



“As You Have Received Him” Colossians 2:1-10 Steve Harden 10/4/20

Turn with me to Colossians 2. As you know, Shane is finishing out his semester at OSU and he’s going to be sharing the pulpit responsibilities with me, so you’ll be hearing from him in Mark and from me in Colossians this fall.

You know, I’ve never met a Christian who doesn’t want to grow in their faith, ever. I was trying to figure out this week, and I gave up, but I think I’ve talked to hundreds of people who are so discouraged with their spiritual growth. They’ve longed for spiritual maturity. They’ve longed to just shed that sin that so clings to them. They’ve longed to have strong faith and trust in their Father when going through really hard times, to trust Him and know that He has a plan for their lives. And they know it to be true, but sometimes it just doesn’t feel like that and we just want to grow in our faith, to embrace the fact that He has that plan and He’s working out that plan in their lives. I know for me, I suppose that the greatest longing of my heart is to sense, to truly sense the presence of my Savior, to feel His presence. I know He’s always here, but to grow in that experiential understanding, that Jesus is here. It’s the greatest desire of my heart and I long for that more and more.

But the hundred-dollar question tonight is how do we pursue, how do we grow as followers of Jesus? How does that happen? There are a lot of people who would give you a lot of different answers. Most of them are not very helpful. Some of them are. Some of them aren’t. There are lots of books being published. I think most of them are being published by the “More” family. Do you know the More family? You know, the one that tells us the way to grow is to read your Bible more, to pray more, to journal more, attend church more, evangelize more, pursue your theological education more, attend more Bible classes, read more Christian books, listen to more Christian music, listen to more preachers online, Lord help us, and the list goes on! The “More” family. Obviously, none of these things are bad, so please don’t leave and say, ‘Well, Steve’s not for reading your Bible every day.’ That’s not what we’re talking about. They are not bad or wrong and we need to take spiritual disciplines to heart, but they’re not ends in and of themselves. They’re not the end goal. Alone they will not bring about the result that our heart so longs for. They are a means to an end, not the end in and of themselves. They alone will not satisfy your longing. Paul addresses, in our text tonight, just how we may pursue growing in grace.

Colossians 2, we’ll begin reading in verse 1.

“¹ For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, ² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.



⁶ Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.”

You see, there were false teachers who were teaching things that just didn't quite line up, didn't square, and they were being divisive. In both verses 4 and 8 there, Paul says, avoid them! I don't want you to be deceived! The phrase, 'plausible arguments' there, is court language. It talks about an attorney who knows his client is guilty and yet, through the power of his argument, he gets him set free. The plausible arguments. You see, the Gnostics, or the false teachers here, their teaching was around how to become a better Christian, how to grow in grace. They taught that it was good and right to believe the gospel, to talk about Jesus and accept Him into your life but if you're really going to grow in grace, if you're really going to grow in faith, you kind of need to leave those elemental things behind and learn the special knowledge they had, and only they had it. They were the elite, the religious elite, the spiritual ones, the ones who were set apart and they had this secret knowledge that you need to understand and come along with us and we'll help you, is what they said. If you are to grow and mature you need us to become wiser. We are the ones in the know. But Paul says, don't listen to them! Don't listen to them. Instead, he says this in verse 6, "As you have received Him, so walk in Him." This statement begs two questions. How did we receive Him? And how do we walk with Him in the same way we have received Him?

So, how did we receive Him? Well, to some degree, all of us then, when we came to Christ, we recognized that we had a great need. We discovered that we were sinners and that our sin offended a Holy God. We experienced guilt and shame and the weight of sin, to some degree, weighed heavily upon us. And it only increased when we realized that there wasn't anything we could do, in and of ourselves, to rid ourselves of that guilt and shame. And then somebody told us the good news of Jesus Christ, somehow, we heard the message of Jesus and as Charlie said earlier, God loves me. We heard that He loved us enough that He would send His only, dearly loved, Son to the earth to live a perfect life and then go to a cross to pay the penalty of the sins that we have committed. We learned that we should be paying that debt, we should be paying that penalty, but instead, Christ took it away and now we don't have to pay it anymore. We heard that God offered this forgiveness to us if indeed we would trust that His death was adequate payment for the penalty of sin. And so, we received that message. We believed. We had faith. We received the message of Jesus.

The word 'received' here is an interesting word. It's a technical term that speaks of a particular authoritative teaching that has been delivered and accepted. The word brings to mind Moses. Do you remember when he brought the tablets down from the mountain? He received that law from God, and he delivered it to the Israelites, and they accepted it. Earlier in the book of Colossians, Epaphras received the message from Paul. He is now delivering this message to the Colossians, and we trust that they are accepting that message from Paul. In the same way, we



received the authoritative message of the gospel from God about Jesus. It was delivered to us from someone or in some way and we accepted it; we received that authoritative message.

Now the authoritative message that is given to us is the message of Jesus: who He is and what He has done. Period. That is the authoritative message. Now, there's a lot to that message but it's all about Jesus, who He is and what He is done. There in verse 6 you see a phrase that is really important, and it's really easy for us to gloss over. It says, "As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord." All three of those terms are really, really important. They are a summary of who He is. You think of Christ, the Messiah, the one who was promised to Adam and to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob: the Messiah! The one who had been predicted for thousands of years. Jesus is the one! The one who was commissioned by God to come to the earth to rescue a people for His own possession. The authorized representative from God to man is the Christ! Christ *Jesus*! Jesus was a historical man. He was just as real as you and me. The man who was fully God and fully man. The man who died to pay the penalty for the sins of His people. Christ Jesus the *Lord*! The one to whom all creation will one day gather at His feet and bow their knees. That one who created the world and is King and ultimate authority over the world. The one whom early day Christians would give their lives to in the face of a cruel Roman government who said, 'Say Caesar is lord,' and they said no, "Jesus is Lord!" He is the one from whom they took the courage to stand strong against the whole Roman Empire and gave their lives for the sake of being able to call Him, Lord. The one from whom we, by faith, receive! Like Thomas, when Jesus bid Thomas to put his finger in the nail print in His hand, to stick his hand in His side where the spears stuck Him, and Thomas fell at His feet and said, "My Lord and my God!" You see, Christ Jesus the Lord! All three together describe who He is and who we must accept Him to be as we receive this authoritative message. The gospel is about the person of Jesus. The gospel is not about a system of beliefs that will save you from Hell. It's not a code of ethics. It's not a rule of morality or a philosophy of thought. It's the good news that a person, fully God, fully man, came from heaven to rescue you! That's what the gospel is about. It's about Jesus: who He is and what He has done.

So, "as you have received Him, so walk in Him." How do we walk in Him in light of receiving Him? The term 'walk' in the Scriptures is an all-encompassing term. It encompasses all moral and ethical and social and mental and spiritual elements of life; it's an all-encompassing term. How do you live in relationship with others; how do you respond to the tests of life; how do you make decisions on where you spend your time and your money? So, how do we grow in our faith? As you have received Him, then that becomes the model that you are to use to walk out this faith in all areas of life. As, or in the same way, that you have received Him, so walk in Him.

So, what does that mean? To grow in your faith, you need to go deep with Jesus. That's it. Nothing more. Everything in life bows its knee, to growing deep with Jesus. Look at verse 7, he says, "Rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught." Getting rooted down, firmly established in Him, being built up in Him. You see, Paul has been setting the stage for this one phrase in chapter 2 verse 6, since the beginning of this book. In chapter 1:15-20 we see the most succinct, the most powerful, summary and description of the



person of Christ found anywhere in Scripture. He has told us about who Jesus is. In verses 21-22 we see that he describes the fact that we were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, but Jesus has reconciled us by His death. Then in verses 24-29 he describes himself as one appointed to go to the Gentiles, all those non-Jews like you and me, or at least most of us. He went to all of us. He was the apostle appointed to go and tell them about Jesus so that they could mature in Christ.

He told them that he longed for them to experience encouragement and unity as a body of Christ, how? Look at verses 2 and 3, he says, “² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” We find joy and encouragement and hope and joy in growing in the knowledge and wisdom regarding Jesus. The word knowledge is really facts, the truth, whatever is the truth, being crystal clear about who He is and what He has done. Understanding then describes having known this truth and being able to use the implications about what is true about Jesus in every element of life, in knowledge and wisdom and understanding.

I love the picture he gives us in verse 7 about being rooted and built up in him and established in the faith. The picture is a tree. Now, if you payed attention at all in junior high science, you know that the roots of a tree go way down deep and you can't see them, and in general they are about as broad and about as wide as the tree is broad and wide. Not always, but generally it is a truth. The life and the health of the tree is found in its roots. The unseen root system is what feeds the tree and the branches and the leaves. My friends, your unseen root system, your beliefs and understanding about Jesus, must be strong and vibrant if you want what is visible to be strong and vibrant. All those unseen things that nobody else sees, what you believe about Jesus and who He is and what He has done. It is from those nutrients, if you will, that you receive the joy and growth in grace. Look, having a superficial understanding about Jesus is okay if you're a new believer. We all started there. There's no way that we should look down on anybody having a superficial knowledge of Jesus. Great! Praise God! Now, go further! Sink your roots down deep and understand who He is and what He has done. Don't be satisfied with superficiality!

An idea about how this works is in 1 John 3:2, one of my favorite verses, favorite thoughts, John writes, “Beloved,” and he's talking about the second coming of Christ and what's going to happen at that time, okay? He says, “Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared;” basically, we don't know. We're going to be different; we're going to be transformed; we're going to be changed at the second coming of Christ, but we just don't know exactly what that's going to be like, “but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” Look, on that day, our sanctification will be complete and full. Sanctification is a theological word that simply means the fact that from the point that we become a Christian, the Holy Spirit is at work within us, changing us, growing us up to be more like Jesus, to look more like Jesus; that's sanctification. In that day, when He returns, we will see Him as He is and we will be transformed into the image of Jesus by seeing Him.



Now, apply that right now. In the same way, the more we pursue seeing Jesus as He is, the more we hunger to know Jesus and His beauty. To the degree we go deep in understanding what He has done for us, we see Jesus and it transforms us. That's how spiritual growth happens. It's all about Jesus: who He is and what He has done and rooting deeply, being firmly established in the truth! My favorite preacher is Charles Spurgeon, from a bygone era, but this is how he describes it, he says, "To wake up in the morning and to have our first thoughts full of the Savior, to seek His guidance and blessing in everything that is to happen to us during the day, to go down to our morning meal with our hearts affection fixed on Jesus, to go off to business or the workshop in the full consciousness that He's going with us. When our hands are busy and our minds are occupied with our trading or our working, still realizing that our heart is with our beloved in the secret place where none can follow us. And so, as the hours run on through the noontide heat, Christ is our shade and shelter. In the cool of the evening, His company is our supreme delight, and then as we retire to our bed, our last thought being, 'How sweet to rest forever on our Savior's breast.'" Christian, this ought to be our way of living, and if you are right with God, this should be the way you live. You walk in Him. Do you see? Do you hear? Being with Him, being in the presence of our Savior. Growing in grace is not doing more. What you do, do it with Him.

So how do I know if I'm walking with Him, Steve? Well in the very last part of verse 7, I think he gives us a hint. He says, "6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, *abounding in thanksgiving*" [emphasis added]. Abiding, overflowing in thanksgiving. Look, gratitude is a sign that you are truly being rooted and built up in Him. If gratefulness does not mark your life, then it's an indicator that perhaps you're not walking with Him as you have received Him. Thankfulness and gratitude are not small things. The reality is that when we are growing in Christ, consciously focus on the person and work of Jesus, we cannot help but have a heart that is overflowing with gratitude because He has done everything for us. Abounding in thanksgiving. I have no doubt that everyone in this place tonight who is a follower of Jesus longs to go deeper with Him, for their faith to be strengthened in Him, to display Christ's likeness in our lives. It's universal among Christians. But we so often attempt to do so in ways that will not produce the fruit that we want. Sometimes we try so very hard, but we're looking for life and joy and happiness in the wrong place! "As you have received Him, so walk in Him"!

So how do you do that? At the risk of getting into the "Mores," I don't want to do that, right? But let me give you some suggestions. The first one I would say is build some margin into your life. Far too often we are marginalist people. I don't have to go very deep in that, you understand. We schedule every waking moment. But let me encourage you to build some margin into your life to just ponder and think about the person and work of Jesus. Gain some margin. The second thing I would encourage you to do is to preach the gospel to yourself every day. Take some time and rehearse the gospel to yourself. What has God done for me? Why am I here? Why am I a Christian? Preach the gospel to yourself. To do that over and over again takes some knowledge. A superficial understanding of the gospel, again, is a great place to start, but don't stay there! When you read the Word, or read a book, read to discover Jesus, who He is and what



He has done. Read your Bible in that way, searching for this. You don't know where to start? Well, let me give you two suggestions, in terms of books, well first, read your Bible, right? It's all about Jesus, trust me. Two things: I recommend to you the Children's Catechism. You say, well I'm not a child? That's okay, it still reads well. My favorite catechism is the Children's Catechism because it's short, succinct, and to the point. I have found it to be a great prompter to worship. Just the Children's Catechism. If you can't get into that, get into the Westminster Shorter Catechism. But start with the Children's Catechism, I think it will bless you. Just some ideas. But my friends, ponder this statement: "As you have received Him, so walk in Him." Let's pray.

Father in Heaven, we come to You so grateful that You did not hide the truth of Jesus and the gospel behind some weighty intellectual, theological tomes. But You sent it, and Him, to people just like us, people who need Jesus and who can tend to get bent out of shape trying so hard. Father, would You just burst upon our understanding that it's not about trying, it's about being and it's about knowing Jesus and reveling in His love for us and what He's done for us. Show us His beauty. Show us the altogether lovely One and help us grow in our faith. I pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.