

CHRISTIAN MATURITY

An exposition of Colossians 4:7-9
at West Hills San Jose on June 6, 2021

PASTORAL PRAYER: Lord we appear before you with fear and great trembling, recognizing with reverence that you are the God of all, in holiness, justice and power you reign over all things. Lord we also come to you with confidence and faith, acknowledging that through the blood of Christ and the power of your Spirit, we are sons and daughters of the kingdom. Rise up in strength, and make your grace present among us. We pray to you Lord

1. For the salvation of the lost in all the earth,
 1. We adore you for your heart of love that desires all men to be saved
 2. We rejoice that you have included your people in your work of redemption
 3. Would you cause our hearts to correspond to yours, such that we would long for and become increasingly eager to see, sinners converted to saints, and enemies become brothers. May this longing haunt our prayers and our thoughts always.
2. For the church in all places, especially those who are under persecution, Myanmar Burma
3. We pray for the many unreached people groups in South America and New Guinea, especially the tribes who are open to hearing the Word, would you raise up missionaries, our sons and daughters to GO and learn the languages in order to preach the gospel to them.
4. We pray for our country and our leaders, Lord would you pour out your spirit and cause a mass revival. Would you bring our leaders to a saving faith and submission to Christ Jesus, Would you cause the men and women who lead this country to turn in their hearts to you, and then bring forth righteous laws for our people.
5. We pray for the South Bay and all the people who live here. Would you open their hearts to the gospel. Lord I pray for all the Christ following church's in our area, would you make us one as Christ and the Father are one.
 1. We pray for the ministries of Orchard Community Church and Lincoln Glen, we pray for Chinese Church for Christ and Cambrian Park. Lord we pray for Grace Presbyterian and Mercy Hill and Venture Christian church. WE pray for Neighborhood bible and Emmaus and West Gate and Trinity church in MH. Lord we pray for our Morgan Hill campus and for the Spanish ministry to the community in MH. We pray in particular for Armando and for His team bless them with conviction and faithfulness to your gospel.
6. We pray for our own church. Would you come and minister to our many needs. We pray for Mark Clarke and his recovery from his stroke. Would you heal his body and encourage the Clarke family with hope of life in Your Son. We pray for Eric Lindholm's father. Would you do the same thing, bring healing and hope to their whole family by grace.
7. Finally, would you open the eyes of our hearts to behold wonderful things from your law. Would you prevent by your grace...that anyone would leave here this morning, without being blessed by the majesty of your Word. Deliver us from the evil one, and bring us into your kingdom with power and great glory. Amen.

PROBLEM: Well good morning West Hills, welcome guests, I'm confident that there is a reason that God brought you here this morning. We have been slowly working through the book

of Colossians and we are beginning to land the plane. Today Paul is going to begin transitioning to His closing concerns. And as I am fond of doing, I want to point out that you should never rush through any part of Scripture. These closing sections of letters are often rich and full of significant insights into Paul, his thinking, and the Christian life. In fact, in our text today he is going to offer us multiple beautiful pictures of what Christian maturity LOOKS LIKE.

And by Christian maturity I mean, we are going to look at some snapshots of what a person tends to look like after the Spirit of God and the gospel of Jesus has actively shaped that person's life for a sustained period of time. He isn't going to give us a definition. He's going to show us some pictures. These are the attitudes, actions and descriptions you would expect in a person who was born again and allowed the reality of the gospel to fill most of their life by the Spirit's power. This is what Christian maturity looks like. Now let me invite you to consider with me why growing in Christian maturity is so massively important.

You live in a huge world...full of love, and hate and glory and sorrow and beauty and sin...that doesn't fall apart when you fall asleep and is still there when you wake up in the morning. You spend night after night sleeping under stars that silently and consistently declare to you, things about the God who made them. All around the world, every day, animals and plants and peoples are birthing and dying, laughing and crying, swimming and flying, failing and trying. You live in a huge world.

But unfortunately most of us live stuck in sin-cramped shackles of our own design, mostly conscious of ourselves, our feelings and frustrations, our desires and ideas, our achievements and discoveries, our failures and wounds. These small things feel like big things, to our small eyes, in this huge world. Christian maturity is an invitation to journey out of the obsessive confines of your inner monologue and to look upward and outward. It's not that our lives or our problems don't matter, or are insignificant. God cares deeply about all of us and our choices. Maturity is learning to see yourself and your life in proper relation to everything else and to respond appropriately. To begin bending your attention outward toward God and toward others in a posture of love and service and gratitude. Maturity opens your eyes to the greatness, the bigness, and the goodness of God and the world He has made, and to all the people He has filled it with, and to be filled with love in your heart for all of it.

MAIN POINT: Christian maturity is to orient your life around loving and serving God, so keep growing up.

SETTING THE CONTEXT: Please open your bibles to Colossians chapter 4, we will be picking up where Pastor Eric left off last week in verse 7. Before I read, give me a moment to reestablish the context. Paul is probably in prison. He has been writing this letter to a newish church filled with people he has never met. The only Colossians he knows, are the ones that had come to hear him preach in places far far away from Colossae. Yet despite that fact, Paul deeply cares about this church, and this church deeply cares about Paul. And one of the things that had gotten back to him as he did his time under house arrest, was that false teachers had been creeping around the congregation seeking to win attention away from the fullness we have in Christ. And Paul, has penned this letter in response.

But now, here at the end of chapter 4, Paul has basically made all of his central points. And he is ending the letter with a litany of very normal, human, pragmatic details. And one of the things that is very useful about hearing someone end their basic point and turn to the humdrum details of what needs to happen next is you get to hear what the person really sounds like. To give you an analogy, you can get to know me pretty well by hearing me preach on Sunday morning, I'm pretty open and forthright. But you get to know me even better by talking to me after the sermon is over. *And you get to know me even better by hearing me process with my wife the mundane details of getting the kids home and lunch plans, and so forth.* Similarly with Paul. Paul has told us, in everything we do do all things to the glory of God. And that is a good summary of Christian maturity. To orient every part of your life around serving God for His glory. So what does that look like in the humdrum details of travel arrangements? Let's now humble our minds and open our hearts for the reading of the word of the Lord:

READING: [7] Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. [8] I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, [9] and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here. (ESV)

PRAYER - Lord we are deaf and blind apart from grace...open our ears and eyes and hearts to You and Your word.

ROAD MAP: 1.) A Picture of Christian maturity, 2.) The inclinations of Christian maturity, 3.) The demand of Christian maturity, 4.) How to grow in Christian maturity

The Picture of Christian Maturity

1. Let's begin with verse 7. Paul begins with a name. Tychicus. The Colossians almost certainly have never met Tychicus before, and I say that because Paul basically introduces him in verse 7. And Tychicus has been tasked by the apostle to bring news of what Paul has been up to since the last time they heard from him.
 1. And it takes a couple of passes over that text to realize what an enormous responsibility that is. Paul had some things he wanted the Colossians to know. The most important stuff he wrote down. But paper is expensive and time is short.
 2. But he wanted to communicate with the Colossians badly enough that he literally sent away one of the men that were helping him survive while in jail to convey additional details of what he has been up to. In first century jail, in first century house arrest, they don't provide you with food and water and covering. You are dependent on family and friends for that stuff. And Paul wants to communicate with the Colossians badly enough, that he sent away one of the members of his support team.
 3. And Tychicus has not only been tasked with the delivery of this letter, but also with the responsibility of providing a faithful update on Paul's activities.
2. And so naturally, the church in Colossae's first question would be...well who is this guy? This guy showed up with a letter that's clearly from Paul. Claiming he has an update on the

apostles movements. But they don't know this guy from Adam. And so Paul includes a very brief letter of recommendation. A word about this man that will certify his reliability in their sight. In other words, Paul is trying to convey that the man delivering this letter to you, is a faithful reliable trustworthy brother in the Lord who should be listened to and obeyed.

1. Or to say that another way, Paul is claiming that Tychicus is a portrait of a godly, mature Christian man.
 2. In the story of Jon Bunyan's Pilgrims progress, Christian is making his way through this world toward the Celestial city of our Lord Jesus Christ. And one of the places he stops for his benefit and blessing is the house of the interpreter. And the interpreter has all kinds of interesting things to show Christian that will help him on his journey. And one of the pictures he sees is of a mature godly minister.
 3. When Christian sees the portrait hanging in the interpreters house he sees a man with his eyes lifted up to heaven, the best of books in His hand, the Law of Truth was written upon his lips, the world was behind his back; it stood as if pleading with men and a crown of Gold did hang over his head.
 4. If I was interpreter and wanted to show Christian another portrait of a godly mature friend to your soul, I would show him a picture like this one... a man or woman deeply loved by the church, a brother or sister of the house, with a banner of faithfulness flying over their life, with the a golden chain of bond service to the Lord Jesus in all they did.
 5. In Paul recommendation of Tychicus, we see a portrait of Christian maturity. Let's briefly consider each element of this description.
3. First Tychicus is... A beloved brother (family)
 1. Love by who? Loved by the church, or loved by Paul, or maybe loved by God? Which is it? The answer is...yes. Paul says I'm sending you Tychicus, and we love this guy. He is loved by me and the other brothers, and in the gospel He is loved by God. He is beloved. How did that happen? There are a lot of things that contribute to the formation of the feelings of love towards one another.
 2. But among some of the most important factors are knowing and being known. It's tough to love something you don't know or understand. But when you engage a congregation with openness and a desire to know, the natural movement of things is to become loved. I would be willing to bet that your closest friends at this church are also the people that you know the best. And to be known, you have to participate. To know and be known you have to be involved. In order to be a beloved brother or sister, you have to be loved by an actual family of believers. If you don't feel loved, my question to you would be, have you proactively sought to know and be known? That is a central part of how love in any and all relationships works.
 3. But Tychicus isn't just loved, He is a beloved brother. He is a part of God's family. And of course the whole title of brother orients your relationship not only to the rest of the brothers and sisters in the Church but also to God as Father.
 4. This guy is living out his role as a member of God's household, because being a brother comes with familial obligations. I can't unpack them all now, but among them is repenting when you wrong someone, and forgiving when you have been wronged. Among them is asking for help when you are in need, and meeting needs when others ask

for help. I could go on. The first dimension of Christian maturity is living out your vocation as a beloved brother or sister among the church.

4. Second - Tychicus is a faithful minister or deacon. The word in greek is the word we normally use for deacon but it seems fairly obvious from context that Paul is using the word in a more generic way. Tychicus is a faithful workman, he is a reliable dependable servant of the Lord. There was a lot of these guys in the early church, according to the NT. They weren't elders, they weren't deacons, and yet they carried out some very important ministries that combined responsibilities of Word and deed. In any case...
 1. This is snapshot number 2 of Christian maturity. This description emphasizes not only what he does but how he does it. Tychicus shares in the work of the church's mission and he does so faithfully and reliably. The word faithful in English has taken on all kinds of different connotations especially within the church.
 2. Faithful doesn't mean Tychicus will try as hard as he can to do a good job. A lot of times the word faithful is boiled down to meaning loyal, but that's not quite the central idea either though it's included. Faithful, means he's worthy of your faith. Faithful means he can be trusted. Faithful means he is reliable to discharge his duty correctly.
 3. When there is important ministry to be done, Paul sends a faithful minister to carry it out. And that is snapshot number 2 of Christian maturity, it is someone who faithfully carries out the ministry they received from the Lord.
 4. And just to be clear because I'm using a lot of words that mean different things to different people. I don't think Tychicus is an elder or a deacon of the church, I think Tychicus is a mature Christian that has been tasked with an important ministry, like a short term missionary that the church supports (or something like that). This is a person like any of you, who has been serving Christ for a while now, and has been deemed faithful by the leaders of the church and has now been given a very important ministry to carry out.
 5. Maybe you're asking yourself, how do I become like Tychicus? Christ tells you in Luke 16:10. One who is faithful in a very little, will also be faithful in much. Be faithful with the relationships and the ministry you have right now, humble yourself before the Lord and at the proper time he will exalt you. This is Christian maturity.
5. Finally, this mature Christian is A fellow servant (slave). Or more literally in Greek, he is a co-slave in the Lord. A slave like the rest of us, Paul and His companions.
 1. In other Words, this guys actions and choices and life-decisions are constrained by the will of God in Christ Jesus. This guy literally defines himself and his life around serving the Lord Jesus Christ. He lives like He is Jesus' slave with the rest of us.
 2. That is the crux of it. That's the center of Christian maturity...how do you become a beloved brother...not exactly by becoming a beloved brother, how do you become a faithful minister, not first and foremost by trying to become a faithful minister...you become those things by first and foremost resolving to live as a bonds slave of Jesus Christ.
 3. And that doesn't mean to begrudgingly do what He says. That means to take up your cross and follow him wherever he would have you go. It's to resolve to lose your life for His sake in order that you might find it in Him. It's to say that my personal goals and

ambitions, my personal hopes and dreams, my personal discontentments and frustrations stand in second place to my desire to be a servant to my Lord.

4. The mature Christian has decided in his heart that this life is not my own but that I belong, both in body in soul, in life and in death to God and to my Savior Jesus Christ and to turn and live out that truth. That's what mature Christian's do. Mature Christian's don't start with the question...what do I want to do...and then ask Jesus if it's okay. Mature Christians start with the question, Jesus what do you want from me, and then orient the rest of their life around God's leading by the Holy Spirit.
5. When Jesus says "He who seeks to save his life will lose it, and He who seeks to lose His life for my sake will find it"...isn't actually a mystical saying for the early church martyrs. The martyrs faced in a more dramatic way the same question you face every single day...I can do the thing that will make me comfortable, or happy, or alive...or I can do the thing that God wants me to do.
6. The mature Christian lives as a bonds lave to Christ. He or she wants to go where God wants them to go, they will say what God wants them to say, they live how God wants them to live, and when it comes time they will die how God wants them to die. And the chain that holds them to this commitment is not a chain of tyranny but a chain of holy-self giving love. We love because He first loved us. We walk in love because He gave Himself up for us a fragrant offering to God.
6. This is a 3 dimensional portrait of a mature Christian. It isn't everything, but it covers a lot. Tychicus is a beloved member of the family, he is a reliable helper in God's mission and he lives out his life as a bonds slave to Jesus. This is what Christian maturity looks like in the wild. Now let's start moving much more quickly and talk about what Paul says next. That was a portrait of Christian maturity...let's now look at the inclinations of Christian maturity.

The Inclinations of Christian Maturity

1. Paul says in verse 8 I am sending him to you for this very purpose that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts.
2. Or putting that differently, I am in jail in an extremely vulnerable situation. The other people helping me could be arrested at any time and all my help could be cut off in a day. However, I am taking some of the very little that I have and I am sending it to you because I want to bless you.
3. There aren't any secret things to be unearthed in this text...but if you just sit and look at it and try to think about what is going on in the heart of someone to be able to write this it's kind of amazing. Because I know you are worried about me and I want to encourage your hearts, I am sending you Tychicus.
4. This would be like me dealing with cancer, and saying to one of the small team of doctors that is keeping me alive...I want you to leave and drive cross country to a church of people I don't even know because I'm concerned that they are worried about me and I want you to encourage them. I heard that there were some false teachers creeping around and I want you to bring them this letter from me.
 1. How does someone do something like this? My suggestion is that you do something like this by thinking long and hard about the fact that you had sinned and fallen short of the

glory of God. And in response, Jesus Christ the Son of God, did not count His equality with God a thing to be grasped onto, but instead emptied Himself to take on the form of a bondservant and being found in the likeness of sinful men was put to death on a cross for our sins, that He might bring us to God.

2. And so Paul, having this reality fleshed out in His life over some time is beginning to live the same way...I'm not looking at my survival as a thing to be grasped but instead I'm willing to empty myself and take on the form of a servant for your sake even if that means my death...in order to do my part in bringing this congregation to God.
3. Or to say all this more simply, I think the gospel has forged a deep conviction in Paul's heart and life that He is not here to be served but TO SERVE and to give up His life for the sake of the Lord.
5. This is the first inclination of Christian maturity, to not only look upward to God as your master, but outward to those around you in need. To make the transition from asking what can Christ and my neighbor do for me to asking what can I do for Christ and my neighbor. Pardon the allusion to JFK there. Maturity thinks about how it can serve, not just be served.
6. But what is so cool and such a beautiful dimension to this passage is that Paul isn't just interested in serving period. He wants to be a servant to the church's joy.
 1. I have sent him to you for this purpose that you may know that we are okay and that you would be encouraged.
 2. I had not really thought about this before but I think it's true based on this passage, part of being a mature Christian is not just paying attention to how you can serve, it also involves looking for ways to be an encouragement. You want to know how to give awesome encouragement, pay attention to what Christ seems to be doing in the people around you and affirm it. Don't lie. Don't exaggerate.
 3. Pay attention to what Christ is actually doing...when you see someone going through a hard time but fighting for faith...that's the Lord's work in them. You should affirm it.
 4. When you see someone taking a new step in faith, affirm it, even if it's imperfect. Don't spend your life noticing what's wrong with everyone. Try to notice what is good and true and praiseworthy and encourage people with those observations.
7. Tychicus is a portrait of Christian maturity because of how Paul describes him. Paul is a model of Christian maturity because of the inclinations of his heart revealed in this text. Paul is seeking to consider others as more important than Himself and by becoming the servant of all he has become one of the greatest among us. The inclinations of his heart are to serve not to be served.
8. And I suppose it's worth it to stop and ask yourself the question...is that the inclination of your heart? Think about your relationship to the other people in your life...is it one in which you primarily seek to give? Or where you primarily seek to receive? There is going to be reciprocity in every relationship, there will almost always be both, I'm just asking about the inclination of your heart. Are you characterized by a mature desire to serve, or an immature desire to be served?
 1. Now at the risk of healing anyones wounds lightly, I want to say that when I hear about and watch you guys care for one another...I wonder if I'm the most blessed and luckiest

pastor in the world. Most of the time, and I literally mean most of the time, when I go visit people in the hospital, some of you guys have already been there.

9. I feel like most of the time when I hear about a need in this church body...it's because some of you have already risen up to deal with that need. Praise be to God. My observation is that many of you are really good at this already, but my heart yearns for ALL OF US, to be really good at this. Or to say that another way, my heart's desire is that all of us would attain to the fullness of the stature of the maturity of Jesus Christ. Is this a way that you are mature?
10. So what have we seen, we have seen a portrait of Christian maturity, someone who is loved member of the house, a reliable servant, and who orients their whole life around serving Christ. We have seen the inclination of a mature heart, that is to serve rather than to be served, and to look to serve one another's joy in the Lord. Third, let's briefly look at the demand of Christian maturity.

The Demand of Christian Maturity

1. So Paul has sent them Tychicus in verse 7 and with him in verse 9 Onesimus. Who is Onesimus? Onesimus we know from the book of Philemon is an actual slave from the household of a man named Philemon who lived in Colossae. And there is a problem, a while ago, Onesimus ran away from Philemon's house, which is an act of significant betrayal in the Roman world. But while he was on the run, Onesimus met Paul, was converted to Christ, and Paul discovered the connection between Philemon the Christian whom he knew, and Onesimus whom he had just led to Christ. And Paul decided that the righteous thing to do was to send Onesimus back to Philemon, knowing full well that Philemon had every right to deal harshly with Onesimus, he even had the right to put him to death.
2. And I think it's very very likely, that Tychicus is going to arrive in Colossae, with this letter in one hand, and the letter to Philemon in his other hand...with Onesimus standing behind him peering over his shoulder in fear and trembling. And if that is indeed the context here... then there is some significance to what Paul says Onesimus is and isn't.
3. Verse 9, Onesimus is OUR as in YOUR AND MY faithful and beloved brother. Onesimus is also a Colossian like the rest of you. He is a Christian like one of you, and a local boy, like the rest of you.
 1. Try to think about this from Paul's perspective and from Philemon's perspective. Paul says I have Onesimus here...and he is faithful, the way Tychicus is faithful, he is beloved by us the way Tychicus is beloved by us, and he is OUR brother...your brother and my brother. Can you hear any nudge nudge from Paul's perspective.
 2. If you think about it from Philemon's point of view, there is that ungrateful family member who deserted us...and he is here with this mature godly minister coming from Paul...and Paul says that this traitor is my brother...and he is faithful. He is probably thinking "this guy is anything BUT faithful and beloved in my house." And Paul is saying the definitions in your house are not as important as the definitions of God's house.
 1. What Onesimus is...is what God says he is. Beloved faithful brother.
4. But what's significant is not just what Paul says Onesimus is...what does He NOT say Onesimus is. Paul often introduces himself and his coworkers as bondslaves of Christ. That's

how he introduced Epaphras in 1:7, and Tychicus in 4:7. But now...when Paul is sending an ACTUAL by profession bonds lave back to his master...he leaves that title out.

1. The only guy in the letter who is actually subject to the institution of slavery is not acknowledged to be such. And given the context...that omission to me is glaring.
2. It's like Paul is saying...this man isn't primarily your slave...this man is primarily your brother...treat him as such.
5. Receive him this way, with forgiveness and compassion.
6. And it's worth asking: Why? Because you were once slaves. Slaves to your sin, rebels and servants of God's enemy. And God received you, not as a slave but as a son. Those chains of gold are not chains God imposes upon us but chains we gladly receive as the path to true freedom.
7. God received you, not because you deserved it but because of the offering of Christ on your behalf. God has displayed the most costly compassion possible by giving His Son in your place, to bear your sins in His body on that tree.
 1. And he did this so that you would be saved, and transformed into someone who displays costly compassion to those who wrong you. And in Christ dying for you, he paid the price for your forgiveness, He received the judgment that was due to you, so that you could be forgiven, reconciled and brought into a relationship of everlasting love with God.
 2. Another way of describing Christian maturity is to be someone who acts like God. That's what it means to BE GODLY. To treat others the way God has treated you, even at great cost to yourself.
8. The demand of Christian maturity is that we love our enemies, forgive those who wrong us, to display compassion when we have a claim to vengeance. The demand of Christian maturity is to deal with others as God has dealt with us in all circumstances. And to do it from a posture of love for God, and love for others.. That is the way of life of those who have internalized the gospel of grace and seek to live it out over time by the power of the Spirit.

How to grow in Christian Maturity

1. The Church's mission is a team effort...and your role is to be yourself.
 1. Paul is in prison, Tychicus is delivering the letter, the church is praying. Everyone is called to embrace their role in carrying out the mission of God.
 2. Pastor with autoimmune disease transition with joy to a role of persistent prayer. What is your ministry? Is it to pray, is it to give, is it to lead, is it to adopt, is it to encourage?
2. There is no a team, or b team. We aren't called to figure out who is the greatest, we are called to love and serve one another as God in Christ has served you.
3. Word 1, Scriptureprayer, and word 2 prayerscripture. This is life in communion with God. We listen to Him, learn from Him and respond to Him in prayer. You can't become like God without getting to know Him.
4. What are some areas of your life, where you are bent inward? Thinking of yourself. What are some meaningful steps you can take to bend out? Think about what would bless them...
5. All of us can grow...Open your small eyes to this big world...

Christian maturity is to orient your life around loving and serving God, so keep growing up.

COMMUNION: Whether you are mature or immature, this table is for you...grace to fredom