

Grow Up

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 September 2014

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Turn with me, please, to Colossians chapter 2. I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally.

My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are all the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit, and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world, rather than on Christ.

[1:14] For in Christ, all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with the circumcision done by the hands of men, but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins, and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code with its regulations that was against us and that stood opposed to us.

He took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration, or a Sabbath day.

[2:25] These are a shadow of the things that were to come. The reality, however, is found in Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize.

Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Since then you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belong to it, do you submit to its rules? Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.

These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

I don't think anyone would deny that we have a growing up problem in our nation. Somewhere along the line, something has happened, and so now they tell us that 30 is the new 20, and 40 is the new 30.

[3:58] And we could talk about why that is, and what's caused that, and there's lots of reasons for it. But I think we can say, and I'll agree, that we are meant to grow up, aren't we?

Boys are meant to become men, and girls are meant to become women. They're designed, they're God-designed, to go out and to be producing, to be useful, to be leaders.

They're God-designed to go and get dominion over this world. As creatures made in the image of God, people are designed to grow up.

And Christians are God-designed to grow up as well, to go on to maturity. The theme of Colossians chapter 1 was Jesus Christ.

He's the gospel. And the theme of Colossians chapter 2 is now Jesus Christ. He's God's wisdom. He's new life. He's how you grow up.

[5:09] He's how you go forward. He's the path to maturity. God wants us to grow up into Jesus Christ. God's designed us to grow up.

And so let me ask you, Christian, are you growing up? Are you a mature Christian?

Is that where you're headed? What would that look like? What would that process look like? Well, Paul, in our passage, we're going to look at just the first five verses of Colossians chapter 2.

Paul, in our passage, gives us a very helpful, useful description of what he is aiming for. What does Christian maturity look like? What does it mean?

What does it look like to be growing up into Jesus Christ? And he shows us three aspects of that maturity in these first five verses. And he begins by saying, I want you to know how much I'm struggling for all of you.

[6:16] And for those who are in Laodicea, that's the church down the road. They were all in the same valley. And for all who have not met me personally. And then he begins to list what he's going for, what he is struggling for, what he wants to see, not only in the Colossians' lives, but in everyone who have not met him personally.

And that nicely brings us right into the story. And so he begins. What is he aiming for?

What are three marks? He shows us three marks of Christian maturity. And he begins with this first one. He says, So what does Christian maturity look like?

Where should we be looking for it at? Well, it begins in the heart. You begin to look for maturity by looking at the heart.

And that's important. The rest of Colossians chapter 2 is a lot about things that you could see on the outside.

[7:31] And Paul begins by saying, No, I want you to be encouraged in heart. A mature Christian is marked by an encouraged, comforted, strengthened heart.

And I think strengthened is probably the particular meaning that Paul has in mind here. It can mean comfort. It can mean encouragement. But in light of the context, there wasn't a lot of persecution going on in Colossae.

There's no word about that. But there is this great danger of false teaching sweeping them away. And so what they needed was to be strengthened in their hearts.

To be able to be strong, to resist the temptations that were coming their way. See, Colossae was just like us in many, many respects. It was a church with a wider culture that was anti-Christian, anti-Christ.

And it was tugging on them. And so they were a tree in a flood, in a raging river, that if they weren't grounded and they weren't firm, they were going to be pulled away.

[8:41] And that's where we are. The culture was saying, Yeah, Jesus is good, if that's what you're into.

But you know he's not everything. He's not the only way. There's other ways. There's other things that you could use. There's other ways of enlightenment. There's other ways to be fulfilled.

And really, yeah, you could have Jesus, but you also need these things as well. There's other ways to be religious. Jesus is just one of many.

And that would be life in Colossae. So what did the Colossians need? What did the folks in Laodicea, the church ten miles down the road, what did they need?

They needed to be strengthened in their hearts. And so what do we need? What does Christian maturity look like? It looks like a strong, strengthened, comforted, encouraged, empowered heart.

[9:42] They needed the gospel driven down deep into their hearts. Hearts that could resist the buffeting and the blasting and the pressure of a culture and the pressure of a culture that was trying to pull them away from Christ alone.

Not too long ago, we were having an elders retreat down in Warsaw, and we had agreed to meet at a park by the lake.

And when we got there, there was something very strange going on. The place where we were going to meet, there were all these 50-foot telephone poles lying on the ground.

Now that's not strange in and of itself, but what was really interesting was beside those 50-foot telephone poles, there were also these 4-foot telephone poles sticking out of the ground. So there's 50-footers lying on the ground, and there's 4-footers sticking out of the ground. And Aaron and Hoke and I were looking at each other, and we're looking at the 50-footers, and then we're looking at the 4-footers, and we're saying, what are they going to do?

[10:55] Are they really going to put, there's no way they're going to put all that under the ground. Well, pretty soon a crane-like thing picked up a 50-foot telephone pole, stood it on its end, and then bam, bam, bam, again and again and again.

They drove that 50-foot telephone pole until 4 feet was sticking out of the ground. And Aaron looked at me and he said, well, that playground is not going anywhere.

And that's what they were making, a playground, a splash pad or something. A thing. A mature Christian is like that.

There's a lot underneath the surface. His heart is reinforced in the truth. So, when a storm comes, is that playground going to go anywhere?

When the lake floods, water is three or four feet, is that playground going to go anywhere? Well, that's Christian maturity.

[12:10] The truth of Jesus Christ isn't sitting on the surface. It's down deep. It's gone down below and it's reinforced so the heart is comforted.

It's strengthened. It's encouraged. It's resisting. And it has the strength to do so. And on top of that, that heart is ready for action.

That playground, when it is done, it is going to be ready to be used. A hundred children could be on that playground and using it and using it hard.

And it'll be sturdy. It'll be ready for action. And a strong heart is a heart that is ready for action.

Mature Christians are ready Christians.

They're ready to be used Christians. They have sucked so much life. They are so grounded into Jesus Christ that they are now producing fruit.

[13:08] and they're ready in season and out of season because the connection between them and Jesus Christ has grown so deep and so close that now they're ready to live, ready to be used.

They're not hiding away, nursing their fears, nursing their doubts, second, you know, always asking and complaining that they're no good and of no use.

They have life to spare. life to give to others. And so when the going gets tough, they have something to give to other people.

I grew up in the country and we had well water and that well went down deep under the ground.

Now, I don't know how deep it went.

My dad could tell you, but underneath the ground, there are these deep reservoirs, these deep aquifers filled with water. And so when there's a drought and when it was dry and it hadn't rained for weeks, we had water because that water wasn't, our water didn't come from the surface.

[14:23] It came down from down deep. So we had water to use, water for our garden to take a bath, to cook. Now, a mature Christian is like that. He has strength, he has hope, he has comfort that goes past the surface.

It's down there deep. It's ready to be drawn out. It's ready to be used for others. And so, are you mature? Are you maturing?

Well, do you have strength for others? Begin by looking at your heart. Now, don't mishear me. I'm not saying that you necessarily feel strong every day or you feel this extra power and that you're always riding on cloud nine or anything like that.

I'm not talking about how you feel, but are there deep, broad, close connections to Jesus Christ where his life has so overflowed into your life that now you have strength?

That's maturity. It goes past feelings. It's a spiritual, it comes from a spiritual union with Jesus Christ. Now, secondly, Paul wanted to see them united in love.

[15:38] What does Christian maturity look like? It looks like union, unity and love. Maturity is not a solitary pursuit.

What I mean is maturity is not something that you do by yourself. Maturity is having your heart united to other people.

The word could be translated knitted in love. And that's a nice picture, isn't it? So, your grandmother or your mother or you are knitting something.

You're putting things together. And a mature Christian is knitted together in love to other Christians. He's not a scrap of cloth all by himself, living all to himself. He's not the super strong, super self-sufficient, I have everything I need.

[16:43] He's not a turtle with his whole house on his back and everywhere he goes is home because it's just him. A mature Christian is a mountain man, a rugged individualist who can go on his own.

That's not maturity. No, Jesus Christ is knitting together a living quilt. He's building a living temple and we could say he's building a living, he's knitting together a living quilt and it's made from the hearts of men and they're stitched together not with thread but with love.

One heart, one life joined to another and then another and then another knitted together in love. And Paul says that's what I'm struggling for.

That's what I'm preaching for. That's why I proclaim Jesus Christ because preaching Christ, preaching the gospel clearly, painstakingly, powerfully in the spirit doesn't drive people away from each other.

It drives people towards each other. It knits people together. It gets people together. It moves people closer to each other. See, when you are yourself believing the gospel, how do you know am I believing the gospel?

[18:01] Am I really applying it to my life? Well, you can see what are your relationships like? Are you knitting together? Are you moving toward people, not away from them? See, the gospel breaks down the divisions.

It breaks down walls between people. It breaks down, it disarms the criticism that naturally lives in our hearts, that self-righteousness that looks down upon others.

It destroys that pride and the gospel stirs up love. So a person living in Jesus Christ is no longer only thinking of himself and thinking, what can they do for me?

When the gospel has been worked into a person's heart like yeast in the dough, that person is saying, okay, how can I live for others? So he goes to church thinking about who he can bless.

He doesn't go to church feeling like these people are such a drag. I just can't take them today.

[19:06] They just drag me down. They don't give me what I need. And my answer would be, of course they don't give you what you need. You need Jesus Christ. That's life.

That's resurrection life. It's sad and it's strange. when we end up looking to other people for salvation and for life and for, oh, they approve of me, they end up, we always end up moving away from each other because they inevitably, invariably, let us down.

You end up not loving them because they're so disappointing. And of course they let you down. They're weak sinners just like you.

So, living in Christ enables us to love and to serve and to actually join ourselves to real sinners. Not pretend sinners, not sinners in theory, but the sinners that are actually next to you with real sins, not sins of imagination, but they're real sinners.

[20:14] And so, you, when the gospel is worked into your life, you can go to church and you're ready to serve and live with and love on real sinners, real weak people.

But on the other hand, the gospel enables us to open up and share our own struggles and our own sin and our own weakness.

And the reality is that's actually where the closest fellowship comes in. the closest fellowship comes in when we're sharing in our sin and our weakness, not in our righteousness and our piety.

So, how does the gospel do that? What was Paul thinking? He's preaching the gospel, he's proclaiming Christ. So, my question is, is how does proclaiming Christ and believing in Jesus help us to now share my life and my sin not just with God but with other people?

Well, if you think with me, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you can talk to yourself and you can say something like this.

[21:23] You can say, I'm justified already in Jesus. I don't have to hide because God, the God who knows me through and through, who knows my sin and my weakness who I can't hide anything from, He's loved me and He's accepted me because of Jesus and I've been forgiven and freely welcomed and so I don't have to hide.

I can be me and I can be honest not only with myself but with other people. That's Christian maturity when you're able to be honest with people.

So are you mature? Well, let's think. Do you come to church wanting to get or wanting to give?

Do you come saying, well, I hope something good comes my way or do you come looking to bless? Do you open up to people to confess your sins and your weakness? Maturity isn't always having the right answers.

It isn't always being in the right. It isn't always having a happy smiley face on. Maturity isn't always being sought after. Maturity isn't always having and giving the best advice and people asking, well, what do you think of that?

[22:50] Maturity is seeing I need them. Maturity isn't just being needed. It's realizing I need them. I need their prayers. I need their advice.

I need them. I need their love. I need their help. So is that, would that describe you?

Are you growing into that? Is that the direction you're going? Are you living more of your life with others? Or are you a solitary, secret Christian?

So you're here. but no one knows you. You're here. You're here faithfully, but no one really knows you.

Now, I don't want to simplify something that could be more complex, but that very well could be a sign, a symptom of a more, of a deeper problem.

[23:56] And the deeper problem is that you aren't believing that gospel for yourself as much as you ought. That you need to live in Jesus Christ more.

Because when you are living and united to Jesus Christ, that's going to have an effect in moving you out toward people. And so the answer to your loneliness is not, well, those people need to get their act together and give me the love that I deserve.

The answer to your loneliness is not even so much that you would get your act together and love other people, although that would be a good step. The answer to your loneliness is finding hope and life in Jesus' life.

Finding mercy in Him and then going out and living for others. The answer to our loneliness and our lack of unity and our lack of love is Jesus.

Loneliness is not, first of all, a personality problem. It's not even a social problem. It's a gospel problem. And Christ is the answer.

[25:08] And so that's why Paul proclaimed Christ. He knew that as they saw Jesus, as they saw Christ, as they marveled in Him, they were going to be moving out towards other people.

They were going to be loving other people and they were going to be united and growing up in faith. That's maturity. Now, third, and really the heart of this passage, what is maturity?

maturity. And this is the heart of the passage. This is sort of the pinnacle of these first five verses. Everything leads up to it and everything leads down from it.

And it's this, what is maturity? And he says this next in verses two and three. He says, And that they may have the full riches of complete understanding.

That they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. So what is maturity?

[26:07] Well, it's a Christ-dominated mind. It's a Christ-dominated mind. Do you see all the mind words there?

There's understanding. There's wisdom, knowledge. So maturity is having a Christ-dominated, Christ-shaped mind.

So picture a magnet. And that magnet is Christ. And Christ is dominating. He is shaping. He is bending. Everything that comes into my mind.

And he's the filter. He's the lens through which I'm looking at life. And so what is maturity? It's where you're looking at life through a Christ-tinted lens.

So you've seen those rose-colored glasses. Well, these are Christ-colored glasses. That's maturity. When you are going into life, you're going into work, you're looking at your family, you're looking at your trials, you're looking at your difficulties, you're looking at your sin, you're looking at every part of your life.

[27:16] And Christ is always there. Some way, he's there. He's there. You don't have separate thoughts. You have that thought and Jesus Christ is right there beside all those thoughts.

So that's maturity. When your wisdom, when your mind is saturated with Jesus Christ, then the gospel. Not only are you looking at life through Christ-tinted glasses, Christ-colored glasses, you're looking at God through Christ-colored glasses.

And he says, he is the mystery of God in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

He's the mystery of God. God. We've talked about that word before. That word mystery. And now he does something very marvelous.

And this is, in some ways, the high point of all of Colossians. He says, Christ is the mystery of God. He's the end time, last days, disclosure of God.

[28:30] God. We've talked about this word mystery. It's something that wasn't known or it wasn't fully revealed, but now is climatically and finally and wonderfully and fully and completely revealed.

And it's something that's revealed in Christ. That word mystery is always attached to Christ. And now here, what is hidden? What was hidden in some way but now is revealed?

Well, it's God himself. It's God himself. Christ finally and fully reveals God.

And you might say, well, how could that be? Are you sure? I mean, is that, what, how can you say that? I mean, didn't the Moses and the prophets, didn't we see, didn't the Old Testament saints know him?

Well, yeah. Didn't he reveal himself to Moses and to Israel on the mountain and that great theophany, that great appearance of God on Mount Sinai?

[29:35] Well, in a way, in a way, he definitely did. But Moses and the prophets, they were not the final unveiling of who God is.

Christ is. Christ is. So think of John 1.17 and 1.18. John says there, for the law was given through Moses.

Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God, but God, the one and only, referring to Jesus, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Now, there's an obvious contrast of some sort. And it's beside my point to talk about that, but there is at least something different and now unexpected that Jesus Christ brings that Moses didn't bring.

There was something of truth. There was something of God that Mount Sinai and Moses and the prophets didn't reveal. And so on the mountain, it was an awesome and awful display of his majesty and his holiness and his righteousness and his justice.

[30:50] And the people trembled and they should. But John is saying, if you want to know and understand God in all of his fullness, don't go to Moses.

Don't go to that mountain. Go to Jesus Christ. Christ is that final unveiling of God. He's the mystery of God. And so what does it mean to be mature? It means Christ is how you understand God.

I'm not saying that God and Jesus are completely the same. We're not talking about the Trinity or anything like that. I'm saying that Christ is how you understand God.

He's how you know Him and how you approach Him. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the lens, is the primary lens through which you think about God.

Martin Luther said it like this in his commentary on Galatians. And he refers to John 1.18 in this passage. God will, this is Martin Luther, God will and can be known in no other way than in and through Christ according to the statement of John 1.18 the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father He has declared Him.

[32:20] Christ is the only means whereby we can know God and His will. In Christ we perceive that God is not a cruel judge but a most loving and merciful Father who to bless and to save us spared not His own Son but gave Him up for us all.

This is truly to know God. Those who do not know God in Christ arrive at this erroneous conclusion. And watch what Martin Luther does here.

He says, those who don't know God in Christ or through Christ, they always come to the wrong conclusion. They always end up thinking about God and themselves in a totally wrong way.

And this is what they come to. I will serve God in such and such a way and I will join this or that order and I will be active in this or that charitable endeavor. God will sanction my good intentions and reward me with eternal life.

For is He not a merciful and generous Father who gives good things even to the unworthy and ungrateful? How much more will He grant unto me everlasting life as a due payment in return for my good deeds and merits?

[33:34] This is the religion of reason. And we've read the rest of Colossians chapter 2 and it's all about this human religion of reason. Luther says, this is the natural religion of the world.

Hence, there is really no difference between a Jew, a Muslim, and any other old or new heretic. There may be differences of persons and places and rights and religions and ceremonies, but as far as their fundamental beliefs are concerned, they are all alike.

So you look at God and you come to some conclusion about Him apart from Jesus Christ and you invariably and inevitably turn to some sort of works righteousness.

You set up some kind of works righteousness. It might be a Jewish variety, it might be a Muslim variety, it might be a Reformed Baptist variety, but it is invariably and inevitably the same.

I will do this and God will reward me because that's what, that's the deal. Well, do you know, how do you know if you're mature? How do you know if you're growing up?

[34 : 49] Well, do you, are you living by faith or are you living by works? day to day? Do you relate to God on the basis of I did this and that and did this and that or is it all because of Jesus?

Are you offended when bad things happen to you because of, that you, because you and God had a deal and now He's somehow broken it? Are you in despair because, well, we had a deal and I didn't live up to it now and look what's happening.

So we had this deal and I sinned and now it's over for me. Or do you believe in grace? I don't mean the word grace and I don't mean the theory and the theology of grace.

I mean, do you believe in grace? Do you hope on it and count on it that God in Jesus Christ is reconciled? Are you seeing God through Christ?

Are you embracing Christ's righteousness as your only hope and you're rejoicing and resting and you're glad to do it? Or are you living day to day on your own self-righteousness?

[36 : 03] This is where Paul takes his thinking about Christ. Read the rest of Colossians 2. This is where Paul takes it. People who don't know God through Christ end up living in some sort of human tradition.

They live on rules. They think this is really how you grow. This is how you live this fulfilled life and it can be anything and he gives us all sorts of things.

But to all that, Paul says, no. Christ is the mystery of God. In him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He's God's answer to my sin problem.

He is God's answer to the guilt of my sin because he died for my sins. He's God's answer to the sin's deadly grip because in him I have put off the flesh and now I'm alive to God in a totally new way.

And I live in his resurrection life. If you aren't a Christian, this is where it begins. By looking, by changing the way that you look at God.

[37 : 11] Because you are either looking at God as the evil, wicked task master or you're looking at him as someone who doesn't care what you do. But either way, you're not looking at God through Jesus Christ as someone who does care about our sin and yet we can be reconciled to him.

So this is where it begins. You take Christ. You put on Christ. You begin looking at God through Jesus Christ. And you give yourself to him because he has shown himself to be loving and kind and a savior for sinners.

sinners. He's shown it to us through Jesus. He's shown himself to be full of grace and love for sinners. So understanding God and trusting God through Jesus Christ is where it begins.

And if you are a Christian, this is the way to maturity. does Christ dominate your mind? Is he how you understand God?

Or do you just always looking around God? And when you think of God, Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection don't play into it very much. Are you living day to day on his righteousness or on your own?

[38 : 32] And you know what? Many of you are. And praise God. Many of you are growing and growing in this. And that's so encouraging. Many in Colossae were too.

Paul isn't writing this because the Colossians had this disease. The book of Colossians is more like a vaccination. It was to give them beware. Be on the guard.

This is out there. This could happen to you. Don't let it happen to you. Many in Colossae were firm in the faith. That's where he goes. They were standing against the world. And Paul was encouraged.

And your pastors are encouraged too. You're growing. But we all have to say, have I really obtained? Am I as grown up as I need to be?

Am I as grown up as I could be? Well, how do we go further? That's the next few verses. We have to live in Christ more. Rooted and built up in him.

[39 : 31] Just as we received him, we live in him. We have to dwell more on Jesus Christ. We have to learn more about him. And I don't talk in just head knowledge. I'm talking heart knowledge. So we need to be praying, Spirit of God, teach me Jesus Christ.

Show me how his life affects my life. Show me what his resurrection means for me. Show me what his death means for me. Now, help me live more and more in his life instead of my own life.

Flee self-righteousness. If you want to grow, press into him and don't settle with ideas about him, but know him.

Not thoughts about him, but him. Live in his love. Don't settle with talk about him, know him. Then live in his love, know it.

Count on it. Dwell in it. Rejoice in it. overflowing with thanksgiving for what he's done. Well, as our response and as our closing prayer and our closing hymn, we're going to sing May the mind of Christ my Savior live in me from day to day.

[40 : 45] From the overhead, let's go ahead and stand as we sing. Amen. Amen.