

Growing to Maturity:

The Message of Colossians" #6

"What Are We Here For?"

Col. 1:28,29

--CEFC 8/9/20

Topic: Purpose Statement

I'm not sure when the craze took over corporate America—

I think it was the 1990s—

but ever since, it seems that every organization has to have a mission statement.

You simply cannot function without one.

I mean, I was in Jiffy Lube, and I saw their mission statement posted on the wall.

A mission statement is supposed to say what you do and why you exist.

A good mission statement should be short, memorable,

and in some way, it should not only inform, but also inspire.

But often I find these statements to be rather vague or even vacuous--

There's Walmart's mission statement, for example:

"We save people money so they can live better."

OK, I can "live better" by shopping at Walmart.

That's good to know.

Or there's Microsoft—

"We exist to enable people and businesses throughout the world

to realize their full potential."

Pretty similar, but loftier, I suppose.

“Reaching my full potential” is more inspiring than simply “living better.”

Sometimes these statements are just downright fanciful.

Avery Dennison is a company whose mission is

“To help make every brand more inspiring, and the world more intelligent.”

That's a pretty grand ambition for a company whose main product is stick-on labels.

Of course, we as a church had to have something along these lines,

so, maybe fifteen years ago,

we came up with what is printed in our weekly bulletin:

“Cornerstone—building a community of grace and truth

for ministry and mission to the glory of God.”

I kinda like it.

And I'm inspired by it, personally.

But like any mission statement, it needs to be spelled out quite a bit

if it is to really guide us in what we do.

And our passage this morning from Paul's letter to the Colossians

is as good as any to help clarify what we mean by this mission statement.

What is our mission as a church?

What are we supposed to be doing?

What is our central reason for existing?

Are we a **social club**--

a place where you can belong,

a warm and inviting place like the Cheers Bar
where everybody knows your name?

Or are we a **welfare agency**?

Do we replace the values of camaraderie and community
with those of compassion and service?

Or are we a **political action group**?

Is our primary purpose to be the soul of society, the conscience of the nation,
demanding justice and righteousness?

In function, if not expressly, these are all commonly held models of the church,
and, of course, all three have important elements of truth
that in some fashion should be incorporated into a healthy church.

But Paul's words in Colossians suggest another model of the church
that, in his mind, should supersede all others.

And what is Paul's model?--

The church as a **communication center**--existing to broadcast a message.

"We proclaim Christ" he says.

That's our job--

to be a lighthouse, a beacon, a transmission station,
communicating a message to all who would listen.

You see, this is the church's only unique purpose--

Surely, we should enjoy one another's company--

the church should be a fellowship of believers knit together in love.

Without a doubt, the church should seek to help those in need,

in very practical ways--

we could scarcely be called followers of Christ if we didn't.

And the church should also seek to be a force for good in society,

we wouldn't be loving our neighbor otherwise.

And, with caution, prudence, and humility,

we should seek to shape public policy in ways that are just for all.

But in each of these areas the church engages in activities and purposes

that it shares with others--

social clubs, welfare agencies, political action groups.

But the church--and the church *only*--proclaims Christ.

If the church does not make Christ known,

then who will?

That's our job--

Our message is Christ--we are to make him known.

And that purpose is embedded in our church statement—

We find it, first, in our name—Cornerstone—

You see, Christ is our Cornerstone—everything we do is to be built on him.

And the community we are building is to one of “grace and truth”—

which is the way Christ is described in John 1—

Jesus Christ is “**the one and only Son, who came from the Father,**

full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14).

We build this community of grace and truth

by proclaiming this one who is full of grace and truth—

we are to proclaim Christ. /

And our job is to proclaim the Christ Paul writes about earlier in our chapter--

The one who **“is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn over all creation.”**
the One by whom and through whom and for whom
all things were created.

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together,
so that in all things he might have the supremacy.

The Christ we proclaim is the **Prophet** above all prophets,
for his words will never pass away.

The Christ we proclaim is our **supreme Priest**
who alone can bring us into a relationship with God—
for the once and for all sacrifice he offers
is the perfect sacrifice of himself
when he died on the cross for our sins.

And the Christ we proclaim is also the great **King**—
risen from the grave and exalted to the highest place,
given all authority in heaven and on earth.

It's the Christ that we affirm in the Nicene Creed—
God from God,
Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.

This has been a standard confession of Christians for over sixteen centuries.

We proclaim Christ—

we proclaim Christ within the church

in our ministry to one another,

and we proclaim Christ outside the church

in our mission to the world.

And we do this, not for our own glory,

but “to the glory of God.”

But when we proclaim this Christ,

will our proclamation be **credible**?

Will it be believable?

Will our own lives--individually and collectively as a church--

reflect and indeed **support** the truth

that Jesus is in fact God Incarnate,

full of grace and truth?

The medium is part of the message, you know—

and how we live as followers of Christ

may speak louder than our words.

A.W. Tozer makes this sobering observation:

"The present position of Christ in [many] gospel churches

may be likened to that of a king in a limited constitutional monarchy.

The king (sometimes depersonalized by the term 'the Crown')

is in such a country no more than a traditional rallying point,

a pleasant symbol of unity and loyalty

much like a flag or a national anthem.

He is lauded, feted, and supported,

but his real authority is small.

Nominally he is head over all,

but in every crisis, someone else makes the decisions.

On formal occasions he appears in his royal attire

to deliver the tame, colorless speech

put into his mouth by the real rulers of the country.

The whole thing may be no more than

good-natured make-believe,

but it is rooted in antiquity, it is a lot of fun,

and no one wants to give it up."

That's not what Paul has in mind.

We proclaim Christ, Paul says,

and he wants us to know that by that he means much more

than just having people recite the Nicene Creed.

Jesus must be much more than just a constitutional monarch.

For that reason,

if proclaiming Christ is our purpose,

then "admonishing and teaching with all wisdom" must be our method.

We are to teach the truth about Christ--

but always with a view to the appropriation of that truth
in the lives of those who receive it.

Our proclamation addresses both the mind and the will.

Is Jesus Christ truly Lord?--

not just in our creed, but also in our deeds?

Our proclamation of Christ certainly involves teaching,

but it must also have a moral dimension--

it must come with "**admonition**," Paul says.

The word "admonition" has a rather homely feel to it

in our vocabulary.

It makes me think of Poor Richard's Almanac

and its practical tidbits of advice,

like "Waste not, want not"

or "A stitch in time saves nine."

The word Paul uses here, *nouqetevw*, is much stronger than that.

it derives from the idea of "putting the mind in order,"

and it is variously translated

when it is found in the New Testament--

Sometimes it carries the basic idea of moral instruction--

as in Eph. 6:4--

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children;

instead bring them up in the training

and *instruction* (the word is nouqesia) of the Lord" (cf. Rom. 15:14).

But more often, this word nouqetevw,

is translated by the English verb, "to warn"

I Thess. 5:12--"*Warn* those who are idle."

Tit. 3:10--"*Warn* a divisive person."

Acts 20:31--Paul says to the Ephesians,

"So be on your guard!

Remember that for three years I never stopped

***warning* each of you night and day with tears."** (cf. 1 Cor. 4:14)

Notice the personal concern that accompanies this action--

It's like a parent teaching a young child

about a pedestrian crosswalk signal.

"Green means 'Go,' and red means 'Stop!'"

This is not idle information.

To act on it or to ignore it

may be a matter of life or death.

So our proclamation of Christ is teaching, but it's not merely academic--

it contains a warning, an exhortation, an admonition.

It calls for a response of the will.

It must affect our behavior

or it is useless or even dangerous. /

We proclaim Christ as our Savior—

who died for our sins on the cross.

But Jesus' death on the cross does us no good

unless we turn in repentance from our life of self-centered rebellion against God,
and seek his merciful forgiveness in the sacrifice of his Son.

In other words, accepting Jesus as my Savior

means I must want to be set free from my sin

so that I can love the God who created me and who loves me. /

We also proclaim Christ as our Lord—

who was raised in glory as the eternal King.

and we must also admonish everyone

to make him Lord in their lives.

All that stands ahead of him in our lives must go--

our decisions must be submitted to his control.

Our lifestyle must be examined in the light of his directions.

We must live a life worthy of the one who has called us to himself.

And that's what has to take place as a result of our proclamation of Christ.

We are to call people to that kind of living faith.

That's how Christ is to be proclaimed—

the message of the gospel comes with a moral dimension—a moral demand.

That's why we must admonish and not simply inform.

We must warn those who hear the gospel of the consequences of rejecting it.

Without Christ we are without God and without hope in the world.

Responding to this message is a matter of eternal consequence—

it is a matter of heaven and hell.

For this reason, admonition,
or the exhortation to apply what we have learned,
must be included in every aspect
of the ministry of the church--
not just the sermon on Sunday mornings.

Our Bible studies,
our fellowship groups,
even our friendships
must all be places where we exhort one another
to love and good deeds.

Christianity is much more than morality,
but it is never less.

Our teaching must include admonition with all wisdom.

That is, our admonishing and our teaching is to be done wisely--
practically applying the truth to the issues of real life.

Our Purpose and our Method.

That's what we are to do,
and how we are to do it.

We proclaim Christ,
teaching and admonishing with all wisdom.

But *why* are we to do it?

For what end?

What is our goal?

"We proclaim Christ," Paul says, "teaching and admonishing every person,
so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ."

"fully mature"--

The Greek word here is teleivo"--

which could also be translated "complete" or "perfect."

Paul's goal in proclaiming Christ

is to bring every person to a complete and perfect maturity in Christ.

Now you may have thought that we proclaim Christ

so that people can be saved from their sins and go to heaven.

But Paul didn't just strive for conversions

when he traveled through Asia Minor and preached the gospel;

No, he sought to build churches—

communities of believers united to Christ

whose lives were being nurtured and shaped

so that they might be complete and mature in Christ

and might grow up to become more like Christ—

full of grace and truth.

Churches are like families--

It is in families that human beings are to reproduce.

In families we see new birth.

And in families we see small communities in which infants can grow to maturity--
becoming responsible adults.

Peter says,

**"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk,
so that by it you may grow up in your salvation." (1 Pet. 2:2)**

And what a tragedy it is when children don't develop and mature,
when their growth, either mentally or physically, is stunted.

But isn't that what happens so often in the church?

How often do we see adult Christians whose growth has been retarded--
they quit growing at a children's Sunday School level.

Spiritually, intellectually, and morally they are perpetually immature.

How tragic! That's not how God intended it.¹

Our goal is "to present everyone mature, complete, perfect in Christ"--

We are to help people become more like Christ. /

What does that look like--this mature Christian?

I think we can look at what Paul has already said to these believers

in the opening words of this letter.

What Paul thinks God for in their lives

and what he prays for in their lives

help to paint a picture of the kind of person we should aim to produce.

¹ cf. Heb. 5:12-6:1

A. The first thing really is the first thing—
and that is that a mature follower of Christ
demonstrates a clear grasp of the gospel—

Paul says in v. 4-- "**we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus**"

v. 6—you heard **"the true message of the gospel
and truly understood God's grace."**

When I am assessing a person's spiritual state,
I want to know if that person understands the good news
that our relationship with God
is one based entirely on his **grace---**
that God has rescued us from our hellish captivity to sin
not because of anything we have done—
but solely by his sovereign mercy and love.

By the work of the Holy Spirit when we turn to Christ in faith
we are joined to him
such that we are brought into a new kingdom, a new realm of existence—
we are, as Paul says in v. 13,
**"rescued from the dominion of darkness
and brought into the kingdom of the Son he loves,
in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."
and we are loved—
just as the Father loves Jesus himself.**

A mature Christian clearly grasps this gospel.

and a mature Christian continues to grow

in their knowledge of this gospel in all its richness

and to internalize this message

and to allow it to have its full effect.

So have you grasped this message?

Have you **"understood God's grace in all its truth"**?

Has this truth so gripped you that it forms an essential part of your identity—

who you are.

Do you now understand yourself as a person **"in Christ."**

If you are to be a mature believer, you must.

In Col. 1:4 Paul thanks God for what he sees in these Colossian believers,

"because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus"

and then he thanks God also

because **"of the love you have for all God's people."**

A mature Christian has a clear grasp of the gospel

and as a result of that, he or she **loves their brothers and sisters in Christ.**

The one flows from the other.

So if I'm assessing a person's spiritual state,

this is something I look for—

Does the person desire the company of other Christians?

Is there a commitment to the local church—

Do they see the importance of this new family that they have been joined to

by the work of Christ?

How can you say you love Christ if you have no love for his body?

Jesus calls our love for one another

an essential distinguishing mark of being his disciple.

A right understanding of the gospel

must lead to a commitment to the new community that the gospel creates—

that new community in which Christ dwells by the Spirit.

You cannot be a mature Christian believer without a love for God's people,

that's why we as a church seek to connect people to one another

in a gospel-centered community—

a community of grace and truth.

It's a fact--you cannot be a mature Christian on your own.

A third thing Paul mentions is found in v. 9ff—

"we have not stopped praying for you

and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will

through all spiritual wisdom and understanding

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord

and may please him in every way:"

I would capture what Paul says here this way:

A mature Christian **lives a life of moral virtue.**

Once you grasp the gospel,

you come to know the love of God as your Father in heaven

and you want to please him in every way.

You want to know what he wants for your life.

You don't want to dishonor him and bring shame upon his name.

You want the wisdom to know his will

so that you might live in a way

that is worthy of his calling in your life.

So when I'm assessing a person's spiritual life,

I want to know if a person wants to live this kind of life.

Is this important to him?

Does this person want to be a man or woman of moral virtue?

Will he speak the truth and deal with people honestly?

Will she refrain from gossip?

Will he not be quick-tempered and easily angered?

Will she be patient and forgiving?

Is the person greedy or envious or divisive and quarrelsome?

Is the person generous toward those in need?

Is he or she self-controlled,

avoiding drunkenness?

Is there a concern for sexual purity,

recognizing God's design that sexual intimacy is to be reserved

for a man and woman in marriage?

Does the person seek to act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with their God?

If you don't understand these things—and if you don't pursue them in your life,
then you still have much to learn about what it means to follow Christ.
You've yet to understand the new life to which you are called in the gospel.

What does Jesus say—"If you love me, you will obey my commandments."

A mature Christian wants **"to live a life worthy of the Lord,
to please him in every way:"**

He or she must live a life of moral virtue,
displaying the character qualities of Christ.//

In Col. 1 Paul prays that the Colossian believers may grow to maturity in Christ,
and that prayer includes this in v. 10:

**"And we pray . . . that you may live a life worthy of the Lord
and may please him in every way:
bearing fruit in every good work,"**

So I say, fourthly, that a mature Christian bears fruit in ministry and mission.

Jesus talked about this when he said in John 15--

"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. . . .**

**This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit,
showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:5,8)**

Bearing fruit in every good work—

following in Jesus' footsteps as a servant sent out into the world--

engaging in ministry and mission—

that shows that you are truly his disciple—

and this is to the Father's glory.

Do you want to serve Christ by serving others in the church family?

Do you want to serve Christ by being engaged in his mission in the world?

Bearing fruit in these ways is a distinguishing mark of Christian maturity.

There are two more distinguishing marks

from Paul's words in Col. 1—

and both deal with the heart in our relationship to God.

in vv. 11-12 Paul prays that these Colossians Christians would be those who

"joyfully give thanks to the Father . . . "

It's hard to imagine a mature Christian believer

who is always dour, downcast and despondent.

Not that you need to put on a happy face all the time and be perky,

but as a consequence of understanding

the incredible riches that are ours in Christ,

the mature Christian can experience a deep sense of joy about life.

Jesus says, **"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you**

and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11).

His joy came through a sense of well-being
in knowing the love of his heavenly Father--
in knowing his Father's constant companionship, his protective care,
his gracious, sovereign rule in all of life.

This was the joy that no one could take from him—
It was a joy that transcended all his circumstances,
and it was a joy that he came to give to us.

The mature Christian shares that joy--
he can say "Thank you, Lord" regardless of the circumstances--
he can rest in his Father's hands--
secure, at peace, always with a future and a hope.

Victor Hugo observed that "The supreme happiness in life
is the conviction that we are loved."
I would amend that slightly by saying that the supreme happiness in life
is the conviction that we are loved by God."

The mature Christian is one who has come to know
the height and the depth and the breadth of the love of God in Christ--
he has, above all others, a reason to be joyful.

And in that joy he can be humbly thankful to God for all his goodness,
without a sense of entitlement,
as if God owed him anything.

Everything that he has, he receives as a gift—with a thankful heart—
submitting his will to God's in all the circumstances of life.

Yes, our desires may be frustrated,
but we must trust that God knows better than we do what is for our good.

So we have reason to live before him in joyful thanksgiving.

Is that your experience?

It is an area in which we all need to grow.

And finally, maturity as a Christian results in **hope**—

as Paul speaks in v. 27 of the glorious riches of this mystery—

Christ in us, the hope of glory.

Christian maturity doesn't come about in a week or a month or even a year—

there are some seeds that spout up quickly, Jesus says,

but they are found on rocky soil,

or they are crowded out by weeds—

and when trouble or persecution comes

or it is choked by the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth,

it becomes unfruitful.

But the seed sown on good soil endures

and produces a rich harvest.

The mature Christian is one who **endures in hope**—

not deterred by troubles and trials,

not distracted by worries or wealth.

The mature believer has set his hope on Christ and his riches—

and so he perseveres to the end.

A Mature Christian . . .

Clearly Grasps the Gospel

Loves God's People

Lives a Life of Moral Virtue

Bears Fruit in Ministry and Mission

Responds to God with Joyful Thanksgiving

and Endures in Hope

Certainly, there are other things you might add to this list,

but these are surely essential.

This is what we should be aiming at

as we seek to proclaim Christ—

admonishing and teaching with all wisdom.

Notice what Paul says in our passage.

Three times in the original

Paul uses the term *pavnta a[nqrwpon*--"every person"--

literally, "admonishing *every person*,

teaching *every person*,

so that we may present *every person* complete in Christ"

This is deliberate--

He gives no room for the idea of a spiritual elite--

the notion that spiritual maturity, real discipleship, is only for a few.

Every single Christian is capable of the maturity of which Paul speaks,
for that maturity comes through faith,
abiding in Christ, and being obedient to him.

We're all capable of that--you don't need a theological degree.

And in Paul's view, Christian maturity is expected of every single Christian.

This is what you were created for--

This is what you were called to become—

This is what it means to be fully human--

to be conformed to the image of Christ.

This is our glorious destiny--

and while we are alive on this earth

it is our highest responsibility.

And only as we are becoming more like Christ

can we make him known.

And that is our goal as a church—to present *every person* complete in Christ."

But how does this get done?

It doesn't happen automatically--

any more than seeing your children grow into a healthy maturity

happens automatically.

As any parent knows, it takes commitment,

it takes time,

it takes effort.

Look at what Paul says--

v. 29--"To this end I strenuously contend, . . ."

He labors, he struggles--and we shouldn't think that we can do less.

Fruitful ministry--

seeing people come to Jesus Christ and grow into mature believers--

that won't happen without a lot of time and effort.

"To this end I strenuously contend, . . ." Paul says--

Paul speaks of "struggling" using an athletic term--**ἀγώνισμα**

You can hear the English word "agony" embedded there.

"To this end I strenuously contend, . . ."

and yet, he says, he struggles

"with all Christ's energy, which so powerfully works in me."

That's our hope, you see.

We do not labor alone.

Our hope is that as we work, God will work, too--in us and through us--

to accomplish his good purpose.

That will be our power--

as we abide in the vine, we will bear much fruit.

And what could be more exciting

than to see the almighty God of heaven and earth

do his work in the world through us.

What are we about as a church?

What are we here for?

What is our purpose?

And Paul's answer is that we are here to proclaim Christ.

We have a message to deliver to the world—

the most important message of all.

There are lots of good things we could be doing,

but only this is unique and distinctive to the church—

we are to proclaim Christ.

If we don't do it, nobody else will.

There's no government program to do this,

it's not the job of the Hollywood to do this;

It won't happen in our public schools.

The church is God's instrument of grace in the world,

making known the good news of the gospel to all nations.

We are to be a community of grace and truth—

the grace and truth that is revealed in Jesus Christ,

and we are to make that grace and truth of Christ known to all.

We proclaim Christ—

we proclaim him to each other in our ministry within the church,

and we proclaim him to our friends, our neighbors,

our fellow students, our co-workers

and to people everywhere outside the church

in our mission to the world.

This is fundamental,

 this is basic,

 this is essential—

and the day we cease proclaiming Christ, we cease being a real church.

 But as we do, we bring glory to God./

#293 Rise Up O Church of God --all 4 vv.

Benediction: "May God himself, the God of peace,

 sanctify you through and through.

 May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless

 at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it."

Growing to Maturity:

The Message of Colossians" #6

Aug. 9, 2020

"What Are We Here For?"

Col. 1:28,29

What's it all about--this thing called "church"? Paul's words in our passage this morning will help us to answer that question, and in the process help us to keep our church on target.

I. Our Purpose--

"We proclaim Christ"

II. Our Method—

*"admonishing and teaching everyone
with all wisdom"*

III. Our Goal--

"to present everyone fully mature in Christ"

A Mature Christian . . .

Clearly Grasps the Gospel

Loves God's People

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Responds to God with Joyful Thanksgiving

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IV. Our Power--

*"To this end I strenuously contend
with all the energy
Christ so powerfully works in me."*

Sermon Response:

"What Are We Here For?"

Col. 1:28,29

•What are some of the different ways that we as a church "proclaim Christ"? How can you be involved in doing that? Pray for an opportunity today.

•Why should we proclaim Christ by admonishing? What does this mean? What is the proper way to admonish people in the context of the church?

•Read 1 Cor. 3:10-15. Why is it important that we seek to present every person complete, mature, perfect in Christ? Look back at what Paul mentions in Col. 1—

A Mature Christian . . .

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What is an area in which you need to become more mature as a Christian? How can the church help you?

•Read 1 Cor. 15:10. What is the relationship between our effort and God's power working in us? How can we increase God's power at work within us? How can you work harder in this divine calling found in this passage?

•In what areas of your life do you need admonishment? Who in your life "admonishes" you? Who could you admonish? How do you respond to admonishment in your life?

•As we think about our purpose as a church, pray that we may be wise in the way we use our resources so that we might be effective in accomplishing this purpose. Pray for your own opportunities to “proclaim Christ.”