his power and his knowledge. He was trying to sanctify himself on his own.

In the gospel, we have an announcement that God saved sinners through His power and not theirs. He changes sinners through His power and His knowledge and not theirs. Jesus lived the life that we couldn't live. He died the death that we should have died, and He rose from the grave and the same spirit that carried Him through that, that elevated Him, that resuscitated Him, that rose Him is the Spirit that is at work in us! The power of the Holy Spirit! And in Philippians Paul says that He who began a good work in you will see it to completion. He says work out your salvation with fear and trembling because God is at work within you. The transformation, the change that we want is found in the power of the gospel and it's accessed by faith in Jesus. By believing in Him, God transforms us. Luther finally figured it out. Luther had his breakthrough. He called it his tower experience. For Luther, this may have been his conversion. He would probably say this was his conversion. But for us, I think this is a great example of how we can believe the gospel and it can help us break through in our sanctification.

This is what Luther says: "I greatly longed to understand Paul's epistle to the Romans, but nothing stood in the way more than the phrase 'the righteousness of God,' because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that though I was an impeccable monk, I stood every day before God feeling like a sinner, troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage Him." Sometimes this monk feels like that too, by the way. "Therefore, night and day I pondered, and then I saw the statement, 'the righteous will live because of faith' and then I grasped that through gift and sheer mercy, God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself reborn and to have gone from open doors and into paradise when I discovered that the distinction that the law is one thing, and the gospel is another. I broke through."

We focus on the gospel because that message is the power of God to help sinners and sufferers like us break through. It is the message that saves us. It is the message that transforms us, and it is a gift. It's a gift that we receive by believing in Jesus. As we proclaim the gospel, God works by and with our message to save sinners from beginning to end. We're unashamed of that message. We will continue to proclaim it week after week after week because that is the power of God for our salvation and it is the power of God for any sinner and sufferer. Paul says it's for the Jew and the Gentile. The Jews were the religious people, the good people, the moral people, the traditional people. Paul is writing this letter about salvation to Christians to teach them about the gospel. That means that the gospel is for us! The gospel is for our discipleship. The gospel is to rescue us from trying to save ourselves by our own good works. But it's not just for us, the gospel is for the Gentiles. The Gentiles were the unbelievers, the rebels, the irreligious people, the immoral people, the nontraditional people. The people we look at and say, 'but they're out there.' The gospel is for them! God loves them so much that He gave His only Son for them! God wants to save sinners. He wants to bring them into His family. The gospel is the

power of God for evangelism and discipleship for all peoples in all times in all places. So, we're going to keep going over the gospel every week.

You might be thinking, 'Okay, isn't that a little simplistic?' No. The gospel is not a simple thing. It is clear enough that even a child can understand it, but it is so infinitely complex that it can confound the oldest saint. I had the privilege of preaching at Christ Pres in Tulsa this morning and I got to warm up on this message, this morning. Afterwards a lady came up and she said, 'Thank you so much. I'm seventy years old and I still need to hear that message today as I did when I was five.' The gospel is like a diamond. We see its beauty the more we analyze it from different angles. You might be thinking, 'Okay, well, does that mean we're just going to ignore things like Christian education and spiritual disciplines and cultural issues and that kind of stuff?' No, we're going to teach that as we go through the Scriptures. We're going to teach through books of the Bible or major themes in Scripture, and as we come upon those things in the passage, then we'll address them.

But we want to try to stay focused on the gospel, because if you think about a tree, the gospel is like the trunk of the tree. We focus on the gospel and the trunk is what brings the nutrients up to the top of the tree, and up at the top of the tree you have fruit, and that fruit, missions and evangelism is a fruit and growth in grace is a fruit and fellowship and service is a fruit, and a Biblical word life view is a fruit. You don't get fruit by just putting fruit on the tree. You get fruit through the trunk. We're going to focus on the trunk to produce the fruit. You might be thinking, 'Won't it get repetitive?' Yes. It's repetitive. But that's a good thing. We need it. Martin Luther taught seminary classes later in his life and he had a student who came up to him after class, and he said, 'Doctor Luther, why do we always start every lesson going over the gospel?' Luther said, 'Because you forget it from the last lesson until this lesson.' We forget it. And so, we go over the gospel again and again and again so that we can get it into our bones, so we can receive it every day, every week.

So, what is the gospel? God saves sinners. Why do we focus on it? Because it's the power of God for our salvation. Lastly, how do we receive it? We receive it by faith. Look at verse 17: "17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" The righteousness of God comes from His faithfulness. All throughout Old Testament history we saw that God was faithful every step of the way and it culminated in the faithfulness of Jesus, and so we see that faithfulness, and His faithfulness to give us His spirit and to change us, and that brings out our faith. We put our trust in a faithful God. In the gospel we see that God faithfully saves sinners and that brings us the faith.

So, you have two things working here. We believe the gospel with our hearts and our minds, and then Paul said, "The righteous shall live by faith." We live out that faith in action. Faith demands action. Faith demands an action step. So, we believe with our heart and our mind and we live it out and we do it with our bodies. We do it in our lives. This idea of believing and doing, it keeps us from legalism on the one hand. Legalism says, 'Do this and you shall live.' And so, we create all these laws to avoid sin and we're going to do this and we're going to live. But that's not the gospel. And license on the other hand does this: license says, 'It doesn't matter how you live. You can live any way you want.' What we normally think to do is we think, well I'm being a little bit licentious, what I really need is some legalism in my life. Or I'm being a little legalistic, what I really need is some license in my life, I just need to let go. The gospel says no, no, no, no, no, you don't need a little legalism and a little license, that's not the answer. The answer is the gospel. It's a whole other way to live, to believe the gospel and to live each and every day out of that belief.

What does it look like? Let me close with this. Let me tell you what it looks like for me. I'm going to take off my Sunday face, take off my pastor hat, and just describe what it looked like for me to live by faith this week. I did not have a good week. The Bible talks about a root of bitterness that builds up in your heart, well my root started growing and by Thursday night it was a tree. I was miserable. Everything I said was tainted with my bitterness and I was taking my misery out on myself and on everybody in my family. I knew there was a problem. I knew that I needed to change but I couldn't change myself. I can't change me.

So, I laid down in bed Thursday night, I knew there was a problem, and I remembered that verse that Charlie read for the call to worship, Psalm 40:4 where it says, 'Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord.' I took about ten deep breaths and I prayed that prayer. I said, "Lord, I trust You." I got done with that and I was a little bit better, but I was still pretty much a mess. I thought, "Alright, what am I going to do tomorrow? It's my day off, Friday is my day off, but my sermon is not done. I could wake up in the morning and work on my sermon and get that done." Then I thought, "How good is it going to be if I work on a sermon while I'm stuck in bitterness and if I don't take half a day off? That's not going to be any good. That's not going to work." So, I thought, "Okay, what I really need to do is I really need to go play some golf. If I just go play golf, and I just have some fun, I just take some time to myself, then that will make everything better." And then I remembered that I had done that before and it did not make anything better. In fact, it made it worse. Because here's what happens, that bitterness is not in my home, that bitterness is in my heart. So, I just take it to the golf course with me and then I feel bad because I'm not serving anybody else, I'm serving myself, and all it does is create more shame and more guilt. So, I thought, "What am I going to do?" Then I remembered that Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before Him. So, I thought, "Okay, probably the best thing for me to do is to get up in the morning and just serve my family and do the best I can at serving my family." And so, that's what I did.

I'll be honest with you, it did not start out well. It's not like I woke up and all of a sudden, I was a saint! Between breakfast and lunch, I think I had to apologize to every person in my family at least once, some of them twice. Through the process of the day, somewhere in between mowing the lawn and making the kids' lunch, and taking the kids to the pool, that act of serving, of putting other people in front of me, it caused me to break through and that tree of bitterness was cut down. I began to laugh a little bit, I began to smile a little bit, and I began to enjoy some time with my family. I began to experience that blessedness that David talks about in Psalm 40:4. Now, will that bitterness come back? You bet it'll come back. It's come back a dozen times since Thursday.

Do you know what I needed on Thursday and Friday? I needed the gospel. Do you know what I needed on Saturday? The gospel. Do you know what I need today? The gospel. That's what it looked like for me to live by faith. What does it look like for you to live by faith in this moment right now, to believe that God saves sinners like you and me, that He loves us, and He wants us to believe Him and trust Him? That's what we're going to do, week in and week out, day by day, moment by moment, year after year. We're going to focus on the gospel and we're going to let God save us one moment at a time, one day at a time, until we get to glory. Let's pray that He would do it.