

Growing to Maturity:

The Message of Colossians" #6

"Moving On to Maturity"

Col. 2:6,7

--CEFC 8/23/20

Topic: Christian Growth

Theological errors, like bookends, usually come in pairs.

Somebody takes an extreme position on one side of a question,

and then somebody else takes the extreme on the other side,

and the truth is usually to be found somewhere in the middle.

Take, for example, the fundamental issue of becoming a Christian.

Some people say that to become a Christian you just need faith--

and by faith, they mean simply giving mental assent to certain propositions--

like, Jesus was the Son of God who died for my sins.

If you just believe that in your head, you're saved--

They talk of receiving Jesus as your *Savior*,

but there is no necessity to receive Jesus as *Lord*.

In other words, no moral response is required--

no repentance, no dying to self, no commitment to follow Christ.

"Oh no," they say, "that would be salvation by works.

We can have none of that.

We are saved through faith alone, by grace alone."

But others say that's just "dead faith" and "cheap grace"--

faith devoid of action,

and grace empty of any real meaning.

Becoming a Christian, they say, is all about morality--

Jesus is Lord, and he has given us a new law to obey.

Becoming a Christian is not a matter of simply believing,

it's about doing, doing, doing--

you must strive to be good and holy.

Didn't Jesus say, "**Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect**"? /

So which is it?--

believing or being good?

is it faith or is it works?

And there is a hybrid heresy that is quite prevalent in evangelical circles--

and I suspect you may come across it,

and you may even have become captured by it.

It says that *becoming* a Christian is all about

faith and grace and unconditional acceptance.

But then it says that *being* a Christian, that is, living as a Christian,

is all about working to be good and holy,

trying to please God in preparation for judgment--

you have to read the Bible every day and pray,

and help the needy and share the gospel.

After you become a Christian

your relationship with God is all about your own good works.

As we've said before,

there are ditches on either side of the road,

and the devil really doesn't care which one you fall into.

It takes wisdom, discernment, and even bold courage to navigate safely down the middle.

It's tricky, because both sides have some element of truth,

but the passage that we look at this morning, as well as any I know,

helps to set us on the middle path

that leads to Christian maturity--

a path which involves both our belief and our behavior.

In Col. 2:6,7 Paul presents what could be called his thesis statement for the entire letter.

It sums up his whole message to these Colossian Christians.

It links what he has *already* said about the majesty and glory of Jesus Christ

with what he is *about to say* about how we ought to live

in the light of it.

Here Paul ties together belief and behavior,

faith and works,

being and doing,

in a way that is to lead us into becoming

complete and mature in Christ.

There are two basic elements in this passage as he addresses the Colossians--

first, an assumption about their past--

"just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord"--

then a command related to their future--

"continue to live your life in him"--

a command which is then expounded by four phrases.

That structure will guide us

as we dig in to what Paul has to say to us this morning.

Let's begin with their **past**.

"So then," Paul writes--

"as a consequence of what has been said

about who this Jesus is . . ."

I. "*Just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord . . .*"

The word Paul uses here for "**received**" has an almost technical quality about it,
referring to accepting what has been passed on from others.

The message of Jesus was passed on to them probably through a man named Epaphras
who had himself received it from Paul--

who had received it from the risen Jesus himself.

From one faithful witness to another this gospel had been passed down,

and these Colossians had received it.

That apostolic tradition became formalized in the written canon of Scripture,

but its message has continued to be passed on from person to person

for nearly two thousand years.

And here we are, in Annandale, Virginia, in the year 2020.

We have received it, and we, too, are to pass it on.

But what was it they received?

Literally, Paul says, "**You have received**

the Christ [that is, the Messiah], **Jesus, the Lord.**"

which could be translated in various ways,

but I prefer "*you have received Jesus as Messiah and Lord*"

I say that because that was the earliest Christian message.

It's what Peter preached on the day of Pentecost,

when he concluded his first sermon with these words;

Acts 2:36--"**Therefore let all Israel be assured of this:**

God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

The Christian message, the gospel,

is that this man Jesus who grew up in Nazareth

and taught and performed miracles in Galilee and then in Judea,

this Jesus who was crucified by the Romans in Jerusalem--

this man Jesus was God's Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ.

He was the royal heir of the throne of David

who saves his people from their sins,

and brings them into a new relationship with God--

he is Messiah.

And this Jesus is also **Lord**--

he has been raised from the grave

and is now seated at the right hand of the Father in the place of highest honor.

He has been given the name above every name,

all authority in heaven and earth belongs to him.

He will one day come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

This is the Christian message which was passed on and received
by these Colossian Christians.

But I want you to see that by its very nature, because of what it means,
this is not a message that can be received only as a piece of information,
like the fact that Boris Johnson is the Prime Minister of Great Britain.
That fact doesn't have much impact on me.

But this Christian message is quite different--
It requires a personal response
for it has very personal implications for each one of us.

To receive this message *about* Jesus requires that you receive him—
For that's what Paul says here—
they had received Jesus.

To receive this message is to Jesus himself and all that he is

and all that he has done.

It is to receive the salvation that he brings
by pledging your allegiance to him as Messiah
and by submitting to his authority as Lord.

What else *can* it mean?

How can you say, "I'll accept Jesus—but only as my Savior
but I won't accept his authority over me"?

I was thinking of an illustration--

it's like an Air Force pilot shot down over enemy territory--

he's hiding from the enemy,
and then he receives a message on his radio--
"Lieutenant, this is your commanding officer, and I've come to rescue you--
now get to these coordinates and the helicopter will pick you up."
Now, can that pilot say, "I'll accept you as my rescuer
but not as my commanding officer.
I don't have to do what you tell me to do."

No. That doesn't make any sense.

If you want to be rescued, you have to believe this message,
and believing this message means you will obey the messenger.

And so this Jesus is Messiah, he is Savior, *and* he is Lord--
you can't just have half of him.

To receive him is to put your faith in him, to trust him—

It means you believe that he has come from God
and that he died as a sacrifice for your sin on the cross.

It means that in union with him you now share in who he is—
you can share in his divine life;

in union with him you can now enjoy
a new relationship with God as your heavenly Father.

And it means that you believe that he has the right to command your obedience.

And why wouldn't you want to obey?—

this Lord who is the same Savior
who loves you so much he died for you.

He is the same Messiah

in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Do you think you know better than he does

how you are meant to live,

and what is for your ultimate good?

Who do you think you are, anyway? God?!

No, to receive Jesus as Savior must include receiving him as Lord—

there is no other Jesus than this.

That's why becoming a Christian has a moral dimension--

it requires us to **repent** and believe.

Repentance simply means that I acknowledge that I have been wrong,

that I have not lived as I ought,

that I have turned my back on God and gone my own way.

Turning toward the Lord in faith

requires that I turn away from my sin.

How can we believe that God is good

without also believing that all that opposes God is evil?

So becoming a Christian involves our mind and our hearts and our wills

as we respond in faith to this wonderful message of grace--

that Jesus is our Messiah,

he is our Savior,

and that he is our Lord.

He accepts us just as we are,

but a proper understanding of faith means

that we cannot want to remain as we are.

He's come to rescue us from our captivity to sin.

We must want to become more like Christ,

we must want to follow him--

for we believe that he saves us

so that we may become what God created us to be--

restored into his image.

Let me ask you,

have you received Jesus in this way?

Can you trust him?

Can you trust him enough to know not only that you are forgiven,

but also that he knows best how you are to live?

Have you received Jesus as your Messiah and your Lord?

That's what baptism means—

Baptism in water sets before our eyes a picture of our forgiveness by God—

as he washes us clean by his grace through the death of his Son.

And it is a visible display of our death to our old life focused on self,

and of our rising to a new life that comes through our faith in Christ.

Baptism is a picture of our “receiving” Jesus as Messiah and Lord.

And when we receive him as Messiah and Lord

we are called to declare that faith through baptism.

Have you made that commitment?

Have you trusted Christ—have you received him?

You must—for there is salvation in no one else.

That's what Paul assumes has happened in the lives of these Colossians.

They have been converted—

they have turned from their old beliefs, their old way of life,
and have turned toward the true and living God.

They are now Christians because they have received Jesus—
as the Christ, the Messiah, and as the Lord.

That's the basis for what he has to say to them.

That's where the Christian life begins, but certainly now where it ends.

Now he wants them to move on to maturity,

as he writes, "**So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord,
continue to live your lives in him, . . .**"

He uses the image of walking--

Literally he says, "**keep on walking in him.**"

Keep moving, go forward, make progress, continue to grow as a Christian.

The Christian life does not end at conversion,
any more than a marriage ends at the wedding.

It involves a lifetime of growing in the relationship of faith that has just begun.

And Paul uses four phrases, four participles, using four different images,
that expound what this means.

The first comes from the world of *horticulture*--

it's the image of a plant sending its roots deep into the ground.

"*So continue to live in him . . .*" Paul says,

"rooted in him"--

rooted in the truth of who he is,

rooted in the life-giving relationship he provides.

Jesus--the Messiah, the Lord--

he is the source of our life as Christians.

He is the soil, the nutrient,

into which our lives must be rooted as believers.

He is the vine, and we are the branches--

apart from him we can do nothing,

for apart from him we will wither and die.

Just like some of the grass in my yard right now—

it is not deeply rooted enough to withstand the summer heat,
resulting in big brown patches.

The prophet Jeremiah says it well:

Jer. 17:7,8--"**blissed is the man who trusts in the LORD,**

whose confidence is in him.

He will be like a tree planted by the water

that sends out its roots by the stream.

It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green.

It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

We need to send our roots deep into the truth of the gospel—

in the person of Jesus Christ.

we need to feed our souls on the truth that, as Paul has written,

Jesus Christ "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. . . .

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

And he is the head of the body, the church;

he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead,

so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,

and through him to reconcile to himself all things, . . .

by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

That's where our strength and nourishment comes--

as we have our faith rooted in this truth

that speaks of this glorious person.

That's why it is so important that we gather together week after week

to remind ourselves of these truths and to drink them in.

That's why we have a regular practice of communion—the Lord's Supper,

where in a visible sign, we feed on Christ,

and our souls are nourished by him.

We need to keep coming to Christ,

always being rooted in him,

drinking in his love, his mercy, his grace.

Maturing in our faith begins here.

The second image Paul uses to explain what it means to "walk in Christ"

comes from the world of **architecture**--

So continue to live your lives in him . . ."

being built up in him.

You are to be rooted in the truth
and then built up in your life.
The tenses of the verbs suggest that the rootedness takes place first,
and then, as a consequence, there will be
an on-going process of additional construction.
This building project never ends,
there's always more to add.

Paul is a master of mixed metaphors,
Paul says, the roots go down, and then the building rises up.

When I think of buildings,
I think the high-rise buildings in New York City.
They are incredible.

Manhattan, with its enormous skyscrapers, is almost overwhelming.
You look at that mass of steel and concrete and you ask yourself--
Why doesn't that little island sink under all that weight?

The answer I was once given was that Manhattan is one big rock.
And builders were required to excavate into the island's bedrock before construction
and remove the same weight in rock
as the weight of the entire structure they are building.
The height of the building was limited
only by the willingness of the builders to dig deeper.

So it is with us--
as we are rooted in Christ, grounded deeply in his truth,

then our lives can rise up to new heights into the character of Christ,
transformed into his image. /

But how do our lives change?

How are we "**built up**" in Christ?

Does it happen spontaneously and necessarily?

I don't think so.

Newly born-again Christians

don't grow up into mature spiritual adults automatically,
any more than new-born infants
grow up into mature physical adults automatically.

Infants need to be given a healthy diet of milk and then solid food.

They need to exercise and develop their muscles.

They need to go to school and study.

They need training--moral training, job training, life training--
if they are going to be mature.

So it is in the spiritual life--

if we are to be built up in Christ

we need a good diet found in the nourishment of God's word
found in solid biblical teaching.

We need the teaching that we receive from others,

but we also need to feed ourselves through our own reading and study.

We need exercises to develop our spiritual muscles--

sometimes we call these spiritual disciplines--

exercises like corporate worship and prayer and meditation

and fasting, and acts of service to others.

These are practices that shape our souls,

and they help to train us to distinguish good from evil (cf. Heb. 5:14).

We need to be in relationships with other Christians

who can model the Christian life

and who can train us in Christian living--

helping us to put away our grudges,

and to grow in generosity;

to be wise in our financial stewardship,

to say no to sexual temptation,

and to seek to live in compassion and justice with others,

and to know how to serve Christ in the workplace.

This is what we must do if we are to grow up!

But our growth is not just some self-help exercise.

We can grow up only by the gracious power of God.

As in our physical lives, so also in our spiritual lives---

only the Spirit of God can bring life and health.

It is his gift,

but we are still to eat good food and to exercise. /

Why do many Christians never seem to grow up spiritually?

Why does their building never seem to rise above the basement level?

•Maybe they fail to see the benefits--

their hearts haven't been captured by the glorious vision
of growing in their knowledge of God and his love.

They haven't experienced the delight of heart-felt worship of God.

They've haven't felt the pleasure that comes
in doing something that pleases God.

They haven't experienced the joy that comes in serving others
from a pure heart. /

•Or maybe they don't grow up because they think it's too hard--

"It's good for the pastor--he's a professional.
or maybe for the elders or some spiritual elites in the church,
but I'm just an ordinary Christian," they say.

"I'm just an ordinary Christian,
living an ordinary Christian life.
I can't do any more than that."

That's what I feel when I see a concert pianist play the piano
or a professional ice skater do triple jumps--
I could never do that in a million years!

But growing as a Christian is not about what's in our DNA.

It has nothing to do with athletic abilities or artistic talents.

As we said last week,

growing up into a mature Christian is for everyone.

God is the one who actually makes it happen.

We simply have to make ourselves available to him.

We have to put ourselves in a position where he can work in us.

We simply raise the sails

and then the Spirit blows to move the boat. /

Let me share with you a profound secret for Christian growth--

I got it from Woody Allen--

He once said that 90% of success in life is found just in showing up.

That's the secret--

90% of Christian growth occurs just by showing up!--

showing up to worship as we gather each week,

showing up to learn in a Sunday School class,

showing up to engage with other Christians in a community group.

It means showing up before God each day--

saying, "Lord, here I am. Let me hear from you today.

Lord, empower me to respond to you today."

There is not one of us who can't do that.

The Lord wants to build a glorious building, a beautiful sanctuary,

a temple to the Lord, out of your life,

a place where he can dwell and which will bring him honor and praise.

Will you let him do that?

The Lord wants to make something beautiful of your life--

Believe it!

We are to continue to live in Christ,
being rooted in the truth,
being built up in our lives,
and third, Paul says, we are to be **confirmed in our faith**.

The NIV translates the word here as "**strengthened**," which it does mean,
but the word also comes from the world of the law-court.
It was often used of a settlement or guarantee
that is confirmed in a legal agreement.

Paul is saying that as we are rooted in the truth of the gospel,
and as that truth is working itself out in our lives
and we are being built and growing,
then our hearts will be confirmed in what we believe,
just as we were taught.

Faith, when put into practice, leads to a more certain faith.

I find that faith is lot like riding a bicycle--

I can read a book about how to ride a bicycle,
but that doesn't do me any good unless I actually get on the bike
and try it for myself.

Our faith in Christ needs to be put into action.

And when riding a bicycle,

if we ever stop peddling and the bike stops, then we fall off--
it's not that the bicycle doesn't work anymore,

but that it doesn't work when it's not being used,
when it's not in motion,
when it's not moving forward.

Our faith is like that—

if we're not using our faith,
if we're not moving forward in our spiritual lives,
then we may develop doubts and feel it doesn't work.

But it's the bike's fault.

But when we are acting on our faith,

we develop a new assurance of faith,
we learn to trust God even more,
and we move forward even faster.

Isn't that what you want--

to be confirmed in your faith?

To have that assurance that you are loved by God,
that he is at work in your life,
that he has a purpose for you that can encompass everything you do?

Don't you want to live that good life that he wants for you?

Then put your faith to work.

And finally, Paul says,

**"just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord,
continue to live your lives in him,
rooted and built up in him,
strengthened or confirmed in the faith as you were taught,**

and overflowing with thankfulness."

The final image Paul gives us is that of a bubbling spring
that continues to stream out of the ground.

We are to be *overflowing* with thankfulness,
grateful in our hearts.

I've noticed that this last one is perhaps the most important
in that it is the one that helps to prevent the hybrid heresy
that I talked about earlier.

This is the heresy that is prevalent in evangelical circles--
it is that are saved by the grace of God received through faith,
but that we are sanctified or made more godly
solely by our own hard work.

This way of thinking can give Christians a very harsh and legalistic demeanor.
They can become very demanding of themselves and others,
and can lose all the joy and wonder that they once had
when they first discovered the love of God in the gospel of Christ.

But Paul says that's not right--
the growing Christian, the one who's got it,
is the one who knows that we are dependent on God's grace
from our first day to our last.
That Christian is overflowing with thankfulness.
Whenever that person sees the slightest hint of spiritual progress in their life,
they don't pat themselves on the back,

congratulating themselves for their own godliness.

No, they thank God for what he is doing to remake them to be more like Jesus. /

_____ -

How do we maintain that attitude of gratitude,

even as we are striving to build higher in our Christian life?

It's very simple--

We must do what Paul says here—

We are to live as Christians just as we began as Christians.

Just as you received Jesus as Messiah and Lord,

so continue to live in him.

In other words, the same gospel that saved you

in the same gospel that sustains you.

The good news of God's love in the gospel—

this gospel that tells us that Jesus came to save sinners,

and that it is not the proud but the poor in spirit

who receive his blessing--

that's what it's all about from beginning to end.

So we must preach the gospel to ourselves every day.

Every day we must remind ourselves that we are sinners redeemed by God.

We are prodigal sons returned to find our father running out to greet us,

gathering us into his arms,

and calling for a celebration.

Every day we need to survey the wondrous cross of Christ

and see from his head, his hands, his feet,

sorrow and love flow mingled down.

Every day we need to affirm that he has forgiven us,

and cast away our sins as far as the east is from the west.

Every day we need to appreciate that he has adopted us into his family

as his beloved sons and daughters.

Every day we need to thank him for the imperishable inheritance that is ours,

kept in heaven for us.

We need to thank him for life and breath,

for the smallest joys to the largest blessings he has for us in this life.

Thank him, even in the midst of trials, knowing that he can use them for our good.

Every day we need to hear the gospel afresh,

for just as we received Jesus as our Savior and Lord--

by faith, trusting in his grace--

so we need to continue to walk in him--

by faith, trusting in his grace,

overflowing with thankfulness.

What does it look like to be overflowing with thankfulness?

I find that the person who is overflowing with thankfulness

is, by and large, **a joyous and positive person,**

for he appreciates all the many gifts he has been given.

He doesn't waste his time grumbling and complaining

about the things that he doesn't have.

The person who is overflowing with thankfulness

is a generous and giving person,

for he recognizes the source of all that he has--

it is a gift from the hand of God.

As King David prayed as he was making an offering for the building of the temple--

"Everything in heaven and earth is yours.

Wealth and honor come from you;

you are the ruler of all things.

In your hands are strength and power

to exalt and give strength to all.

Now, our God, we give you thanks,

and praise your glorious name.

"But who am I, and who are my people,

that we should be able to give as generously as this?

Everything comes from you,

and we have given you only what comes from your hand."

(1 Chron. 29)

Or as Jesus put it,

"Freely you have received,

Freely give."

It is not the wealthiest people who are the most generous, you know,

but the most thankful.

The person who is overflowing with thankfulness

is a humble and unassuming person,

for he feels that he has been given much more than he deserves.

He doesn't feel a sense of entitlement, that he has a right to God's blessing.

Everything he receives comes as a gift of God's grace.

The person who is overflowing with thankfulness

is a gracious and forgiving person,

for he knows how much he has been forgiven by God.

How can he not be gracious to others?

William Law, in his book *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*--
arguably the most important devotional book

of the 18th century--

says this:

"Would you know who is the greatest saint in the world?

It is not he who prays most or fasts most;

it is not he who gives most alms,

or is more eminent for temperance, chastity, or justice;

but it is he who is always thankful to God

who wills everything that God wills,

who receives everything as an instance of God's goodness,

and has a heart always ready to praise God for it."

The gratefulness found in a person's heart

can truly be a measure of his grasp of the gospel.

Let me draw us to a close--

Here is Paul's program for moving on to maturity in our Christian lives.

**"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord,
continue to live your lives in him,
rooted and built up in him,
strengthened/confirmed in the faith as you were taught,
and overflowing with thankfulness."**

As you have received Jesus as Messiah and as Lord,
continue to live in him--

Rooted in the truth

Being built up in your life

Confirmed in your faith

Grateful in your heart.

Let us work out our salvation with fear and trembling,

for it is God who at work within us,

both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Let us labor with all his energy which so powerfully works in us.

Let us move on to maturity,

trusting in God's grace.

Prayer—

Closing Song: *#455 Come All Christians Be Committed*

Benediction--

Acts 20:32 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace,
which can build you up
and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

let me remind you and encourage you to go outside to visit with one another.

Growing to Maturity:

The Message of Colossians" #8

Aug. 23, 2020

"Moving On to Maturity"

Col. 2:6,7

"We proclaim Christ . . . so that we may present every person mature in him." That is Paul's purpose, and in our passage this morning he talks about moving on to maturity, going from an initial acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ to a life-long process of transformation by that same gospel.

I. *"Just as you have received Jesus as Messiah and Lord"*

II. *"So continue to live your lives in him . . ."*

A. Rooted in the truth

B. Being built up in your life

C. Confirmed in your faith

D. Grateful in your heart

Sermon Response:

"Moving On to Maturity"

Col. 2:6,7

- What do you remember about your initial reception of the gospel of Jesus as Messiah and Lord? How has your understanding of who he is developed since that time? What was your understanding of God's grace at that time? Thank him today for his work in your heart to bring you to himself.
- How does who Jesus impact the way you live? Paul's encouragement is to "walk in him." Survey what Paul has said about Jesus in Colossians 1 and seek points of application to your life.
- What are you doing to become more rooted in the truth? What areas are you weak in? What reading material might be helpful? Are there suggestions for Sunday School courses that might be helpful to you? Reflect on the convictions you have that you would never consider giving up.
- How would you like to be built up in your life? What are character qualities that you would like to see improved?
- Seek to have a grateful heart today. Look for things to give thanks to God for. Seek a joyous, humble, and gracious spirit today as you interact with people. Ask God to give you this attitude toward him.

