

# To Be or Not to Be Mature?

## Colossians 2:1-5

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### Introduction

The theme of the book of Colossians is the supremacy of Jesus. He is the center of everything—the core. We are now in a section dealing with Christ centered ministry and last week Nate led us in the study of the end of chapter one and the “ministry of mystery”. This week’s passage flows from the end of chapter one as seen by the word “for” that begins the second chapter. In Colossians 1:28 Paul says his goal in ministry is to “present everyone mature in Christ”. Verse 29 states that he toils “struggling” with the energy that comes from Christ. Chapter 2 continues seamlessly as he uses the word “struggle” again to show his intense effort and desire to see the church reach maturity.

We live in a culture that does not value maturity. In eastern cultures maturity and age are honored and respected. In our western culture, youth and immaturity seem to stand as the optimum time of life. As I have watched my own kids, they wanted to grow up and get the “freedom” of adulthood. They always would express their age in terms of 12 ½ or “almost 16” to let the questioner know that they were older than merely 12 or 15. They are now in their 20’s and they dread the day when they will hit the dreaded 30 because life is almost over. I remember those thoughts myself which are now long gone from my reality, but we live in a culture that really hesitates to desire maturity. The question for us today as a community centered in Jesus is whether we truly desire maturity. Paul did and he desired it of ALL of his children in the faith to become mature. In this 5 verse section of Colossians 2:1-5, we will see Paul describe 3 truths concerning maturity in Christ.

### **I. Truth #1 about maturity—The fight for maturity—2:1**

Paul states that he wants them to know that he has a great struggle for the church in Colossae as well as the neighboring church in Laodicea and for others who had never seen him. “Struggle” is a strange word unless we see it in the context of 1:29. Paul uses an athletic metaphor describing his intense effort that he exerts toward those who he had not even seen. What a testimony of a heart of true minister. He has a view of the world that does not leave people out—even if he has never met them. His struggle is to “present everyone mature in Christ”—what an aggressive and challenging goal.

In CPC I have seen this in a small way in our minister partner in Nicaragua. We have many families who are supporting a child to help them get a Christian education in the little village of La Concha. Some of those families have gone to Nicaragua, but many have not. They are supporting them while never having met them because they believe that helping kids in a country of poverty to mature in Christ is worth inventing in.

In terms of application, verse one shows us that maturity is worth sweating for. Paul uses an intense word to describe his desire for the people he has never seen to become mature. We must see the need to become mature and buck our culture which argues against the benefit of maturity—it is worth sweating, fighting and going after maturity. Let us not fall short in this area.

## II. Truth #2 about maturity –The features of maturity—2:2-3

Verse 2 begins with the word “that”. It could be translated “in order that” and introduces a purpose clause (we have seen that in Colossians previously in Colossians (1:18) where Christ is the head, the first born from the dead— THAT (for the purpose of) “in everything he might be pre-eminent”. Paul is struggling with a purpose in mind—their maturity. What does that maturity look like? A fairly lengthy and slightly complex clause follows that describes some facets of maturity. We will look at it in 2 sections. There are 2 characteristics that describe maturity for Paul and for us. They may not have been the concepts you would use to describe maturity. Look at you life in relationship to these features:

### 1. The first feature of maturity is **COMMUNITY**—2a

Paul struggles to see their **“hearts encouraged being knit together in love”**. The word for encouraged is sometimes used in Christian circles—it is the word *paraklatos* (we sometimes use the word *paraklete*—used of the Holy Spirit in John). The word has many possible meanings of which encouraged seems to be the most frequent. I think in this context a better translation would follow the commentator O’Brien who uses the word “strengthened”. The New Century Bible uses the word “strengthened” and the Amplified Bible uses the word “braced”. The nuance is that Paul wanted to see these believers not weak and immature but strengthened and encouraged in their hearts. The question becomes—how does one get his/her heart strengthened. Paul’s answer is simple yet profound—it is by being “knitted together in love”. Maturity understands the need for others to achieve maturity. Maturity is achieved in community not in isolation. The key that makes community work is “love”. Living together in love is crucial to maturity. Love is the Biblical reality that allows for the love giver to be self sacrificing and acting for the good of the other. When people are maturing, they are strengthened in their hearts and are being knitted together with the unifying adhesive being love.

There are many illustrations of the need to be together to become strengthened and mature. Many of us have gone to Nicaragua on mission trips. We have done some construction there in helping to build their church and school buildings. I am not a construction person, but I learned how to wire rebar together. Everyone on our teams have learned that if they were doing construction. You take some steel rods and tie them together with steel wire and steel supports. This grid of steel is placed in the area where concrete will be poured (like for the wall of a building)and the concrete is poured over the steel. No one sees the

steel after all is done, but the wall is much stronger and very hard to take down when it is reinforced with steel.

A better illustration is seen in Christian marriage. We have had some older members go home to be with the Lord recently who had been married 50 years plus . It is amazing to see the bond and strength that has been a product of their union. I have seen it in my marriage—when Cathy and I are agreed on a project or issue, we are a very strong force to accomplish that job. Even in families we see the strength of unified community. We just returned from a family vacation at the beach in S.C. It was the most unified time we have had as Cathy and I with the 3 adult kids, 1 son in law and one “friend” united together to conquer Myrtle Beach. It was strengthening and fun to move together in unity as we played, ate (too much), prayed together and matured as a family. This principle has also been evident in our church. As a community it has been a delight to see the elders function as a unified whole. In the last couple of years our church has had some challenges and we have matured—as we have been “knitted together in love”.

Soooo—how does this apply? You and I need to be becoming mature in our faith. It will only be done in community. Look at your life. Is your life characterized by being stronger today than last year at this time? It will be true as you find yourself knitted together with others in love. How is your marriage or your relationship with you parents or siblings? Maturity will see you growing in unity as you live out love. Are you involved in a small group in this community? Maturity takes effort and Paul says it is in the context of community. We need to be strengthened in our hearts by being knitted together in love. That is one of the features of maturity and a good test of your maturity.

## 2. **The second feature of maturity is CONFIDENCE (assurance)—2b-3**

Paul calls the believers to move toward the **riches of full assurance**. He wants to see a mature church who is confident and assured. The question is—assured of what??? Paul quickly answers that question. Our assurance must be in the understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery. This mystery is defined as Christ (as Paul previously commented in 1:27. A couple of words need to be worked on to get the point of this text. The word mystery is a word used by Paul frequently in this book. It is not like a secret that only the initiated can know. There were “mystery religions” at that time and now that argue that only the select few can know this mystery and if you do not understand the mystery-it is not for you. When Paul uses this work the picture is better seen in with an understanding that the mystery is something veiled that

is now unveiled. It was not clear and now is clear. It is for all who truly desire to see it and it is the person of Christ. He is the mystery. He is not a figure that is hard to figure out—but he is one that may be hard to follow because his kingdom centers on Him and not us. The mystery of Christ was a stumbling block to those who want to build their own kingdom but he is the fulfillment of all that was promised and prophesied.

Another challenging word is the word “hidden”. “In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”. That does not mean that these treasures are unknowable. They are hidden from those who do not believe, who do not want to see them. Christ is not for special people who know the “codes”. He is for everyone who desires true truth.

SOO—how does that apply? We are called to become mature. That will happen as we are in community and as we become confident in our Lord. How does assurance come? What is your assurance level? Mature believers have strong levels of assurance in Christ and the mystery of Christ in whom are hidden the treasures of wisdom. Confidence and assurance is a growing reality in life. We have a neighbor son who has his learner’ permit and is learning to drive. He is over 6 feet tall and a very attractive and self assured young man. He seems in control of most situations. I did, however, see him drive the other day and he was not very confident or assured. In contrast to him—I drive too assuredly and often do not even remember driving to a certain location. Confidence and assurance comes as we know Christ better. Are you working to know him better. If not –do not expect to become mature. You need to be in His Word and in a study of Him. You need to be in ministry and to experience the work of God in this world. Do you want to be mature—be more assured of Jesus and your relationship with him. Work at it. I am more assured of my relationship with my wife as we celebrate our anniversary on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. I know her better than before and try to work hard in knowing her—that makes me confident and assured.

### **III. Truth #3 about maturity—Immaturity is Foolish—2:4-5**

Paul concludes this section with a warning. There are those who will attempt to delude you with plausible arguments to draw you away from your mature confidence and community. The world does not like mature, community oriented, confident, assured Christians. It never has liked that. There are and have always been those who are set to fool the immature and drive them away from the treasures found in Christ. Beware of those schemes.

In Paul’s time there were Jews who tried to pull the young Christians from Christ by calling them back to their worship form and telling them that the Messiah would not die on a cross (how absurd). Paul also saw the immature

falling to false teaching of that time that argued for the fact that God could not take on flesh because that is evil. They were too “spiritually” focused that they could not see God’s work in redeeming and reconciling the world. There were also the materialists who wanted to live life for pleasure and temporal satisfaction.

Are those kinds of people around today? I think so. Let me mention a few delusions that some of us are tempted to believe. In the Indianapolis Star on June 24, 2008, there was a cover page article concerning a survey conducted by the Pew Forum and stated that 76% of those in Indiana (fairly conservative state) absolutely believe in God. 73% of Hoosiers also believe that many religions can lead to eternal life. They have been deluded to think that treasures of wisdom and knowledge may be found outside of Jesus. Paul would aggressively disagree, but immature, unconfident, Christians have followed this delusion. Another delusion is in the realm of morality. Many in our culture argue that we must accept different lifestyles of morality because that is the loving thing to do. To say that God desires sexual expression to be in a monogamous, male/female relationship of love is not loving and tolerant. True knowledge comes from knowing Christ who created marriage and relationships that are to reflect him. Do not be deluded. Another area of delusion in our culture has to do with power and prestige and money. I live in Carmel and was talking to a friend this week. We both were grateful for God’s blessing in terms of material blessings, but are convinced that we have bought into the immature view that wealth or power positions are ends in themselves. The good life is to be rich, healthy and powerful. God’s kingdom is made up of mature believers who find their treasures in him and can endure the onslaughts of poverty, sickness and suffering as we follow and are confident in Christ

In verse 5, Paul says he was rejoicing because he had heard of their mature and firm faith in Christ. May that be true of CPC in the days ahead? May be those who are fighting for maturity that will show itself in a strong community of love and a mature group of believers who have full assurance of God’s mystery in Christ and do not fall prey to immature claims of other competing gospels.

#### Conclusion:

Today we are going to partake in the Lord ’s Supper. What a privilege. Let me direct your thoughts to a couple of words in this text to prepare us for this act of worship.

1. Their hearts encouraged (strengthened) beign knit together in love—as we partake together let us allow the Spirit of God to knit our hearts together. If you have “ought” against someone or the Lord—make it right
2. Reaching all the riches of full assurance—Let this be a time where your confidence and assurance in Jesus is strengthened. He died for you. We need to allow this service to mature us. We can physically experience the glory of the mystery which is Christ in you (eat his flesh and drink his blood).