

MATURITY | RADICAL DISCIPLE

Main Text: Colossians 1:28–29

Supporting Text: 1 Corinthians 3:1–3

Big Idea: Christian maturity is growing into a deep, living relationship with Christ where we worship, trust, love, and obey Him.

1 Corinthians 3:1-3

1 Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. 2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. 3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?

1. The Problem: Growth Without Depth

Stott begins with the phrase: “growth without depth”. One of the challenges in the Christian life is that some things look like maturity but aren't.

The church can grow numerically and still remain immature spiritually.

Paul says the Corinthians were still “infants in Christ” because jealousy and quarreling were still shaping their life together.

There is a real tension I want everyone to feel: You can be around Christian things and still remain childish in Christ.

Reflection question: Where am I older, but not deeper?

2. The Goal: Everyone Mature in Christ

Colossians 1:28-29

28 He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature [teleios] in Christ. 29 To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

Paul says: “*that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.*” That word “mature” is the Greek word teleios. Now when we hear a word like that, many of us immediately

think, perfect. And that's where some people check out. "Well, if maturity means perfection, I'm out."

But that's not what Paul means. In the New Testament, *teleios* rarely means flawless. It means complete. Whole. Fully developed. Grown up. It's the difference between an acorn and an oak tree. Both are alive. Both belong to the same species. But one has become what it was intended to be. Or think of a child and an adult. We don't expect a child to know everything. But we do expect growth. We expect development. We expect movement toward maturity.

That's Paul's concern. He's not asking, "Are you perfect?" He's asking, "Are you growing up in Christ?" Because the tragedy of the Christian life is not that we aren't perfect yet. The tragedy is when we stop growing.

Christian maturity is having a relationship with Christ where we worship, trust, love, and obey Him.

Notice what he doesn't say. He doesn't define maturity as knowing more facts about Jesus. He doesn't define maturity as attending more church services. He doesn't define maturity as serving on more ministry teams.

Those things may contribute to maturity, but they are not maturity itself. Maturity is relational. Just as a healthy marriage grows deeper over time, so a healthy relationship with Christ grows deeper over time. We worship Him more completely.

We trust Him more readily.

We love Him more deeply.

We obey Him more consistently.

In other words, maturity is not measured by how much of the Bible you know, but by how much your life is increasingly surrendered to the Christ the Bible reveals.

Think about it this way:

- A mature Christian isn't someone who never struggles.
- A mature Christian is someone who increasingly runs to Jesus in the struggle.
- A mature Christian isn't someone who never doubts.
- A mature Christian is someone who keeps trusting Jesus through the doubt.
- A mature Christian isn't someone who never sins.
- A mature Christian is someone who repents more quickly because they love Christ more deeply.

Maturity is not sinless perfection. It is increasing attachment to Jesus.

That's why Paul doesn't say, "Present everyone mature in theology." He doesn't say, "Present everyone mature in church attendance." He says, "Present everyone mature in Christ." Because Christian maturity is not ultimately about mastering a subject. It is about belonging to a Person.

Reflection question: Am I becoming more worshipful, trusting, loving, and obedient?

3. The Means: We Proclaim Christ

Stott asks, "How do Christians become mature?" He finds the answer in Colossians. Paul's answer is surprisingly simple: "We proclaim Christ."

28 He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature [teleios] in Christ.

But which Christ? Because there are many versions of Jesus available today.

- A Jesus who only affirms.
- A Jesus who only condemns.
- A political Jesus.
- A therapeutic Jesus.
- A self-help Jesus.
- A life-coach Jesus.
- A prosperity Jesus.
- A revolutionary Jesus.

Every generation creates a Jesus in its own image. And Paul knows this.

So Paul begins this letter that encourages growth by painting a picture of who Jesus is...in Colossians 1:15-20 he says that...

He is the image of the invisible God.

All things were created through Him and for Him.

He is before all things.

In Him all things hold together.

He is the head of the church.

In everything He has the supremacy.

Before Paul asks them to follow Jesus, he wants them to see Jesus.

Before he calls them to maturity, he wants them to stand in awe.

The Problem Isn't That Jesus Is Too Small

The problem is that our vision of Him often is. We have reduced Jesus to someone who helps us when we're stressed. Someone who improves our marriages. Someone who helps us raise good kids. Someone who helps us get through difficult seasons. And He certainly does all those things. But if that's all Jesus is, then we have shrunk Him.

Jesus is not merely a consultant for your life. He is the Lord of creation. He is not merely your helper. He is the One holding the universe together right now. He is not simply part of your life. Your life exists for Him.

And here's Stott's insight: The poorer our vision of Christ, the poorer our discipleship. The richer our vision of Christ, the richer our discipleship.

Because nobody worships, trusts, loves, and obeys a Jesus they find unimpressive. We obey what we admire. We follow what captivates us. We surrender to what we treasure.

Perhaps the greatest need in the church today is not more information about Jesus.

It is a fresh vision of Jesus. Not the Jesus of our politics. Not the Jesus of our preferences. Not the Jesus of our culture. But the Jesus Paul proclaims: The image of the invisible God. The Lord of creation. The head of the church. The reconciler of all things. The One who is worthy of our worship, trust, love, and obedience.

THE ROLE OF SHEPHERDS

Before we move on, I think it's important to notice something in Paul's language. He says, "We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ."

In other words, maturity is deeply personal, but it is never private.

God uses people to help people grow.

Paul assumes there will be someone proclaiming Christ, someone teaching truth, someone offering encouragement, someone providing correction, and someone walking alongside believers toward maturity.

This is one of the reasons God gives shepherds to His church. Pastors are not called merely to run organizations, preach sermons, or manage ministries. They are called to

help present people mature in Christ. Through teaching, encouragement, warning, correction, prayer, and example, they participate in God's work of forming Christ in His people.

But notice that even Paul does not present himself as the hero of the story. He teaches, warns, and labors, yet maturity remains "in Christ" and the energy remains Christ's energy. Shepherds are instruments; Christ is the One who ultimately transforms His people.

Reflective question: Is my picture of Jesus biblical, full, and true — or have I reduced Him to something manageable?

4. The Labor: We Struggle With Christ's Energy

I hear Christians say things like:

- "I need to try harder to be patient."
- "I need to try harder to stop worrying."
- "I need to try harder to overcome this temptation."
- "I just need more willpower."

And while I understand what they mean, that's not quite how the Christian life works. Christianity is not a self-improvement project. It is a relationship with a living Savior.

The goal isn't simply to become a better version of yourself. The goal is for Christ to form His life in you. That's why Paul says:

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

Notice both realities.

Paul labors. Christ empowers.

Paul doesn't sit on the couch and say, "God will do it all."

Nor does he grit his teeth and say, "I'll do it myself."

Paul works. Christ empowers.

Paul strives. Christ strengthens.

Paul fights. Christ supplies the energy.

The Christian life is not "let go and let God." Neither is it "God helps those who help themselves." It is active dependence upon the power of Christ.

How do you become more patient? Not by trying harder. By walking closer to Christ.

How do you become more loving? Not merely by gritting your teeth. By abiding in Christ.

How do you overcome temptation? Not simply by stronger willpower. By drawing upon a stronger power.

Because eventually your willpower runs out. Your discipline runs out. Your motivation runs out. But Christ never runs out.

This is why maturity is not measured by how hard you're trying. It is measured by how deeply you're abiding. Mature Christians are not people who have become strong enough to live for Jesus. Mature Christians are people who have learned to depend upon Jesus.

Reflective question: Am I giving my energy to the things that actually form Christ in me and others? Or am I exhausting myself trying to produce in my own strength what only Christ can produce by His power?

CLOSING CALL

Perhaps the greatest danger for a Christian is not that we stop believing in Jesus, but that we stop pursuing Him. Over time, it is possible to settle for knowing about Christ rather than truly knowing Him. We can become content with church attendance, ministry involvement, and religious activity while neglecting the relationship that gives life to all those things. The result is growth in appearance but not in depth.

Yet Paul's vision is far greater. He says, "We proclaim Christ... so that we may present everyone mature in Christ." God's desire is not merely that we become more religious, more informed, or more involved. His desire is that we become people who worship Christ more fully, trust Him more deeply, love Him more passionately, and obey Him more gladly. This kind of maturity is not reserved for pastors, missionaries, or spiritual giants; it is God's calling for every believer.

The encouraging news is that this maturity is not produced by our own strength. We do not become mature by gritting our teeth, trying harder, or relying on sheer willpower. We grow as we see Christ more clearly and as we learn to depend on the power He supplies. The same Christ whom Paul proclaims is the Christ who works powerfully within His people.

So as we leave today, perhaps the prayer is not, "Lord, make me a better Christian," but, "Lord, help me see You more clearly." Give me a fresh vision of Your greatness, Your beauty, Your power, and Your love. As I behold You, shape me, strengthen me, and mature me until my life increasingly reflects Yours.

For the goal of the Christian life is not to become a stronger version of yourself. It is to become a clearer reflection of Jesus Christ.

Closing prayer: **"Lord, give me a fresh, clear, true vision of Jesus, so that I may grow mature in Him."**