

Hope Christian Church  
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13 July 2014

Sermon Series: *The Book of Colossians*



# Toward Maturity in Christ

**Colossians 1:24 - 2:7** (ESV)

<sup>24</sup> Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, <sup>25</sup> of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, <sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to

his saints. <sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. <sup>28</sup> Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup> For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

## Chapter 2

<sup>1</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> 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, <sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. <sup>4</sup> I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. <sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Father, you intend for your people to grow by your word. You intend for your children to abide in your word. You intend for your people to be sanctified by your word. You intend for your children to be kept from sin by your word. You intend for your people to become fruitful by your word. Father, your word is truth. According to all of your wonderful, faithful, powerful, holy, Christ-exalting intentions for your people, help me now to share your word in such a way that all of your will for us today will be accomplished unhindered. Strengthen us according to your word. Encourage us according to your word. Purify us according to your word. Give grace to us according to your word. Create faith in us according to your word. Make us bold for the sake of the gospel of our mighty and only Savior, your only Son, Jesus. Amen.

## Introduction

We expect to see babies receiving nourishment from bottles.



We don't expect to see adults doing the same and if we do see it, we know something is very wrong.



We expect to see parents carrying babies about in wraps over their shoulders.



We do not expect to see full-grown adults carried about in the same way and if we do see it we know something is very wrong.



We expect to see little boys whiling away hours playing with toy cars.



We do not expect to see full grown boys wasting hours playing with toy cars. And if we do see it, we know something is very wrong.



We know the difference between immaturity and maturity, especially when we see it.

## Presenting Everyone Mature

The main point of this passage is that God intends for you, his child, to grow up into complete maturity in Christ. God desires that his children move out of a place of immaturity and consistently grow up into spiritual maturity in Jesus, his Son. We see this in two verses in particular.

**Colossians 1:28-29 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> Him [Jesus] we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup> For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Notice the main point, **to present everyone mature in Christ** (v.28).

**Colossians 2:6-7 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> *Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,* <sup>7</sup> *rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.*

The words “rooted, built up, established, and abounding in thanksgiving” in 2:6-7, are simply Paul’s description of what spiritual maturity in Christ looks like. The rest of the verses in these two paragraphs supports the main idea of moving believers towards maturity in Christ.

## A Definition of Mature

The word translated in v.28 as ‘mature’ (NIV - fully mature, KJV - perfect, NASB - complete) is the Greek word *teleios* (τέλειος). It refers to that which is “fully developed, and complete.”<sup>1</sup> It can also mean moral perfection, such as “not lacking anything good moral quality.”<sup>2</sup> And it can refer to physical development, such as being “completely grown up and mature in all of one’s behavior.”<sup>3</sup> We find the same word several places in the NT.

**James 1:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> *And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

**Matthew 5:48 (ESV)**

<sup>48</sup> *You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Homer used the word in *The Iliad* to refer to sacrificial animals that were “without blemish.”<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, in his *Metaphysics*, defined it as “that beyond which there is no further advance in excellence or quality in its genus, which lacks nothing of its own excellence.”<sup>5</sup> Plato summarized it as “reaching the limit of professional ability.”<sup>6</sup> In Greek philosophical contexts, the word referred to accomplishing the goal of one’s life, or achieving the purpose for which one was created.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 657.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 745.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 752

<sup>4</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 67–68.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

The idea of directional movement toward goodness and progress towards God-ordained purpose is the basic meaning of the word. Paul is explaining that it is the will of God that all the believers in Colossae move towards spiritual maturity found in and through Jesus. Indeed Paul has all believers in mind, since at the end of this letter, he commands that it be circulated among other believers in neighboring cities.<sup>8</sup> ***Spiritual maturity is God's will for all of his children.***

## Maturity Happens Over Time

It has not pleased God to instantly perfect (i.e. mature) all persons immediately at the moment of conversion (i.e. the moment they become believers in Jesus). He simply does not operate that way. He could if he wanted to. God certainly has the power to bring this about, but he does not do this. Many of us wish this is what God would choose to do. Instead, God has chosen to mature all of his children through a rather lengthy process, which the Bible calls the process of sanctification.

## God Uses Specific People to Advance Our Spiritual Maturity

In this process, God uses various means to advance the spiritual maturity of his children. One of those means is specific people. Paul is one of those people. God has been using the apostle Paul through his writings for centuries as a means of bringing about the spiritual maturity of his people. Paul sees himself as simply one of the tools in the hand of God by which God was maturing his church, i.e. his people. In v.25 he describes himself as a 'minister.'

Colossians 1:25 (ESV)

<sup>25</sup> ... I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you...

Paul says, "***I became a minister.***" The word translated 'minister' is *diákonos* (Greek δῖάκονος) from which we have our word deacon. Paul is not here referring to some elite class of elevated ecclesiastical officers. Back in 1:7 he used the word to refer to Epaphras. The word simply means 'one who serves.'<sup>9</sup> There was a time in Paul's life when he was not a servant, then something happened and he ***became*** a servant. Paul is simply describing himself as one who serves the people of God.

However, the reason he became a servant was not because of his own ambition to become a traveling evangelist, but ***according to the stewardship from God.*** God broke into Paul's life and gave him a specific purpose and goal for his life and then gave him all the requisite gifts and abilities necessary to fulfill that purpose. God gave Paul a *stewardship*. A stewardship is

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<sup>8</sup> See Col 4:16. The letter to the Colossians was an encyclical, a letter intended to be shared with other believers in other cities, specifically those in Laodicea.

<sup>9</sup> Curtis Vaughan, "Colossians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 191.

some particular area of responsibility. God handed something over to Paul. He entrusted into his hands a certain mission.

Paul tells us what this stewardship was in Acts 26:17-18.<sup>10</sup> As Paul was sharing the story of his life with king Agrippa, he describes the moment when he first met Jesus face to face. Jesus said to him, "I am...

**Acts 26:17-18 (ESV)**

*<sup>17</sup> "...delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you <sup>18</sup> to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan<sup>11</sup> to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."*

This was the stewardship Jesus gave to Paul—to take the message of the gospel to the Gentiles. A good summary of the gospel is found here—the gospel is the message of forgiveness of sins comes to those who are sanctified by faith in Jesus. This is a message that turns a person from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to the power of God. That was the commission that God gave to Paul and so he can write to the Colossians, *"I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you..."* The goal of Paul's service to God was to take the gospel to the Gentiles, to the Colossians and even all Gentiles in any city who would listen to him, including you and me, some 2,000 years later.

Paul then goes on to offer the job description of the servant of God. And he is not describing vocational ministers exclusively. Indeed vocational ministers should possess these qualities, but Paul again and again commends his own conduct as that after which all obedient followers of Jesus should model their lives (2 Thes 3:7-9; 1 Thes 1:6; 1 Cor 4:16; Acts 20:35). He is describing the character of everyone who desires to be used by God to help others grow in their spiritual maturity.

If the people of God are to be used by God to change this world, here are some qualities you need to embrace. If you are to be an effective minister (i.e. servant) to your coworkers, then here are some specific characteristics you need to exhibit in your life. If you truly want to mature in your faith, then these should be the goals at which you are aiming. If you want to be able to distinguish true believers from pretend believers, then pay close attention to this list.

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<sup>10</sup> See also Acts 9:15; Romans 11:13; 15:16.

<sup>11</sup> Those who do not live under the power of God are ruled by the power of Satan.



## The Job Description of the Servant of God

1. The servant of God must be **willing to joyfully suffer** (1:24).

Colossians 1:24 (ESV)

<sup>24</sup> *Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,*

The servant (i.e. minister) of God must be willing to embrace suffering. Remember that Paul was writing this letter from jail (4:3, 10, 18). He was writing this letter with a shackle around his ankle. When Jesus called Paul to himself, he told him that from that point on his life would be filled with suffering for the name of Jesus (Acts 9:16). Suffering is one of the means by which God brings his people to maturity.

If you desire to be mightily used by God to bring about spiritual maturity in the lives of others, then you must be willing to suffer<sup>12</sup> because of the name of Jesus. Paul even goes so far as to say that he suffers joyfully, because he is suffering **for your sake**.

This verse has been the cause of massive misunderstanding and destructive misapplication because of the words, "**in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.**" Does Paul mean that the sufferings of Jesus were insufficient in effecting salvation? Let's remind ourselves of what he just said.

Colossians 1:19-23 (ESV)

<sup>19</sup> *For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

<sup>21</sup> *And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, <sup>23</sup> if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard.*

This clearly states that what Jesus's atoning sacrifice on the cross was sufficient to 1) reconcile sinners to God through the exercise of personal faith in Jesus, 2) remove spiritual alienation, 3) do away with a hostile mind toward God, 4) bring peace, 5) and to guarantee future holy presentation before God for those who continues in the faith. Jesus' sacrifice is completely sufficient to accomplish all these things. As Paul said in Romans 8:1, "*There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.*"

And yet the Roman Catholic church has it massively wrong on this issue. Sadly, the Roman Catholic church understands this verse to teach that Jesus' death was **not** sufficient to

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<sup>12</sup> For a list of Paul's sufferings, see 2 Cor 11:23-28.

effect salvation. Something is lacking in Christ's afflictions. See, it says so right there in verse 24. Paul's sufferings are "filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions." And since Christ's sufferings were lacking, then more suffering is needed. And so, the Roman Catholic church calls upon its people to engage in *physical* suffering in order to fill up what is lacking. And so they teach error such as this,

We are steeped in the mystery of the Mystical Body of Christ, where every member is connected in spirit with every other, and one Christian can take it upon himself to pay the penalty for a ... sin that another... Christian... has gotten himself into. As Jesus brought about atonement and salvation, so also individual Christians by suffering can atone for the sins of others.<sup>13</sup>

Nowhere in Scripture are we taught that one person can take upon himself the penalty of another person's sins in such a way as to atone for those sins. Jesus is the only person who atones for sins. This is what Jesus meant when on the cross he cried out,

John 19:30 (ESV)  
<sup>30</sup> "It is finished!"

His atoning work is over. It is done and perfectly complete. This is further signified by the fact that Jesus is now **seated** at God's right hand. His work is complete.

Hebrews 10:11-14 (ESV)

<sup>11</sup> And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. <sup>12</sup> But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, <sup>13</sup> waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. <sup>14</sup> For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

The Bible never teaches you to put your faith in my sufferings to have your sins atoned for, but everywhere teaches that you are to put your faith in the sufferings of Jesus in order to have your sins atoned for. The book of Hebrews makes this abundantly clear.

Yet despite this and many other verses<sup>14</sup> Roman Catholics are invited to endure unnecessary pain and suffering under the misguided hope of earning favor with God and adding to the **Treasury of Merit**<sup>15</sup>, to which individuals can add by experiencing extra suffering thus allowing God to apply to others in need. It is because of this teaching that

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<sup>13</sup> Howard Kainz, "Catholicism and Suffering" 24 March 2012 available at <http://www.thecatholicthing.org/columns/2012/catholicism-and-suffering.html> accessed 12 July 2014.

<sup>14</sup> John 14:6; Acts 4:12;

<sup>15</sup> Supposedly the pope has control over dispensing the excess merit in order to free souls from purgatory. Martin Luther in Thesis #82 asked why, if the Pope has control over this treasury, he does not free everyone from purgatory?



some devout Catholics subject themselves to beatings, floggings, and even have themselves crucified during Holy Week.<sup>16</sup> The Telegraph of London has a picture gallery which shows the extent to which hundreds of people go to each year in reenacting Christ's sufferings.

This misunderstanding of this verse is perpetuated by the fact that Mary is supposed to have said that the reason "many souls go to hell is because there is no one to sacrifice themselves and pray for them."<sup>17</sup> Yes there is. His name is Jesus. He is the one who is seated at the right hand of the Father and he is the one who prays for us (Rom 8:34).

Furthermore, St. Ignatius is said to have offered this advice to his followers, "Do you want to become a great saint? Ask God to send you many sufferings."<sup>18</sup> That, I say, is poor advice. Do not pray for suffering, for suffering is sure to come in this broken world. Jesus said, "*In this world you will have tribulation*" (Jn 16:33). What we need to pray for is strength to joyfully endure suffering while giving glory to God the Father. I say joyfully endure suffering because of Jesus our example, "*who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame*" (Heb 12:2).

So what is lacking in Christ's afflictions? The **ability of living persons to personally witness them**. In other words, when your coworker tells you, "How can I know Jesus is real when I've never seen him?," then you should be able to say, "Then look at me. Don't you see him in me?" When your family member says, "how can I know that Jesus is more satisfying than sex?," then you should be able to say, "Does not my love of Jesus demonstrate that he is more satisfying than sex?" When someone says to you, "There's no way having Jesus is better than having the top job," then you should be able to say, "Do you not see in me a contentment that is possible apart from the top job? With the psalmists can we not say, 'It is better to be a doorkeeper in the house of God than to live in the mansions of the wicked.'"<sup>19</sup>

Paul was in jail because he refused to compromise the truth of the gospel. He was living proof that obedience to God was better than enjoying the praise of men. He was living testimony to the truth of who Jesus is and he was suffering for it and that was filling up what was lacking in Christ's afflictions—a *visible demonstration to those living during Paul's day*. When we too remain true to the gospel of Jesus, and all biblical truth for that matter, then we too fill up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions—a *visible demonstration to those living during our day*.

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<sup>16</sup> For a picture gallery visit the following website. WARNING: the crucifixions & flagellation are real and very bloody, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/worldnews/7544416/Roman-Catholic-penitents-flagellate-themselves-and-re-enact-the-crucifixion-at-Easter-in-the-Philippines.html?image=14> accessed 12 July 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Kainz, "Catholicism and Suffering."

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Psalm 84:10.

And it is possible to do this with joy because we know that one day the God who see all, will say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

2. The servant of God must **be called and commissioned by God** (1:25).

**Colossians 1:25 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> *of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you,*

Paul was called to himself by God. Paul was doing his own thing when God broke into his life with glorious brightness and changed his mind. Jesus then called him to a particular task to take the gospel to the Gentiles. This happens to each of us when we come to faith in Jesus. God calls us to salvation and then he equips us for service.

**1 Peter 2:9-10 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* <sup>10</sup> *Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

God called Paul and then he gave him a task to do, a stewardship. God gives particular gifts to each of his Children when he gives them the Holy Spirit.

**1 Corinthians 12:7, 11 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

<sup>11</sup> *All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apports to each one individually as he wills.*

God, through his Spirit, gives each of his children a spiritual gift, which he intends to be used for the common good. Paul was given gifts to fulfill his calling. Each of you have been given gifts and you need to use them and we elders need to help you discover them.

3. The servant of God strives to **make God's word fully known** (1:25).

**Colossians 1:25 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> *of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, <sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how*

*great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

Those of us who are the followers of Jesus do not present our own message. We come proclaiming a message that has been handed down to us through the ages and has been recorded in the Bible. And Paul explains that explaining fully God's word entails a mystery, which does not mean something hard to understand but simply refers to something **previously concealed but is now revealed**. That mystery is that God's plan from the beginning included the Gentiles and involved Christ dwelling within the person through the power of his Holy Spirit.

4. The servant of God will **proclaim the all-satisfying Jesus by warnings and teaching** (1:28, 2:3-4).

Colossians 2:3 (ESV)

<sup>3</sup> *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,*

Colossians 1:28 (ESV)

<sup>28</sup> *Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.*

In Jesus is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Jesus is a treasure trove of hidden wisdom and knowledge just waiting to be discovered. Knowing him is like digging through Treasure Island, except who has time for such an adventure? Who bothers to get to know Jesus so intimately as to discover the depths of these treasures? Who even believes this?

Yet Paul says this Jesus, the one in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom & knowledge, is the Jesus he proclaims by **teachings** and **warnings**. Teaching we can understand—this refers to the corpus of biblical doctrine, but warnings? Probably he is thinking about warnings like, "How can we expect to escape God's wrath if we neglect so great a salvation as this?" (Heb 2:2-3). Or warnings like, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" (1 Cor 6:9ff).

5. The servant of God must **embrace toil and struggle by depending upon Christ's energy and power** (1:29).

Colossians 1:29 (ESV)

<sup>29</sup> *For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*

The work to which we are called is too great for us. It requires that we depend, not upon ourselves, but upon the power and energy supplied to us by the Holy Spirit. We must rely

upon his strength and his mighty power in order to endure the toil and struggle necessary to present everyone mature in Christ.

6. The servant of God **must be willing to occasionally share personal struggles** (2:1).

Colossians 2:1-2 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> 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,

Evidently Paul thought it would be advantageous for the Colossians if they knew about his personal struggles. We do not want to reveal that we struggle, but Paul frequently shared his personal struggles because by it he intended to strengthen the hearts of God's people.

How many Christians have been blessed by Paul's sharing his struggles in Romans 7? He often spoke of his personal weakness (1 Cor 2:3; 2 Cor 11:30; 12:9).

It is through sharing personal struggles that somehow God **knits together our hearts in love**. Do you not love more deeply those who have entrusted to you their struggles?

7. The servant of God will **remind God's people often of what they already know** (2:6-7).

Colossians 2:6-7 (ESV)

<sup>6</sup> Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Paul is simply saying, "Hold true to what you already know. Don't forget what you were taught. Remain rooted in the truth that changed your life in the beginning. Don't deviate from it and don't allow anyone to shake the foundation upon which your new life was built. Remember the truth that changed you and moved you out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of his beloved Son? Then don't swerve from that life-changing gospel message!"

## Application

If you have been walking with the Lord for a long time, which kinds of expression of maturity would you expect to see in your life?

Are there areas in your life which you know you are constantly acting immaturely? Are there levels of maturity you are refusing to embrace? Will you do anything to change these things or will you continue in same immature direction?

If you do not know how to find your area of service of the body to which God has called you, then I'd like to help you discover it. Come see me.