

How to Grow Up

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[0:00] John 15, 1-17. It must remain in the vine.

Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned.

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you.

This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

[1:26] I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. My command is this, love each other as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business.

Instead, I call you friends. I have called you friends. For everything that I learned from my Father, I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command. Love each other. Well, all children want to grow up.

I know a certain three-year-old who is dying to be five. Not four. That's not good enough. He wants to be five. And I think that's about as old as he can imagine being.

[2:35] Parents want their children to grow up, too, don't they? Good parents are always working themselves out of a job. And I don't know if Paul wants to work himself out of a job, but he does want the Christians in Colossae to grow up, to become mature.

And we saw that last week. And if you're a child of God, that's just as true of you as it is of any natural child. You want to grow up.

You want to go on to maturity. And that's natural, and that's good. And the question is, is how? How?

And that's what we'll be talking about tonight. The question can be such a frustrating one. You know that if you've maybe tried, and you've tried, and only to come back around to where you were at the beginning.

Religious folks in Colossae had all kinds of ideas, and those ideas had the appearance of wisdom. They seemed like good ideas, and yet they weren't really any help.

[3:47] He's going to talk about that in a little bit. You only came back around to where you were at the beginning. Now, maybe this is an illustration lost on some of you, or so far gone in your past, but it's very much present and real to me.

And that's the story of Winnie the Pooh, and about how Rabbit was going to have this brilliant idea to get the bounce out of Tigger. And so they took Tigger out into the woods to lose him.

And the point was that if he got good and lost, that he would come back a changed Tigger, a sad Tigger. And if you remember what happened is they go out into the woods, and they try to lose him. But what ends up happening is that Rabbit and Pooh and Piglet get lost in the woods. Of course, Tiggers don't get lost. So that was a problem right from the beginning. But what would happen was they would, Rabbit thought he knew the way home.

And so they would go out off into the woods, and about an hour later they would come back to the same sandy spot that they had started at.

[5:00] And they did that a number of times. And Pooh, being a bearer of very little brains, thought that the sandy spot was following them. But that so often is a picture of how we experience growth in the Christian life.

We think we have an idea. We think we have a good idea. And so we wander out into the woods and only end up coming back to where we started. And discouraged. And scratched.

And thirsty. And no better for the effort. And I think it just really comes down to we don't really understand how God has designed us to grow. How he's designed us to grow up.

So how do you grow up? Well, Paul wants to show us in Colossians chapter 2 and verse 6 and 7. So I would invite you to turn there. Hopefully you're going to see later the connection that there is between Colossians 2 and John 15.

But we're going to begin by looking at Colossians chapter 2 and verse 6. And the first thing that Paul, and I want you to notice, is that Paul here tells us how we can become Christians.

[6:16] Paul here tells how people become Christians. Before you can grow as a Christian, you have to become a Christian. No one is born a Christian. There has to be a change.

Something has to happen. You have to become a Christian. So how do you become a Christian? Maybe you've asked yourself that question. Maybe you've thought, well, mom and dad are Christians.

But how do I become a Christian? Or maybe this is a question that you've wrestled with. And you know that you're not. And the question is, how do I become a Christian?

Well, the answer is right here in Colossians chapter 2 and verse 6. Becoming a Christian means receiving Christ. It means receiving Christ.

So then just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, or so then just as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, becoming a Christian means receiving a person.

[7:16] It means receiving a gift. Many people think that becoming a Christian is a bad thing.

Those who haven't actually had it happen to them, they think it's a bad thing. And it has quite a terrible reputation in our culture.

They think becoming a Christian is something oppressive. It means God's hand is on you and on your neck and he's bending you down. And maybe you're afraid of that's what becoming a Christian is like.

God's going to get his hands all over my life and he's going to ruin it and make me miserable. But let this verse wash that idea away from you.

Because becoming a Christian starts by receiving a gift. By receiving God's very own son. He gives him his very best.

Charlie mentioned it in Romans. And that's good news. Becoming a Christian is not walking into slavery.

[8:17] It's not oppression. It's not slavery. Christianity isn't God throwing chains around you. It's Christmas morning. It's receiving a gift. It's being blessed. It's God opening up his heart towards you and giving you his very best.

Giving you himself. Giving you his son. And that's the great difference between gospel Christianity and every other religion out there. It's good news.

And that means you tell people about it. You tell people about it. You don't go into a city saying convert or die. You don't go into a city with a sword.

It's good news. That isn't good news. That's slavery. That's oppression. And gospel Christianity has never looked like that. But gospel is God saying, here's my son.

You're a sinner. You need a savior. Here's my son. And you become a Christian when you receive Christ, the Lord. Or Christ as your Lord. And so he takes over the lordship of your life.

[9:20] You vacate. You get off the throne of your life. And he comes and sits down. And he sets up his kingdom. And you say, own it all. And reign supreme.

Conquer every rebel power. Let no vice or sin remain that resists your holy war. So Jesus comes into your life. And he sets up his kingdom right there in your heart.

And he sets you free from the dominion of sin and the power of sin. And he sets the prisoner free. And so the gospel is good news.

Jesus Christ is good news for people who are tired of sin. So do you hate your sin? Are you weary in your sin? And you want to be done with it?

Well, here's good news. Here is a strong lord that has the power to destroy reigning sin. To destroy the works of the devil. That's why he came.

[10:17] And Christ's lordship is not slavery. It's freedom. It's real freedom. And so to become a Christian is not to undergo some sort of therapy. It's not to undergo some sort of minor measures.

It's a whole new life. It's a whole new kingdom. It's a whole new lord. It's a whole new power. Your life gets taken over by the Lord of glory. And that's what it means to become a Christian.

So has that happened to you? Has Jesus Christ invaded your life and transformed your life? Have you received Christ Jesus the Lord into your life?

Are you a Christian? That's the first thing that we see. And now secondly, I want you to think about this great truth, Christian. This great and wonderful truth that you have received Christ Jesus the Lord.

It's past tense. This has happened to you. This thing that I have been telling you about has happened to you if you're a Christian. This great conversion has happened to you.

[11:27] And so maybe you're here and you're not amazed by that. That doesn't warm your heart. That doesn't stir your heart. You're not sure what that has to do with you.

If you're dull to that, then think about this. God gave his own son to be your savior. To be your Lord. He didn't hold himself from you.

He sent his son into your life. And so now you have him. You have him. You, a creature, have God, the creator.

He's given himself into your hands. You received him. You didn't used to want him. You used to have a close fist. But now, by God's grace, he's opened up your hands and you've received him.

And the question is, now did you deserve that? Did you deserve to have Jesus? Did you earn that? Or have you done all that you could do to not deserve it?

[12:37] Well, you have received Christ. Now, your life is attached to him. You're sharing a life together. And that was the point of reading John 15.

And the vine and the branches. So, so often, we turn Christianity into something that's just the sort of pragmatic kind of how-to life.

Where if you know it, and if you, and it's just a matter of knowing and doing. And how often we forget that the Christian life, your Christian life, your Christian life, the one that lives in you, is a shared life.

It's a spiritual life. And I mean that with a capital S. It's a spirit-filled, spirit-led life. It's living in the spirit. It's living in living union with Jesus Christ.

So to receive him is to receive him into your life. It's to become one with him. And so he is the vine and we are the branches. Vine and branches share the same life, don't they?

[13:45] The branch's life is in the vine. And the vine's life is in the branches. And that's your life. God has put you into Jesus Christ.

Like a vine into a branch. His life now. His reality has become your life. And your reality. So when he died, you died.

And when he rose, Paul can say you rose. And so all these facts and these truths that we saw about Jesus in chapter 1. Those aren't just objective facts that have nothing to do with you.

They're not just objective truth that's all about him, but not about you. No, Paul's whole point in Colossians is that because Jesus is all these things.

He's the image of God. He's the firstborn over creation. He's the firstborn from the dead. He's the way that you're reconciled to God. All those things that we saw already in chapter 1. And because Jesus is those things, that means you already have what you need.

[14:57] He's his life. His reality has become your life and your reality. And if you don't understand that, then I think so much of the Bible, so much of Paul's work, so much of what we're going to see in verses 9 and 10 and 11 and 12, that's not going to make any sense to you.

Because there, in so many places, as he does here in Colossians 2, 9 through 12, he's mixing Christ's life and our life and Christ's resurrection and our resurrection as if they weren't separate events, but they're organically connected.

That everything that happened to him has some influence and some that means something for me. And so there we are. We're connected to Jesus Christ.

There you are. That's happened to you. And so it's very important that you don't misunderstand me. No one should say here, you're right. I'm saying if you're a Christian, you shouldn't be able to say this or you shouldn't say this.

You're right. I've got to do this. This hasn't been true of me and I've got to make this true. Well, you can't make it true because the spirit has already made it true.

[16:11] You have received Christ. The spirit of Christ lives in you. And so he's not in you in the sense of he's just sort of floating around, not doing anything. No, he comes in as the spirit of Christ to bring Christ's very life into your life.

And so you don't make this true. You don't make this true. The spirit of God has already made it true. And all that Jesus is and done is yours.

And so there's nothing more practical. There's nothing more encouraging than this. If you were to understand that, and as you understand it, it's so encouraging.

It's so helpful. And we would say, who am I? What have I done to deserve Christ's resurrected life, resurrection life into me?

This is God's grace to me. This is God's grace to me. And when God gave me grace, he didn't give me a thing. He gave me his son.

[17:21] And everything I have ever needed, he gave to me in him, in Christ. So I am rich. Tom was playing it.

Let the poor say, I am rich. Maybe you remember, this has been some time ago, but I quoted a quote from Sinclair Ferguson a while back.

And he is so helpful, and he helps us to understand what Paul is saying here. He writes this, or he says this.

It is legitimate to speak of receiving grace. And sometimes, although I am somewhat cautious about the possibility of misusing this language, we speak of the preaching of the word and prayer and baptism and the Lord's Supper as means of grace.

And that is fine, so long as we remember there isn't a thing, a substance, or a quasi-substance called grace. All there is is the person of Jesus.

[18:24] All there is is the person of the Lord Jesus. Christ clothed in the gospel, as John Calvin loved to put it. Grace is the grace of Jesus. And if I can highlight the thought here, there is no thing that Jesus takes from himself and then, as it were, hands over to me.

There is only Jesus himself. Grasping that thought can make a significant difference to a Christian's life. So while some people might think that we are just splitting hairs about different ways of saying the same thing, it can make a vital difference.

It is not a thing that was crucified to give us a thing called grace. It was the person of the Lord Jesus that was crucified in order that he might give himself to us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, you've received the Lord Jesus Christ. His life has come over you. And that should warm your hearts.

That should encourage you. Now, third, and back to our question. The big question is, well, how do I go on to maturity?

[19:36] And this is Paul's main point. And Colossians tells us, so then, just as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him.

Continue to live in him. So how do you grow? How do you mature? How do you grow up in the Christian life? Well, how do you avoid false teaching? Well, you keep living in him.

All that we've just been talking about, you live in him. You, by faith, appropriate that and make that more and more real to you. You just keep doing that.

You've received him. Now continue, Paul's saying. Keep living in him. And I think that is good news. Because so much of our culture has programmed us to think the next thing.

The next thing. So the iPhone 5 is done. And now it's the iPhone 6. And boy, I have a feeling that there's going to be an iPhone 7 coming along.

[20:39] There's always something. We need something new. Something better. So much of our world is always changing. So pop songs come and go.

Movies come and go. Blogs and books come and go. And there's always something new. There's always something promising. And maybe I'm getting old.

I don't know. But I want a place to stay. I want a place to stand. Because the next thing is just another empty thing.

More of the same. And I've been down that road before. So Paul's word here is good news for you. Here's a place that you can stand and live.

You don't have to go on to something else. You don't have to add something else to Jesus Christ. You just need to continue to live in him. And so look down at your feet, Christian.

[21:40] You're right where you need to be. You're right where you need to be. You are in Christ. You live in him. And now grow in that.

Find out more and more of what that means. Find out more and more experientially what that means. You have the right uniform on. And he's saying, grow into it.

Get used to it. Learn to live there. So moms, how do you grow up in your mothering?

So that you're being a mom. It looks more and more like mature Christianity. How do you deal with the ups and downs of raising children?

Well, you do it right where you are. In Christ. You do it right where you are in Christ. You just keep living in him. You remember and you apply. And you live in all that Christ is for you.

[22:43] You find out more of his riches. You find out more of his sufficiency. You keep looking at God through Jesus Christ. So we talked about he's the image of the invisible God.

He is the mystery, the unveiling of who God is. And so when you think about God, think about him through the lens of Jesus Christ. And you keep doing that more and more.

And you keep approaching God by faith in Jesus' righteousness. And you flee self-righteousness.

And moms, you live in Jesus' resurrection life.

The resurrection is such a wonderful truth. When you realize that I am connected to that resurrection life.

Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. He's the living one. He once was dead, but now is alive forever and ever. And he holds the keys to death and Hades.

[23:43] And so do you ever feel like you're running out of life? Out of energy. Out of strength.

Well, you're living in him.

You're living in him. Your life is attached to his life. The spirit of Christ dwells in you. And that should be exciting. And that should be hopeful and helpful to you.

Your resources are as great as Jesus Christ, moms. Isn't that good? And so next time you're perplexed and powerless and you don't know what to say.

You don't know what to do with that daughter, with that son. Think. You're right where you need to be. There's nowhere else to go. You have all the power that you need.

It's in Jesus Christ. So look to him. You're attached to the living one, the resurrected one. And wisdom and power and glory crown his head. And that changes the way I feel.

[24:48] And that changes my situation. That really changes the dynamic of that encounter with my teenage son, my teenage daughter, my children. That would change the way that you reacted to their hurtful words.

That would change the way that you reacted to that crumbled up report card that they're hiding from you. That would change the way that you react to the second fender bender in two weeks.

That would change the way that you would react when you find out they're covering up something. See, when you're in the flesh, when I was in the flesh, and so all the flesh was just the power that dominated me.

And I wasn't living in Jesus Christ. I was separated from the life of God that is in Jesus Christ. Then how do you behave? Well, how do you respond to those sorts of things?

Well, you might scream and you might yell. You might pout and complain. You might have a self-condemning, self-loathing spirit that I should have known better and this is all my fault.

[25:54] Or you have this raging, self-righteous indignation that how can you do this to me? That's how you act if you're in the flesh.

But dear moms, you're not in the flesh. You're in Christ. And the fruit of the Spirit is love and joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Moms, you have life in Jesus Christ.

You have every grace that you need. And it's in Him. And so keep walking in Him. His death overflows into your life. And His life overflows into you.

And so stay where you are. Keep on walking in Him. Husbands, let me talk to you. Because I am one of you.

And sometimes the most confusing person in the whole world is the person that you go to bed with. And you want to do her good.

[26:53] And you want to help her. And you thought you were helping her. But it doesn't seem to be working. And she is very confusing and frustrating. And you say, what does she want?

What am I supposed to do? And we are not saying that we are perfect. Far from it. Or even close to it. But here you are again.

And she is emotional. And she needs you. And what are you supposed to do? So, they are always saying that if you just listen, that's good.

But listening doesn't seem to help. At least in your mind. And you have the answer. It might not be the answer that she wants. It might not even be the answer to the question that she has.

But it's an answer. And my point is relationships are messy. They are messy. And you are in the mess. If you are a husband and you are living with a wife.

[27:54] You are in a relationship. And relationships are messy sometimes. But you are not just in the mess. You are in Jesus Christ too.

And so, you live in. You've received the husband of all husbands. When God was creating a husband. He had a paradigm and a picture of what a husband was going to be.

And it was Jesus. What he is to his church. Ephesians 5 where it talks about that. The first reality is Christ and his church.

And the created reality is man and wife. And so, when God made husbands. He was making them after Jesus. And you live in him. If anyone knows how to be a husband.

It's Jesus. If anyone knows how to deal with a wife. It's Jesus. And his love. His life. His sacrificial spirit. Is with you.

[29:01] And so, you live a shared life. And you've received him. And so, Paul's word is now go on living in him. Go on living in him. And men, if you don't live in Christ.

You're going to live in the power of something. You are going to live in the power of something.

When faced with the mess of those relationships. The answer isn't retreating.

And to some sort of private sexual fantasy. Where you have a woman who understands you. And who isn't so complicated. And who thinks you're great.

But only leaves you in guilt and shame. You already have someone who understands you completely. And accepts you. And who loves you through and through.

And who gave his last breath for you. And he doesn't leave you with shame. He leaves you with joy. And so, you're right where you need to be.

[30:01] You're in Christ. And so, Paul's word to you is keep living in him. Continue in him. In the mess of relationships. And then teenagers, let's talk about your life.

We talked about growing up. And you are. You are. And your world is getting bigger and bigger. And you're now asking questions that we all asked. You're asking, am I normal? Is my family normal? Do I look okay?

What am I going to do with my life? And things are changing. And things are uncomfortable. And you don't handle those situations very well.

No one did all the time. And I know I didn't. But if you're a Christian, can I tell you that you aren't living that teenage life alone.

[30:58] You're living with Jesus. And you have a sympathetic friend who couldn't be surprised. Even if you could. You wouldn't be surprised even if you could surprise him.

God has already accepted you if you're a Christian in Jesus Christ. So, I know you go to school and you always feel like you're on trial. If you've come to God through Jesus Christ, you've already gone into the courtroom and he's already said not guilty.

You're God's child. And maybe you feel like you can't really be a child anymore with mom and dad. Maybe that's right and maybe that's wrong. Maybe you can't cry on mom's shoulder anymore because you're supposed to be grown up.

But that doesn't mean that you're not afraid. And it doesn't mean you don't have questions. And so maybe you can't be a child anymore with mom and dad.

But if Christ is your savior, you're still God's child. And the spirit that cries, Abba, Father, that was in Jesus is now in you.

[32:04] And he, God the Father, loves you like a son, like a daughter. And he loves you like his own son. And you know what? Thank God we never grow out of that.

Because we never grow out of that sense of I need held. I need to be encouraged. Well, we always get to be God's little children. And so, teenagers, live in that.

Live in that. Enjoy that. Run to Christ when you're afraid. Run to Christ when you're self-conscious. Run to Christ when you've sinned against your parents. Run to Christ when your friends have rejected you.

Keep living in him. Take all that he has. Because all of it is yours. The world will pull you away from Christ.

Continue in him. And the devil wants to pull you away from Christ. He wants you to feel like you're all alone and it's all up to you. And Paul, in the Holy Spirit, says, continue in him.

[33:04] Keep living in him. And I think worst of all is your flesh. Because it's that traitor within. And he would keep you from walking. He would have you walk away from Christ looking for greener pastures, looking for better things.

But continue to live in him. He's God's glorious gift to you. And he's all you need. He's all you need. So continue to walk in him. Well, let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, I pray that you would please write these things upon our hearts.

If there is someone here who isn't a Christian, and there are, please show them and open their eyes to this glorious thing that it is to be a Christian.

That we have God as our own Father. We have our sins washed away. We have a bright future. And we have all of your blessings now in Jesus Christ.

[34:13] So much grace. So much help that you give to us. And I would just ask that you would please forgive us for living as poor, impoverished people when we really are so rich in Jesus Christ.

Help us to be a better witness to our lost friends and our lost family. To show them the richness and the joy of living in Jesus.

Pray that you would keep us from idols. Keep us from the devil. Protect us from this world. And help us to continue to walk in Jesus Christ, even as we have received him.

Help us to continue to live in him. And it's in his name I pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.