



Moving People toward Christ, Part 3 -- Establish

Colossians 2:6-7

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We're in the middle of a series on "Moving People toward Christ," in which we're seeking to provide clarity on what it means to be a follower of Jesus and to help others be His followers as well. We're looking at what it means to join Christ on His mission and ministry to gain more followers. What steps of growth should we be taking to become closer to Him and more conformed to His image?

It can be easy for us to get into the pattern of coming to a worship service once or twice a month, maybe weekly. We might give an offering occasionally or even regularly. But even if we have a habit of listening to sermons and singing, we still should step back and ask ourselves, "What's the point of this? Is this what's at the heart of following Jesus?" When Jesus calls us to Himself and sends us out into the world, what's at the center of that calling?

In Mark 1:14-15, as Jesus began his ministry, we read this: *"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'"* This summarizes His ministry, as he proclaimed the good news. He called people to repentance—turning away from everything they had been trusting in—and to belief.

Then right after that, Mark tells us that Jesus began calling people to follow Him: *"He saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men'"* (Mark 1:16-17). From the very beginning, as Jesus began calling followers, He made the point that it wouldn't be a life of secluded devotion to God. Rather, following Jesus means we will be involved in helping others find and follow Him.

In the Great Commission, as Jesus was sending us out into this world, He said, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you"* (Matthew 28:19-20). As He sends us out, His central message to us is that we should be making disciples. This process has two parts. First, they are to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy

Spirit, symbolizing their conversion and entrance into God's family and Kingdom. But more than getting people saved and baptized, we are to be *"teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."*

We find a similar commissioning passage in Acts 1:8, where He says, *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul gives us an identity as ambassadors. So in context, what does Jesus call us to be? What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? Clearly there's a central component, that of our involvement in the lives of others, helping them to also follow Christ.

We are His ambassadors, His representatives, and God makes His appeal to the world through us. In Paul's words, *"We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God"* (2 Corinthians 5:20). This should also be part of our ministry: imploring others to be reconciled to God. Paul continues, *"For our sake [God] made [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

We've spoken earlier in this series of the two kingdoms: the domain of darkness and the Kingdom of His Son. In these two categories there is a spectrum of people. We read in Colossians 1:13-14, *"He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."* Even in this room, there are probably people still in the domain of darkness. If that's you, we're glad you're here today. We hope you will hear this good news and would repent and believe the gospel.

In the first part of this series Patrick spoke of engaging people: showing love to our neighbors through conversations, through listening, asking good questions and simply being friendly. Many people in our world have little or no contact with Christians and know very little about Christ and His gospel. We need to show others His love even before we can begin to evangelize them.

As people become more drawn to Christ through our love, we then are able to tell them the good news: that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). We can explain that all of us are sinners fully deserving God's wrath, but that we can have redemption. We can be rescued by grace alone through faith alone. And on the other side of the cross is the Kingdom of God's Son.

Today we'll focus on the process of being established in the Kingdom. What happens when a person is born again? What is needed for them to be established in the faith? Next week Patrick will talk about equipping people who are in the Kingdom. The main difference between

establishing and equipping is that equipping focuses on the whole process of engaging, evangelizing and establishing others now that we ourselves are established in the Kingdom.

As I said, some of you here are still in the category of needing to be rescued, needing to be saved. More of you, I think, are already trusting in Christ, so we're trying to help you think about engaging and evangelizing others. Today we're asking: what does it mean to be established, strengthened and, growing in our faith? And then, how do I do this with others? How do I have personal ministry with my children, with new converts and within other discipleship relationships?

We're going to base our thoughts today on Colossians 2:6-7. It's not typical for our church to deal with the Scriptures thematically, but I think it can occasionally be helpful. So what does it mean for us to be established in our faith? Paul says, *"Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."*

Paul is using several analogies to make the same point. "In the same way that you received Christ Jesus, by faith and all by His grace, so walk in Him. Continue to live that out. It doesn't stop with your conversion. It's not just a ticket to heaven. There's something deeper that needs to continue to happen in our lives. We need to be rooted. Think of what that picture implies: a tree whose roots are deep in the soil. As matures those roots grow even deeper and stronger making the tree is less and less likely to be blown down.

Paul's second analogy is that of a building that's being completed. You wouldn't stop building a house with just the foundation, or just walls, or just a roof but with nothing inside. Again, there is a process of increasing fullness. In short, Paul calls us to mature as believers, both by being rooted for strength and stability, but also being built up and maturing outwardly as well.

Next Paul uses the word "established." Some translations say "strengthened." He calls believers to be *"established in the faith, just as they were taught."* So let's ask ourselves, "What does it mean to be established in the faith? How does a person become built up in Christ? What does it mean to grow as a follower of Christ?" Those aren't just rhetorical questions which you should wait for me to answer. I want you to think: if someone asked you these questions, how would you answer?

As some of you may know, for the past couple months I have been consumed with a house renovation project. We took the whole top story off our house and did a second-story addition. It's more work and money than we had thought. After about seven weeks of living in the basement, we're finally able to use the upstairs again, even though it's not completely finished.

When you begin a project like that, it would be foolish to start without plans. Thankfully, I have a good friend here who's an architect who drew up some blueprints for us. We sat down together and talked about our goals for this project. This was followed by measurements and detailed drawings. Then several times throughout the project, we would go back to the drawing to determine the next steps. "Where is this wall supposed to be? How tall is it supposed to be? Where does this window go?" We returned to the original plans to see if we were in fact following them and building this correctly.

Similarly, if you're putting together a jigsaw puzzle, it's very difficult without looking at the picture on the box. Of course, I know as soon as I say that someone will come and tell me they've done that. That's great. But you must admit it's more difficult that way. It's very hard to put together a puzzle without even knowing what it's supposed to look like.

I'm going to get into more trouble here, but the same thinking applies to recipes. Even if you are just a taste-as-you-go kind of cook, it's still helpful to know to have a recipe in mind to know how a dish is supposed to look and taste.

There are lots of illustrations we could use. But if there is no plan, if there is no goal, if there's no understanding of what things are supposed to look like, then we're lost and we just wander. We spin our wheels and nothing turns out well. Thus with our Christian walk, I think it's helpful for us to know what our goal is. "What does it mean to follow Christ and grow in our relationship with Him? What does it look like to be more conformed to His image?"

If I say I want to grow this year in my Christian faith and if I ask people to pray for me in that regard, what do I really mean? What are some categories or areas in which I should expect to see growth?

I think there are different ways to answer these questions. We've talked about this in various classes, messages and articles. We ask this kind of question regarding our young people before they graduate from high school: What do we want them to know and believe and maturing in as followers of Christ? What are the central things that are involved in being established in the faith?

When Jesus was asked about the great commandments in the law, He said to them:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets"
(Matthew 22:37-40).

So if I were to answer our question of what it means to be established in the faith, I think these two categories are helpful. I've received Christ Jesus as Lord. I'm walking in Him. So the two main ways my faith should be evident is through my growth in my love for God and my growth in my love for others. This isn't a works-based love, but rather a response to what He has done for me. I should increase in my love for Him and for others. Then the question becomes how do I grow in my love for God? Some of that comes through understanding doctrine. Do I know Him? Do I know what is true?

When I think of loving my wife, if I didn't know anything about her, that love would not be growing. That's part of what marriage is. The longer you're with someone, the more you know about them. You know the good and the bad. You know their likes and dislikes. **Sound doctrine** is a way for us to know Who our God is, what He has done, as well as what He does and doesn't like.

We've been using the following outline in our youth ministry. It's not exhaustive, so you might think of something that could be added to it, but this is a list of things we want our teens to leave here knowing well. But it's not restricted to youth. It's helpful for followers of Christ of any age—truths we need to understand and believe. Here are some truths about our God, including truths about Who He is and what He has done; about the Word He has given us and why we believe it. It also covers how we grow in our ability to understand and apply His Word.

We must ask: "Do I really understand and can I articulate the gospel? Do I realize it's personal to me as an individual? Do I know that I'm a sinner and that Christ died for my sins? Do I believe that my response should be faith and repentance? Do I understand the big picture of the gospel, from creation to fall to redemption and restoration?"

Areas of Growth for a Disciple of Jesus New Covenant Bible Church

Doctrine: What truths do you need to better understand of believe?

God

- There is one God in three equally and fully divine Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- The Person and works of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- God is the creator of all things and sovereignly reigns over His creation and is accomplishing His purposes to bring Himself glory and redeem a people for Himself.

The Bible

- Why we believe the Bible.
- The Bible is the authoritative, inspired, inerrant Word of God.
- Able to read, understand and apply God's Word.

The Gospel

- The gospel that is personal: God, man, Christ, response.
- The big picture gospel: creation, fall, redemption, restoration
- Election, substitutionary atonement, justification, sanctification, glorification.
- The functional centrality of the gospel.

The Church

- The function and importance of the local church.
- The purpose and priority of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Do I believe God is at work redeeming a people for Himself? Do I understand the different aspects of the gospel, such as election, atonement, justification, and glorification? Do I understand the doctrine of the church? Maybe as you look over this list, you might see areas or categories that you need to study more thoroughly so you can grow in your understanding of what you believe.

Character: What are some areas of greatest temptation for you?

- o Wholehearted love for God demonstrated by a desire to know Him and follow Him.
- o The pursuit of holiness motivated by grace.
- o The expression of our dependence on God through prayer and time in His Word.

Community: How could you better follow the “one another” commands for the church?

Love for others demonstrated by relationships marked by honesty, humility and joyful servanthood.

- o Meaningfully engaged in the life of the church.

Mission: How could you take steps to better follow Jesus’ command to make disciples?

- o The ability and desire to spread the gospel to our families, community and the world through our lives and our words.

Then beyond doctrine, growth also involves **character**. Love for God is not just head knowledge—it affects who we are. Because I love Him, I want to live for Him. Jesus says, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). So be honest with yourself. What are some areas of temptation? Are you pursuing a whole-hearted love for God? Do you desire to know Him? Do you desire to follow Him? Are you pursuing holiness motivated by grace? You could probably add the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5. We should also express our dependence on God through time in prayer and in the study of His Word. These two areas—understanding doctrine and the development of godly character—are ways that we grow in and demonstrate our love for God.

But third, we must grow in our love for others. There are two categories of this on your list. First is **community**, which is the context in which we show love for other Jesus followers in the church. There are many “one another” commands in Scripture: we are to love one another, confront one another, rebuke one another, encourage one another, exhort one another and so on. Our love is demonstrated in relationships that are marked by honesty, humility, joyful servanthood and selflessness.

We must ask, “Am I meaningfully engaged in the life of the church?” God has called us to be part of a body, and we need each other. Are you meaningfully engaged with life in this church, or wherever your home church is? Are you committed to using your gifts to the extent you’re able

to for the good of the body? Or are you content simply to come and receive? To simply sit here on Sunday morning and then check off that you went to church this week?

The other category where we show our love for others is through **mission**, through our relationship with this lost world, both locally and globally. What steps can you take to better obey Jesus' command to make disciples? Are you growing in your ability and desire to spread the gospel to your family, your community and your world through your life and through your words?

These four areas have provided a blueprint of the goals I'm reaching toward. They have given me categories for aspects of my life that need to be present and growing as I'm becoming established as a follower of Jesus. This blueprint would also be helpful to use if you're teaching a new convert. This provides a good tool for evaluation. For example, you might look at these four categories and think, "I'm really good a doctrine and character, but lacking in community and mission."

Would it be okay if a Christian only cared about doctrine and character? No. That would go against all those Scripture passages I read at the beginning of this message. That would be a secluded life of devotion to God—just knowing Him and doing good things, being right in your heart but thoughtless toward others. Remember, from the beginning, Jesus said, "Follow Me and you'll be fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). He said, "Go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:18-20). And then there are all those "one another" commands. So much of Christianity is about our relationships with others.

Or on the flip side, maybe you are good at loving others, but doctrine and character don't really matter that much. That also would be at best an anemic Christianity.

Or maybe you're not even a Christian. If you disregard God or maybe don't even know Who He is, if you don't care about doctrine and how it impacts your life, I would call into question whether you're truly a follower of Jesus.

What keeps us from being established? What keeps us from progressing on this path? I think of the parable Jesus gave us about the different kinds of grounds, the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-9). He talks about how the gospel is spread. Some seed falls on the hard walkway and it's just trampled down or eaten by birds. The next two grounds produce a plant—the stony ground and the thorny ground. He says in the stony ground, trials, difficulties and pressures cause the plant to wither. Then on the thorny ground, it's the cares of this world that grow up and choke out the life of the plant. Finally, some seed falls on good ground, growing and bearing fruit.

I think these two middle categories which describe potential things that choke out life are helpful for us to be aware of. I believe there was not true regeneration happening in those two examples, because neither of them bore fruit. It is clear that there are dangers and temptations in our lives that can keep us from progressing as followers of Christ. When trials come, when difficulties comes, when the pressures of life come, we can be tempted to wither, to shrink back, to start trusting in ourselves rather than trusting God.

I think about the cares of this world. Idolatry is a theme that runs through the entire Old Testament and even into the New, and it refers to those things that choke out life and growth. We can become enamored with the things of this world, but they keep us from being established, equipped, strengthened and rooted.

I want to end very practically by asking you to look at this outline and identify one or two areas in your life in which you see need for growth. Maybe it's a whole category—doctrine or mission or character. Maybe people don't know the secret hypocrisy in your life. So first, think about yourself as you are maturing and becoming established.

Then next, I want you to be thinking about the people in your life who fit into this need for engagement. Ask God, "Whom can I show love to? Who can I begin to ask questions to engage them? Who in my life is ready to hear the good news of the gospel? Who in my life can I help to become established, strengthened, rooted?" Maybe you're applying one of these questions to a friend or a child. Maybe as spouses you want to think about these together.

Let's ask God for help in applying His Word.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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