

## Being in a Relationship with Christ Ephesians 2:8-10

This morning we continue in our series explaining our vision - **Passionately following Jesus**. Last week we talked about the who - about Christ. We talked about how at the center of Christianity is Christ. He is our creator and redeemer and worthy of our praise and honor. This week we want to begin to talk about how it is that we follow Jesus. At Olathe Bible Church we use three words to help us talk about how it is that we are to be Passionately following Jesus. All three are verbs and describe something that we do, but while on this earth, we will never stop doing.

First, we talk about **connecting**. The most important first step we can take is to enter into a vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ. We do this by hearing and believing in the gospel. And when we enter into a relationship with Christ, we also become a part of His family, the church. And so we not only connect to Jesus in saving faith, we connect to His body in loving relationship.

Then, as we are connecting to Christ and His community, we are also in the process of **transforming**, we are in the process of becoming like Christ. Not only does Jesus save us from the penalty of our sin, but He is sanctifying and changing us. He wants to transform us in our knowledge, habits, character, relationships, and worldview so we don't live under the bondage of sin. Jesus didn't just come to save us from the penalty of sin, but to save us and transform us from the power and presence of sin.

Then, as we are connecting to Christ and His community and we are transforming to become more like Christ, we are also **servicing**. Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve. And so one of the great marks of someone who is following Jesus is that they are serving. At Olathe Bible, we talk about two main arenas that believers should be serving in: serving in ministry to the body and serving in mission to the world. Every one of us ought to be a part of helping to make disciples here at the church and we also ought to be a part of reaching out and sharing the gospel with the lost. We serve in ministry within the body and we serve in mission outside the walls.

Those are the three continual steps I am taking in my journey of passionately following Christ.

This week, I want us to hone in on the idea of connecting with Christ. And more specifically, I want us to focus in on the way we connect to Christ - through hearing and believing the gospel. The first step to passionately following Jesus is done by connecting to Christ in a saving relationship. That is done by hearing and believing the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

I am really big on the fundamentals. When it comes to cars, I think that some of the most important stuff on a car is the most unglamorous - the tires and the brakes. They are what helps the car stay on the road and stop when it needs to. No matter how long you own a car, you have to keep up with the tires and brakes. And no matter how new the car, you can't ignore the tires and brakes.

The most foundational truth you will ever learn is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The most profound thing you will ever comprehend and the most wondrous thing you will ever experience is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet, the most offensive thing you will ever hear and the most foolish thing you will ever hear is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

My understanding of the gospel is not rooted in reason, because I think we are finite beings and have very limited knowledge. Come on, even the smartest person in the world has very limited knowledge. My understanding of the gospel is not rooted in Church tradition. Tradition leaves us relying on the opinions of men and the church is fallible. While it is God's agent on earth, its history has demonstrated its frailness. And my understanding of the gospel is not rooted in my experience. My experiences in life have been very limited.

So where should I turn for the source of my knowledge regarding what the good news of Jesus Christ really is? I believe that I must turn to the Word of God. God himself has revealed what we are to know about Him and truth in His word. Turn with me briefly to 2 Timothy 3:16... READ. The word for inspired is literally "god breathed." The source of the word is not the human author who writes it, but the God who inspired or breathed it through that author.

There is a trend today to say that we are evolving, that the Word of God should be changing, that we are more enlightened now and can know things better. But I don't believe that. I believe God gave us a timeless baseline that defines ultimate reality. For those that call themselves Christ followers, that baseline, that ultimate standard is the Word of God. It is not church tradition. It is not human reason. It is not personal experience. It is the revelation of God Almighty. The gospel that we have is because of revelation from a loving God. It is not a man made path to earn God's favor. It is a God delivered path that we must respond to. And it is good news... but it is not negotiable news. The gospel does not change because God does not change and His truth conveyed in His Word does not change.

This morning I want us to grasp more firmly than ever the gospel of Jesus Christ. When I was in college, I was taught a very simple set of phrases to help me remember the gospel. So this morning I want to share them with you. And as we explain each two word phrase, you will see unfolded the four main points of the Gospel. The simple Gospel is summarized by four phrases - God's Love, Man's Problem, God's Solution, Man's Response.

The starting point for understanding the gospel is to answer the question, "Who made us and to whom are we accountable?" The beginning of our quest is answered in one word - God.

But today, when I say God, our view of Him is not shaped by what he has revealed. Today, God is defined more by a cultural understanding than shaped by a biblical worldview. God is seen as a somewhat grandfatherly figure who everyone seems to appreciate. Here is how one author describes God: *Thank goodness all that crankiness you read about sometimes in his old book-you know, having the earth swallow people up, raining fire down on cities, that sort of thing-all that seems to have faded in his old age. Now he's just a good-natured, low maintenance friend who's really easy to talk to-especially since he almost never talks back, and when he does, its usually to tell me through some slightly weird 'sign' that what I want to do regardless is alright by him. That really is the best kind of friend, isn't it?*

*You know the best thing about him, though? He doesn't judge me. Ever, for anything. Oh sure, I know that deep down he wishes I'd be better-more loving, less selfish, and all that-but he's realistic. He knows I'm human and nobody's perfect. And I'm totally sure he's fine with that. Besides, forgiving people is his job. Its what he does. After all, he's love, right? And I like to think of love as "never judging, only forgiving." That's the god I know. And I wouldn't have him any other way. ...And don't worry, we don't have to stay long. Really. He's grateful for any time he can get. (Greg Gilbert, What is the Gospel? Kindle ed. Locations 457-475.)*

That is the kind of God many people envision. A higher power grandfather who has wishes but no demands and can be safely ignored if you don't have time for him. He is very very very understanding of our frailties and problems. After all, he made us.

Friends, God does love us. All he does is out of love. I John tells us that God is love (4:16) and the starting point is not that we have loved God, but that he has first loved us (4:10). But it is more than that. So here is the phrase. **God's Love: We are accountable to the God who created us for His glory.** God is the one who created us and so we are accountable for our lives to him. The beginning of our message is that God created the world and then he created mankind. Look with me at Gen. 1:26-27. READ.

God created the world and then God created man and woman. That means you are a special creation of God. Material reality is not primary because it came into existence at the loving hands and by the loving words of God almighty. Everything has purpose. We are not acts of random chance. We are not genetic mutations and chromosomal accidents. We are the special expression of a loving God. You are a special expression of a loving God. And that means that we are not autonomous, but that we are created by Him, we were made by Him, that we have a purpose, and that we belong to God.

Remember when Moses wants to see God's glory and know His name? in Exodus 34:6-7 God says this... READ. How amazing is that! When Moses wants to know God's name and discover His glory, God declares that He is compassionate and gracious and slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness. We love that self declaration. But often, we stop there... but there is more to that verse. READ.

The second half of verse 7 upsets us. It explodes what we want from God. God is not a cosmic janitor who sweeps sin and evil and wickedness under the rug and ignores it and hopes you will too. We have done a pretty good job of convincing people that God is loving and compassionate and forgiving. But we have not done a good job of convincing them that he is righteous and holy.

Look with me at Psalm 97:1-2. READ. Our God has righteousness and justice as the foundation of His throne. He does not hide sin or hide from sin, he doesn't turn his back on sin... He must confront it. He must find a way to deal with sin that satisfies both his love and his righteousness, both his compassion and his justice.

And that brings us to our second main point of the gospel. **Man's Problem: We have sinned against God and are dead and will be judged and are under wrath.**

A few weeks ago I paid a ticket. I had been pulling out of Chick-fil-a in OP and didn't notice that there was no right turn on red at that stoplight. I must not have been the only one who didn't recognize that sign, because there was friendly officer waiting there to meet me soon after I made my mistake. When I paid the ticket, I wanted to plead 'no contest.' I didn't want to admit my guilt. And not only that, I really didn't feel all that mad about the violation. Rather, I felt trapped and that I had just made an innocent mistake. It wasn't really a moving violation and it didn't really warrant a policeman's time.

I think that we view God's laws much like we view our laws. Yes of course, I did wrong. But come on, there are people out there doing way worse things than me. Yeah, technically I did wrong and broke God's law and all that, but nobody else got hurt and really, I was kind of trapped. The infraction wasn't that big, and it was something people do all the time. So, we feel like we can plead no contest to sin.

But sin is not like our violations of some impersonal arbitrary traffic law. Sin is the rejection of God and His ownership over me. Sin is rejecting God's rule. Sin is declining God's care. Sin is denying God's authority. Sin is saying that I have the right to do what I want, when I want, and how I want.

Turn with me to Ephesians 2. READ vs. 1-3. What a picture of what we do and happens when we do it. Sin is devastating. We are dead - spiritually separated from God and having no inclination to draw to Him. We are actually following and living under the reign of Satan, the prince of the power of the air. We live in a way to carry out our passions and fleshly desires. And the result, we are children of wrath. Because of our sin, we have no life, but only death. We are not good, but rather wicked. We are not obedient, but rebellious. We are not sensitive to God and seeking His glory, but rather defiant and self glorifying. Romans 3:23 says that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Every part of us and our existence is stained and corrupted by sin and its power. We are enslaved to sin. It corrupts our mind and our personality and our feelings and our emotions and our will.

Hebrews 9:27 says that it is "appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment." This is one of the most frightful statements in the bible. You are going to stand before the living God, the righteous God, the holy God, the perfect God. You are going to stand before the one who is just and hates evil. And you are not going to be able to plead 'no contest.' You won't have an adequate explanation and you won't find a reasonable excuse. You will be held accountable for all of your sins. You will be held accountable for every single evil thought and every single selfish act.

The bible teaches us that the final destiny of the unrepentant and unbelieving sinner is a place of eternal, conscious, and vicious torment called hell. It is a place that is described as a lake of fire (Rev. 20:10) and Jesus called it a place of unquenchable fire (Mark 9:43).

Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." And that brings us to our third point. God love's us and wants us to experience that love. But we are sinful and dead and separated from God awaiting wrath. He is holy and righteous and so he must judge and punish our sin. So how do we satisfy God's righteousness and deal with our sin? **God's Solution: But God has acted to save us by Christ's death and resurrection.**

'But' is a wonderful word... Your daughter was in a car accident... but she is fine. That word but changes everything. In our case, the bad news of our sinful condition and the reality that God must punish sin is not the end of the story. There is a but... look with me back at Ephesians 2 again. READ vs. 4-10. Wow.

But God... You see, the answer to our problem of sin is not to seek to get better. Notice that salvation is not us seeking to earn God's favor, but God acting to make us righteous. In Hinduism and Buddhism and Islam and Mormonism and every other religion, man is seeking to get better to earn God's favor. But not in Christianity. You have to come to the point where you realize you are utterly depraved and sinful and that there is no way for you to earn God's favor. You can't be saved by works, but by grace. And you can't be saved by cleaning up your act, you can only be saved by God cleaning you up through Christ.

You and I deserve God's wrath and the punishment of hell for our sins. But Christ, the sinless lamb of God (John 1:29) died in my place and your place. He went to the cross, not paying for his sins, but your sins and my sins. He died in our place. He was the payment for our sin. When I got my ticket, if I didn't pay the penalty, then a warrant would have been issued for my arrest. When you sinned just once, you no longer could stand in the presence of a holy

God. And so you were condemned to death. And death has ravaged our world, our bodies, our relationships, our hearts and our communities. And you are under a sentence of wrath apart from Jesus. And you can't pay the fine. So there hangs over your head the reality that a warrant for your eternal punishment of hell has been issued. And when you die, if you die apart from Christ, you will pay your own penalty.

Look with me at 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. READ. There it is. Christ died for your sins. He was buried, then he rose again. His payment was accepted. He overcame death and he can now give you forgiveness and life. He holds the keys to life.

So how do I myself, how do I come to be included in that salvation? What makes it good news for me? That is the last phrase. We must respond to what Christ has done for us. **Man's Response: I take hold of God's gift of salvation by repentance from sin and faith in Jesus.**

I will never forget trying to get my kids to jump off the edge of the pool into my arms. For hours it seemed like when my kids were two or so, I stood in the water trying to convince him that it was safe and that he could jump into my arms and I would catch him... but it was just too scary. Finally, he did... and I caught him and then he couldn't wait to "do it again Daddy." I think that is a universal experience with dads and the pool and sons and daughters.

In Acts 26, Paul is explaining his ministry and how God called him to preach the gospel. In this, he gives a great summary of what we mean by accepting God's gift of salvation by repentance from sin and faith in Jesus. READ vs. 15-18.

Repentance is when you and turn to God from sin. Repentance is turning to light from darkness. Repentance is turning to God's power from Satan's power. Repentance means that you no longer are looking anywhere for the answers, but have turned to God as the answer. And then you must accept the gift of salvation by faith.

Look again at Ephesians 2. READ 8-10. We can't earn salvation by good works. It is a gift. It has to be received by faith. Faith, biblically speaking, is to rely completely upon. It is a rock solid, truth grounded, personal and profound trust in the crucified and risen Jesus to save you from sin and its power and ultimately its presence.

You see, when we accept Christ by faith and what he did for us, then God declares that Christ's payment was our payment. His resurrection is to become our resurrection. We are righteous not because of us, but because of Christ. Christ's perfect life offered on the cross pays our sin debt. And so we are not declared righteous even because of our faith, but because of Christ.

Mark 1:15 says "Repent and believe in the gospel."

Repentance is turning away from sin and seeing it for what it really is and hating it and wanting something else. As you repent and turn from self, the only way you can do that is if you are turning to God. You can't change you and your outlook. Even your awareness of sin and its gross evil has to come from the light that God shines on your life. So when you turn to God in faith and trust in Jesus alone for your salvation, then God makes you a new creature, he comes into your life, and the journey of eternal life begins.

So what are the implications for the gospel...

First, let me speak to the church. Look with me at Ephesians 3:7-12. Wow church, it is our job through proclaiming this gospel to unfold the mysteries of God and to make known His manifold wisdom not just to those on this earth, but to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies! We must not only do good, we must proclaim the gospel

boldly. People cannot be saved by good, but by responding in repentance and faith to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the only way they can be saved (Acts 4:12; John 14:6).

Second, let me speak to the believers. Look with me Gal 2:14. READ. Paul is confronting Peter because of his hypocrisy. But what I want you to catch here is that the ground of his accusation is that Peter had gotten out of step, or out of line with the gospel. Friends, listen. You will never, never, never graduate beyond the gospel. All you and I learn to do as believers, all we learn to practice in regard to our relationships and our perspectives and our character is rooted in the gospel. Every sin we commit is because we have turned away from the truth of the gospel. Every idol we have is because we have turned away from the gospel. Every broken relationship is because we have turned away from the gospel. When you turned to God, it was because of the gospel. And so now as a believer, don't try to be religious, be gospel driven.

Religion is when you believe that if you obey God He will love you. The gospel says because God has loved me through Jesus Christ I can obey Him.

The goal of religion is to get from God such things as health, wealth, insight, power, and control. The goal of the gospel is not the gifts God gives, but rather God as the gift given to us by grace.

Religion is about what I have to do. The gospel is about what I get to do.

Religion sees hardship in life as punishment from God. The gospel sees hardship in life as sanctifying affliction that reminds us of Jesus' sufferings and is used by God in love to make us more like Jesus.

Religion is about me. The gospel is about Jesus. (Mars Hill Website).

And third, to you who are here this morning and have never repented of your sins and placed your faith in Jesus Christ, I plead with you, turn to God and away from sin. Accept Christ's death on the cross as payment for your sins. Believe God raised him from the dead and that he can forgive you and make you a new person and come into your life and give you a new heart!