

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, February 23, 2020**

**ROOTED AND ESTABLISHED (2)**

**Colossians 2: 6-7**

**A PARABLE**

My friend Jim Byrne – *our* friend Jim Byrne, who has preached here on many occasions over the years and led a couple of our church family retreats some years back – often speaks of lessons he learned from one of his mentors, Dr. Richard Halverson. Dr. Halverson was the Pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Church in Bethesda for more than 20 years (1958-1981), before serving for 14 years (1981-1995) as the Chaplain of the US Senate. Here is a paraphrased parable Dr. Halverson liked to tell:

Someday down the road – 10, 30, even 50 years from now – you’re going to meet an old man or woman, and you’ll be catching up with him or her. What kind of old person are you going to meet? Maybe you will meet a gentle, wise, gracious, loving person – someone who has grown old gracefully, surrounded by friends who call him blessed, friends who have been blessed by what her life has meant to them. Or you may encounter a bitter, disillusioned, dried-up old buzzard without a good word for anyone – soured, prickly, judgmental, and alone.

That old person, says Halverson, will be you. He or she will be the composite of everything you say, do, and think – today, tomorrow, next year, and on. Your mind will be molded by what you have believed. Your heart will be turning out what you have put into it. Every little thought and every deed will go into this old person.

Every day in every way, Halverson says, you are becoming more and more like yourself. You’re beginning to look more like yourself, to think more like yourself, to talk more like yourself. You’re becoming yourself more and more. (Just to be clear, Halverson is not talking about the effects of dementia on a person’s outlook or behavior. Dementia often distorts a person’s character as the brain malfunctions.)

What Halverson is saying is this: If you live your life only in terms of what’s in it for you, or what you can get out of it, you will get smaller, drier, harder, crabbier, and more self-centered. But if you open your life to others (and, most of all, to God), if you think in terms of what you can give and how you can contribute to the well-being of others, the old person you are becoming will be larger, softer, kinder, more gracious, and will cast a shadow of blessing that touches many lives. (Adapted from Daniel Henderson, *The Deeper Life*, 165-166.)

Think about it: How do you become the person you want to be? More importantly, how do you become the person God wants you to be? How do you become the

person God created you to be? How do you become more and more like Jesus in the way you think and speak and act? How do you become a person whose life radiates with the love and grace of Jesus? How do you cultivate a heart – a life – of wisdom, love, and godliness?

Paul gives us the answer in Colossians 2:6-7. Listen to these words again:

*So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened (or established) in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*

You could say that this is the main, overarching message of the letter to the Colossians as a whole, at least in terms of Christian living. This is the central message of encouragement or exhortation that Paul gives to the Colossians. And Paul's advice in these two verses teaches us how to become the persons – the Christ-centered, Christ-exalting men and women – God has created us to be.

### **JUST AS YOU RECEIVED CHRIST**

Let's look at what Paul says. In verse 6, he begins: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord ..." To receive Jesus as Savior and Lord of your life is to believe and embrace the gospel message of salvation and new life to be found only in and through Jesus Christ. To receive Jesus as Savior and Lord of your life is to accept His saving work on your behalf. To receive Jesus as Savior and Lord of your life is to willingly submit to His loving, sovereign, and gracious rule over every area of your life.

To receive Jesus as Savior and Lord is not the ultimate or final goal of your life. It is not the goal of the Christian life. It is just the beginning. It is the starting point of the Christian life, the genesis of a personal relationship with our God and Savior that will last until you take your last breath and then continue through all eternity. Receiving Jesus Christ by faith as He is offered to us in the gospel is just the start of a life of fellowship with God and growing in grace that will last a lifetime.

You have to understand this: Being born to Christian parents doesn't make you a Christian. Growing up in a Christian home doesn't make you a Christian. Being baptized doesn't make you a Christian. Going to church doesn't make you a Christian. Teaching Sunday School or Children's Church or serving in some other ministry of the church doesn't make you a Christian, as important and beneficial as any of these are. Having a reputation for sound moral character or an impressive resume of church or community service doesn't make you a Christian. Even knowing and believing all the right doctrine, as necessary as it is for right living, doesn't make

you a Christian. You can know the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and believe all the right things; you can have all your theological ducks in a row, and still miss heaven by about 18 inches. Eighteen inches is the distance from your head to your heart. If you know all the essential truths of the Christian faith in your head, but do not embrace the message of the gospel in your heart by trusting faith in Jesus Christ, you will miss heaven by about 18 inches. I don't believe Jesus wants that to happen to any of you. He wants "whosoever will" to come to Him in trusting faith.

What makes you a Christian? You become a Christian by "receiving Christ Jesus as (Savior and) Lord." You become a Christian by admitting that you are a sinner who needs a Savior, by believing that Jesus is the Savior you need, by trusting Him to save you from your sins and pledging to live your life as one of His followers.

Receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord of your life is where the Christian life begins. Without this personal step of faith, you are not a Christian, regardless of what you may think of yourself. Apart from this personal step of faith, you are not a genuine follower of Jesus, regardless of how other people see you. Unless you take this step of faith in Jesus, you have no real hope of salvation and eternal life with God.

So, the inescapable question for each one of us is this: Have you received Jesus as Savior and Lord of your life? Have you embraced the gospel message personally? Have you acknowledged that you are a sinner in the sight of God and without hope for your salvation except in His sovereign mercy? Have you turned away from your sins, your unbelief, your self-righteousness, your pride, and your desire to be in control of your own life, and turned to God in repentance and faith? Have you taken this step of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you?

If not, now is the time to do it. Today is the day to come home to Jesus. Today is the day God desires to welcome you into His kingdom family. Today is the day to begin the adventure of living your life as a follower of Jesus Christ. You can take this step by simply praying a prayer from your heart. You can pray this prayer with me, or one like it:

"Lord God: I confess that I am a sinner and I am unable to make myself right before You. I can't make myself a Christian or live a Christian life without You. I thank You for sending Jesus to die for sinners like me. Here and now I repent of my sins. I trust in the saving work of Jesus and receive Him as Savior and Lord of my life. Help me to live from now on as a follower of Jesus by Your grace and power. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen."

The Bible says that whoever trusts in Him – in Jesus – will never be put to shame (Romans 10:11), and that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord in faith will be saved (10:13). Which means that if you humbly and sincerely ask Jesus to save you

from your sins, and if you sincerely trust in Him, you will receive Him as your Savior and Lord, and you will belong to Him. By the grace of God, you will be adopted into God's family through faith in Jesus and His atoning death on the cross.

### WALK IN HIM

This is where the Christian life begins. This is where your Christian life begins. But receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is just the beginning. Your sins are all forgiven – past, present, and future. Hallelujah! You have peace with God. Hallelujah! You have the promise and assurance of eternal life. Hallelujah! And now that you have received Christ as Savior and Lord, you have the next 5, 10, 30, 50, or however many more years God gives you to live for Him. To live *in* Him. To live *with* Him and *for* Him in a relationship of faith, hope, and love.

As one who has received Jesus as Savior and Lord, now – and for as long as you live – you are to “walk in Him” (Colossians 2:6). The word “walk” (*peripateo* in Greek) is one of Paul's favorite words. He uses it 31 times in his letters in the New Testament as a way of describing how to live (or how not to live) as Christians in the world. The NIV translates *peripateo* with the dynamic meaning of “to live.” Here are some examples of how Paul uses the word:

In Colossians 1:10, Paul prays that the Colossians may “*walk* in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (ESV).

He uses the word again in Colossians 3:7, where, in the course of describing the qualities of a life ruled by the sinful nature [such things as “sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which,” Paul says, “is idolatry,” as well as “anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language” (3:5, 8)], he says: “You used to *walk* in these ways” – with the clear implication that, as followers of Jesus in whom the Holy Spirit has taken up residence, there is no longer any place for such things in our lives.

He also uses this word in Colossians 4:5, where he says: “*Walk* in wisdom toward outsiders ...” (ESV). In other words, watch how you conduct yourself, how you relate to unbelievers, so that you may be a faithful, winsome, grace-filled, and godly witness to them – so that the Lord may use the witness of your words and life to draw them to Himself in faith.

In one of his better-known sayings, in 2 Corinthians 5:7, Paul says: “We *walk* by faith, not by sight” (ESV).

In Galatians 5:16, Paul writes: “So I say, *walk* in the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (ESV) – i.e., the sinful nature.

In Ephesians 2, Paul describes our condition of spiritual deadness apart from Christ, and then explains the gospel of salvation by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. He begins, in verses 1 and 2: “As for you” – meaning all of us – “you were (spiritually) dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you once *walked* ....” Then, in verse 10, after describing what God has done to save us through Christ, he explains God’s purpose for our lives: “For we are God’s workmanship” – His masterpiece – “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should *walk* in them.”

He uses the word three more times in Ephesians:

First, in Ephesians 4:1, where he says: “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to *walk* in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” as followers of the Lord Jesus.

Second, in 4:17, where he warns the believers in Ephesus that they “must no longer *walk* as the (unbelieving) Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.” As followers of Jesus, we are called to be different from the unbelieving world in which we live. Jesus wants us to be different – not for the sake of just being different, as if there is something inherently virtuous in that. He wants us to be different from the world for His sake. For the sake of His name. For the sake of His honor and glory. Jesus does not want us to become “so well-adjusted to (our) culture that (we) fit into it without even thinking” (Romans 12:2, MSG). Instead, He wants us to “take (our) everyday, ordinary life – (our) sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering” (12:1, MSG). Jesus wants you and me to walk – to *live* – like believers who have embraced the gospel in a personal way and who desire to live all of life *coram deo*. *Coram deo* is a Latin phrase that means before the face of God, under His sovereign and gracious rule, and unto His glory. *Coram deo*.

Third, Paul uses the word in Ephesians 5:2. After urging us to “be imitators of God, as beloved children” (5:1), he instructs us to “*walk* in love” – to live lives characterized supremely by love, “just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

Elsewhere, in 1 Thessalonians 4:1, Paul reminds the believers in Thessalonica of how they “ought to *walk* and to please God.”

A little later, in 4:12, he encourages them to “*walk* properly” toward their unbelieving neighbors, in order that their daily life might win the respect of their neighbors.

## LIVE LIKE A BELIEVER

If we have received Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord, our *walk* as believers – the way we live our lives as followers of Jesus – is supposed to show it. Can the people God has put in your life see that Jesus lives in you and that you are walking with Him each day? How about your friends at school? The guys or girls you like to hang out with? The people you work with? Your neighbors? Is it evident in your daily life – your sleeping, eating, playing, going-to-work, hanging-out, social-media, walking-around life – that you are walking with Jesus? This is something you and I need to be intentional about every day. Every morning we need to renew our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to walk – to live – in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord, in a way that reflects His grace and truth and love in a world that desperately needs it all.

If – or since – you have received Jesus as Savior and Lord of your life, you need to live like a believer. Every day. So do I. If all the professing Christians in our country were to actually live like believers, don't you think the moral, social, and political condition of our country would be much better than it is? I do. We can't fix everything we think is wrong with our country, but one thing we can do is to make sure that we think and speak and live and walk and act like believers who live, as I said a few minutes ago, *coram deo*: Before the face of God (nothing hidden from Him), under His sovereign and gracious rule, and unto His glory.

If we are to live like believers, we must be, as Paul says, “rooted and built up in (Christ), strengthened” – established – “in the faith as (we) were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness” (Colossians 2:7).

We'll continue to talk about these things next Sunday.

To put a wrap on today's message, let me ask you: What kind of person are you becoming? When you meet yourself in 5 years, or 10, or 30, or 50 years from now, what kind of person will you have become? What are you doing now to insure that you are becoming the person God has designed and desires you to be?

## 2 PETER 1:3-11

I want to leave you with these words from 2 Peter 1. I shared this passage with the Elders at the Session meeting on Thursday night. These are among the last recorded words we have from Peter. Listen to 2 Peter 1:3-11:

(God's) divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has

given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature [that is, that you and I may become more and more like Him through the grace and power of His Spirit at work in us] and escape the corruption of the world caused by evil desires.

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith knowledge; to knowledge, self-control; to self-control, perseverance; to perseverance, godliness; to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, they are nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

Therefore, my sisters and brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Lord, let it be so in us, to the glory of Your name. Amen.