

# Maturity Matters

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Thank you, Audrey, for serving us this morning. Colossians chapter 1, 27, and going on down to chapter 2 and verse number 7.

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles were the riches of glory of this mystery, which Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone with mature, everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. For I want to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Macedonia and for all those who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is in Christ, in whom are hidden the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I say this in order that no one may delude you with the plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good in order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

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

[ 1 : 2 4 ] Father, again, we ask your blessing both upon the reading of your word and also upon the preaching of your word. Would you please help me to be faithful, guide my heart and my mind and my mouth?

Would you please bring to our attention those things that you have for us today and anything that would be unhelpful, that would be distracting, that would be disorienting to your people?

Would you please take those things away from what I was going to say so that we just hear those things that you have for us today? We ask this again in the name of our Savior Jesus, and we give thanks.

Amen. I bet that you have heard the phrase, practice makes perfect. Think about a basketball player out in the driveway shooting free throws until midnight.

Or think about an actress on the stage rehearsing a line over and over and over to make sure that you get the nuance of that line, the tone of it just right.

[ 2 : 3 7 ] Or think about a new parent who horribly fumbles that first diaper change, but has it down to 15 seconds before the child's three-month checkup.

There are ways that practice makes perfect. But there is another way that we think about maturity, and this is especially true with living things.

Under normal circumstances, given enough time, growth just happens. That baby in the diaper that you are changing will become a toddler, and then a child, and then an adolescent, and then a teenager, and then an adult, and then a college student.

Before you know it, that teenager is full-on, that baby is full-on adulting. You don't need to practice a seed to turn into a tree.

Under normal circumstances, given enough time, maturity is inevitable. Now, which of these are true of followers of Jesus?

[ 4 : 0 6 ] Some of us are putting in spiritual reps, spiritual disciplines, Bible reading plans, small group discipleship, lots of church activity, podcasts.

Practice makes perfect, we say. And so we are practicing. Others of us are waiting, assuming that if we just keep showing up, that maturity will just be inevitable.

It will find us eventually. What if both those who practice and those who are more passive, both need to be realigned with the gospel?

Paul writes to the Colossians, because maturity matters. Look back at chapter 1 and verse 25.

Paul is a minister. He is a servant to the church. He has a stewardship from God. Stewardship means Paul does not own the church.

[ 5 : 25 ] The church does not belong to Paul. It is not Paul's church. It belongs to God. But Paul has a stewardship. He feels a deep sense of responsibility.

A God-given sense of responsibility to the church. To her welfare. To her care. To her growth. To her maturity. I think every preacher who has stood before a congregation understands something of what Paul is expressing here in verse number 25.

And so it is that Paul commits to what? To making the word of God fully known to the saints.

That's Paul's commitment. Make the word of God fully known to the saints. Read with me at verse 27. To them.

To them. In other words. To the saints. God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery.

[ 6 : 38 ] Which is Christ in you. The hope of glory. What words come to mind when you hear the word mystery?

That's okay. Hit me. Hit me with your words. What words come to mind when you hear the word mystery? Something unknown.

What else? Secret. Secret. Detective. A detective. And a detective is looking for? Clues. Right? We hear mystery and we think clues.

Something secret. Something everybody doesn't know about and probably can't be shared with everybody. That's what we hear when we think mystery.

Dan's explanation of the word mystery last week. So helpful, wasn't it? The mystery is something in scripture. The mystery is something that was previously unknown. But now revealed.

[ 7 : 48 ] For us in our context, we hear mystery and we think clues. But when you read mystery and we think clues. But when you read mystery and scripture, don't think clues. Think time.

Something that was previously not revealed and yet now has been revealed by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

What is it? What is it? What is it? What is it? That was previously unknown and has now been revealed? What is this mystery?

It is the gospel. The gospel. The gospel. That the Messiah, King Jesus. He is not just for the Jews. He is also for the Gentiles. For everyone. And so the Colossians are God's saints.

[ 8 : 45 ] End of verse 26. I love that. His saints. They are not saints because of what they have practiced. They are not saints because they have been waiting around long enough.

They are saints because Christ is in them. And you are a saint if Christ is in you.

And Christ in us is the hope of glory. The solid ground for the hope of glory that is yet to come.

I am an NHL hockey fan of sorts. I don't really have a favorite team like the Vikings for football.

But I do like to watch a little hockey. However, I really only watch hockey during the Stanley Cup playoffs. Because that's pretty much the only time that hockey is free on TV.

[ 9 : 58 ] So, I'm sort of an NHL hockey fan in name only. I also confess to you that I am a friend in name only.

There are contacts in my phone that we could call right now that I think are cool to have in my phone. But if I were to call them, they would not know who I was.

They would not recognize me. That makes me a friend in name only. You can be part of a church.

You can do religious things. You can know doctrine. You may even call yourself a follower of Jesus. Here's the risk. You could be a saint in name only.

And Paul is not content that the Colossians are saints. He's already confirmed for them that they are saints. He said it more than once.

[ 11 : 07 ] Why is Paul not content? Because maturity matters. Notice what Paul does about it.

Verse 28. Him, Christ, we proclaim. Warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Do you see it there? Key words. Mature in Christ. For this I toil. For what? To present everyone mature in Christ.

For this I toil. Struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. For I want you to know.

How great a struggle I have for you. And for those at Laodicea. And for all who have not seen me face to face. That their hearts may be encouraged.

[12:17] Being knit together in love. To reach all the riches of the full assurance of understanding. And the knowledge of God's mystery. Which is Christ.

Under ordinary circumstances. A newborn baby will mature into an adult. But this is not true. Of everyone who professes faith in Jesus. Maturity in Christ is not inevitable. It is not automatic. It is not passive. Paul knows this. And that's why he preaches Christ. In order to warn. In order to teach everyone. Paul is toiling. This word describes the kind of strenuous work.

[13:30] That leaves you exhausted. Worn out. And the next morning when you get out of bed. You feel it. You're sore. That's the word here that Paul uses.

Toil. He is concerned about their maturity. We might say.

The struggle is real. That would be a perfect way of describing. What Paul is going through here. The struggle is real.

But Paul doesn't contend in his own strength. Look down in your Bible. All. All of Christ's energy is at work within him.

All of Christ's energy is at work within him. What is it that Paul strives for? What does a mature saint look like?

[14:37] Maturity means first. Unshakable faith. Look in your Bible. Look in your Bible and notice that phrase. Encouraged hearts. That their hearts may be encouraged.

Encouraged hearts are firm. They are steadfast. They are resolved. They are committed to the truth. Maturity means unshakable faith.

But notice maturity is not a solo act. Maturity also means commitment to community. You see it there in your Bible.

Being knit together in love. This is not just some sort of mere affection for one another. Love. Love. Being knit together in love. Means present in the lives of other believers. It means accountable for one another's growth.

[15:45] It means patiently warning the idle. Comforting the discouraged. Helping the weak. As Paul will write to the Thessalonians.

Maturity means unshakable faith. It means a commitment to community. And third. Maturity means assurance through knowing.

Maturity means you are not content to be a saint in name only. You are not content just to know facts about Jesus. Just to know information about Jesus.

You really want to know him. You want to appreciate him. You want to value him. This is the full assurance that comes from understanding the gospel.

Knowing Christ so well that it changes you. The way that spending time with someone you deeply admire begins to shape how you think and how you talk and how you act.

[17:01] Maturity also means assurance through knowing. Maturity matters. Maturity matters. And Paul is working hard for their maturity.

Maturity. Maturity. Maturity. But Paul is not the only one working. Look at verse 4. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.

There's another message about spiritual maturity percolating around in Colossae. A plausible, persuasive argument from one or more influential teachers.

We don't know exactly what this was called, but we do know what this teaching includes. And we'll continue to see this as we work our way through chapter 2. But let me just summarize.

It is Jewish-based ideas focused on Torah observance, keeping the law, very concerned about strict fasting, and progressing your way up through levels of angelic experiences.

[18:36] Those who follow this teaching are serious about it. They are serious about God.

They're serious about religion. They're serious about spiritual disciplines. They're serious about religious practices. They seem devout.

The teaching seems reasonable. And this is what makes it so dangerous. And why it threatens the maturity of the saints.

Paul's warning is clear. Don't be deluded. Don't fall for the persuasive deception that diminishes Christ.

Don't fall for it. It's a persuasive deception. Don't listen when someone says you need Christ plus philosophy.

[ 19 : 47 ] You need Christ plus experiences. You need Christ plus secret knowledge that I can tell you, but shh, don't tell anyone else. You need Christ plus better habits.

You need Christ plus these experiences of extending up. Don't listen when someone tries to delude you with something that sounds religious, sounds spiritual.

It's a plausible deception. Paul labors for unshakable faith.

But this teaching undermines the sufficiency of Jesus. Paul labors for their commitment to community.

And yet this teaching would have them keeping secrets from one another. Because you might know, but that person doesn't know. Shh, don't tell them. They're not allowed to know this.

[ 20 : 47 ] Paul labors for assurance through knowing. But this teaching results in doubt and insecurity. Why? Because you always have to do more and try harder and be better.

And you will never know if you have done enough to keep ascending your way up this spiritual ladder. You'll always wonder if you've done enough.

Because if this teaching is true, then Christ is not enough. Look again at verse 2.

This is Paul's struggle. That their hearts may be encouraged. Being knit together in love to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding.

And the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ. In whom are hidden all.

[ 22 : 03 ] All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Some say that verse 3 is the pinnacle of the whole book of Colossians.

And I think there is good reason to see that as being true. Maybe you've heard a story about a child who's being asked some questions about the Bible.

And every time they don't know the answer to the question, they just say, Jesus. Jesus. According to Paul in verse number 3, that is exactly right.

Every question that you want to ask about God and his purposes can and must be answered with reference to the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.

What does this mean for us? What did this mean for them? For the Colossians?

[ 23 : 20 ] Your faith is only unshakable because Christ is the object of your faith. Your commitment to community is only as strong as your love is motivated by Christ's love for you.

Your assurance is only as full as your growing understanding, your growing knowledge of Christ.

These influential teachers with their plausible arguments, they are peddling a counterfeit gospel.

Not an upgrade to the gospel. They hide wisdom from the unworthy.

But God reveals wisdom and knowledge freely, graciously, lavishly on all those who will look to Christ.

[ 24 : 24 ] If you don't have that kind of wisdom and knowledge. And you want it. It is in Christ.

If you don't have that kind of full assurance. The assurance that you're seeking. That your faith is real. It is found in Christ.

Call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the scripture says, and you will be saved. Every question you want to ask about God and his purposes can and must be answered with reference to the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.

Every treasure of wisdom and knowledge. All of it originates in him. All of it is found in him. And it cannot be discovered apart from him.

Jesus Christ is the final treasure. And Paul is convinced that the Colossians won't fall for any Christ-diminishing nonsense.

[ 25 : 45 ] No matter how plausible it sounds. Look at verse number five. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit.

Rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. 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 has not met them personally. And Paul is not with them now.

That's why he's writing them this letter. And yet he tells them that he is spiritually present with them. He affirms their good order.

[ 26 : 57 ] He affirms the strength of their faith in Christ. And he calls them to respond to the truth.

That all of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ.

How should they respond? Well, not by adding to Christ. But by walking in him.

Continuously living out the truth that they received. What truth? That Jesus Christ is Lord. Paul doesn't seem terribly concerned here about mixing up his metaphors.

It's hard on preachers. I don't think it was all that hard on Paul. He doesn't seem to mind mixing metaphors. Listen and look at this. Three different metaphors that he uses.

How should they respond? If they want to continue in him. If they are going to walk in Christ. What would that look like?

[ 28 : 06 ] It would mean remaining rooted in him. Rooted like a giant oak tree. With an underground web of roots spreading out.

The oak tree does not chase the rain. It sends its roots where the water already is. Go deep into Christ.

If they want to walk in Christ. Then they should be built up in him. This is like a house. On a solid foundation. You have the foundation he says.

It's the gospel. Christ is all of it. Just continue in him. Be built up in him. The foundation gives stability to the whole structure.

We might ask. What am I building on? Third metaphor Paul uses. They should be established in the faith.

[ 29 : 16 ] This has legal connotations. Like a settled legal precedent. There's no need to relitigate God's verdict over their lives.

There's no need to wake up every morning and hear more argument and listen to more debate. They should be established in the faith.

And finally. They should abound in thanksgiving. Like a cup.

That is overflowing. Filled until it's overflowing. You can tell what someone is filled up. Filled with. By what spills out of them.

When Christ is all. When Christ is your treasure. Then gratitude spills out.

[ 30 : 15 ] Obedience spills out. Love spills out. Worship spills out. I wonder. What is spilling out of you? Since Jesus Christ is the final treasure.

Brothers and sisters. We can repent of thinking that we have now or will someday graduate from the gospel. We can repent of chasing popular spiritual life hacks.

We can repent of following any teaching that diminishes Christ by adding to him. What have you tried adding to Jesus in order to get security?

In order to get identity? In order to get hope? Maturity matters. But if Christ is the final treasure. Then we can measure maturity differently. We will. We'll measure maturity differently. It won't be strictly on how much you know.

[ 31 : 31 ] It won't be based on what obscure theological position you can explain. It won't be by posturing or pretending or propping up.

We will measure maturity differently. When we realize that maturity means you are increasingly unable to live without Jesus Christ.

So, ask God for unshakable faith.

For a heart that is firm and steadfast and resolved. Ask God to renew your commitment to his people.

Be present with love. Be accountable for one another's well-being and discipleship. Ask God to help you grow in knowing Christ so well that you are changed by being with him.

[ 32 : 45 ] Doubt becomes faith. Fear becomes freedom. Insecurity becomes identity. Self-centeredness becomes sacrificial love.

And me first becomes humble service. This is what happens. This is what happens as we spend time with Jesus.

We become like him. And we do as he did. We don't want to be saints in name only.

And so we walk in him. Rooted in him. Built up in him. Established in him. Him we proclaim.

Why? Because when you are rooted and built up in established, you can't help but be overflowing and abounding with all that you have in Christ.

[ 33 : 42 ] You can't help but tell others, let me show you the treasure. I won't show you where the treasure is. I will show you who the treasure is.

It's Christ. Practice does not make perfect. But Christ makes complete.

And as Paul writes elsewhere, he who began a good work in you will carry it to completion.

Child of God, your hope is not in your consistency. Your hope is in Christ's sufficiency. Christ in you is the hope of glory.

And this Christ, in whom are hidden all of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, has hidden you in him.

[ 34 : 51 ] Safe. Secure. Guarded. Protected. Until the day that he returns. The gospel isn't where you start.

It's where you stay. Is the gospel enough? The gospel is enough. How can you be so sure? Because Christ is all.

Let's pray. Thank you.