

Colossians - Christian Maturity

by Mariano Di Gangi

The sermon emphasizes the importance of initial decision, continual development, and the role of Jesus Christ in achieving Christian maturity.

Duration: 26:45

Scripture: Psalm 1:3, Matthew 6:33, John 14:6, Romans 12:1-2, Colossians 2:1-5

Topics: "Maturity"

Description

In this sermon, the apostle discusses the importance of exalting Jesus Christ in our lives. He emphasizes that Jesus is a unique person who exercises a saving power. The apostle warns against false philosophies that promote egotistic hedonism and disregard for others. He urges the listeners to receive Christ Jesus as Lord, live in Him, and be rooted and built up in Him. The sermon concludes with a plea to treat Jesus as an honored guest and to rely on His strength for the living of these days.

Transcript

Reading now from the written word of God, the letter of Paul to the Colossians, the second chapter, beginning at verse 1. Here now the reading of this portion of God's written and inspired word. I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not met me personally. My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine sounding arguments, for though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit, and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. And now we come to the text for today. So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised in the putting of off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men, but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

It's great to be born again, but the evidence of having been born again is that we grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is by moving on step by step toward Christian maturity that we give evidence of having been born again by the Spirit of God. Now in developing the theme of Christian maturity, the Apostle Paul explains spiritual progress, and he tells us that spiritual progress is related to an initial decision.

You received Christ Jesus as Lord. That is where, humanly speaking, it must all begin. In the Gospel of John we are told that Jesus came unto his own and his own received him not.

But then there was that visible minority that did receive him. At the start of our Christian life, humanly speaking, there is an initial decision by which, when we are confronted with the offer of the Gospel and presented with Jesus Christ, we do not reject him, but we receive him. We receive him as Jesus, the one who was born to save his people from their sins.

We receive him as the Christ, anointed to be the Messiah, to teach us with infallible authority as our prophet, to offer up a full and final sacrifice for our sin as a merciful priest, to rule over us in righteousness and give us peace as our sovereign king. At the start of the Christian life, there is that initial decision of faith by which we open our hearts to receive Jesus Christ and to receive him as Lord. Faith is no formal, cold, superficial thing.

It involves commitment, and commitment means absolute surrender to the sovereignty of the Savior, receiving Jesus Christ as Lord. Now, I ask you today, have you received Jesus Christ and submitted to him and committed yourself to him unreservedly as your Lord? If not, then you are to be numbered among the undecided. If not, you may even be among those who continue to resist and to reject, and I must warn you, solemnly as in the sight of God and not from a position of preeminence and superiority.

How shall we escape if, having been offered so great a Savior, we forfeit this salvation? It all begins with that initial decision in which we say yes to Jesus. We are open to Christ. We submit to the Lord.

But beyond the initial decision, there's got to be continuing development. And the Apostle speaks in terms of walking, moving toward a goal. Once we become Christians, we start on a long journey.

It may begin with but a single step, but it involves hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of steps of obedience and faith and repentance day by day until we see him face-to-face. The Christian who moves on toward maturity is a traveler, a traveler who takes steps of daily trust and obedience, moving toward the goal of ultimate conformity to the likeness of Jesus Christ. The Christian is not only a traveler who is on a long journey that leads to conformity to the image of Jesus, but the Christian is like a tree rooted firmly in the soil that is Jesus Christ.

In the first Psalm, David spoke of the godly person as being like a tree planted by rivers of water whose leaf does not wither and who in the various seasons of life brings forth fruit appropriate to that season. And we must ask ourselves this day, are we so rooted in Jesus, drawing our nourishment from him, that in the season of temptation we will bring forth the fruit of resistance, that in the season of sin we will bring forth the fruit of conviction and confession, that in the season of opportunity we will bring forth the fruit of obedience? Are we like a traveler moving toward a goal? Are we like a tree rooted, drawing sustenance and bearing fruit? And we must also be built up in Christ. There the metaphor changes from agriculture to architecture.

There, having spoken of those who are rooted in Christ, he now speaks of those who being based on Jesus as a sure foundation are edified to be what? To become a temple in which he may dwell. No, you not, says the Apostle, that your body is meant to be the temple of the Holy Spirit. We are built up on that solid foundation not to be profaned but to be sacred ground in which Jesus Christ as a place of absolute preeminence.

And so beyond that initial decision of receiving Jesus as the Christ and as the Lord, there has to be continual development like that of a traveler who moves on to his destination, like that of a tree that is firmly rooted and fruitful, like that of a temple that solidly founded rises on the horizon of history to be a sanctuary in which Christ is adored. So Paul explains spiritual progress by an initial decision that must be followed by continual development. But the next thing that he does is to expose false philosophies.

You see, the Apostle Paul didn't buy that invalid approach which says you must always be positive and concentrate only on the possibilities. He also dared to deal with negatives in the best interests of men and women who otherwise would go into a pitfall and be retrogressive instead of progressive. And Paul points out that there are deceitful philosophies, hollow philosophies, fine-sounding but ruinous philosophies, and without going into great detail, which would not be edifying at this point, it would be sufficient to say that these philosophies by nature are hollow and deceptive and false, that these philosophies are based on human tradition, on human innovation, on human speculation, but not on Christ.

They are not dependent on God's revelation but on something that man, out of the figment of his own fertile mind, dares to concoct. And that is what Paul warned the Christians of his day against. What hollow, deceitful, false philosophies are abroad in our day concerning which we should be on guard? Let me just briefly, but I trust clearly, mention several deceptive and damnable philosophies that are abroad in our day against which we must be on the alert.

Take for example crass materialism, the religion of many of our fellow Canadians. Money becomes God. Greed is glorified as admissible ambition.

Possessions matter more than persons. Power, exploitation, fraud, all to gain materially, being willing to trample upon others in order to gain materially ourselves. Forgetting, what shall it profit a man if he gained the whole world and still lose his own soul? Crass materialism is a hollow, deceitful, dangerous philosophy.

And what about secular humanism? Not the kind of humanism that looks on man as made in the image of God and who cultivates all his cultural potential, but a secular humanism. Living life as though God did not exist or even if he did exist as though he did not matter. Living as though there were no absolute moral law given in the Ten Commandments to which every creature is obliged to conform.

Living the game of life by our own standards, motivated by our own ambitions, pursuing our own goals, ignoring God and defying God. That surely is a hollow and deceptive philosophy and many there be who follow it in Canada today. And what about egotistic humanism? There's another hollow, deceptive, and dangerous philosophy.

The idea that my pleasure and my convenience are all that really matter and other people are merely ends to gratify my desire for pleasure. And the standard of right and wrong is if it feels good, if it feels good it can't be wrong. Egotistic hedonism, that man's chief end is to enjoy himself no matter what misery or pain it brings to anybody else, is a mindset that is dominant in our day.

And wherever its corrupting impact is felt, people are unwilling to serve, unwilling to deny themselves, and unwilling to sacrifice. Now it's interesting, disgustingly interesting, that all three of these philosophies this past week have come together in a conspiracy against the most defenseless person in the universe, the unborn child. The crass materialist says career is what matters, economic considerations are primary, therefore the abortion of the fetus is not only an option but in your best interests.

Secular humanism, which disregards any absolute moral law that comes from God, including the sixth commandment, which we are so eager to invoke in criticizing governments in terms of war but refuse to apply in personal terms when it comes to abortion. Secular humanism, disregarding the moral law of God as an absolute, disregarding the biblical teaching that we are made in the image of God and bear that image even before birth, joins in the conspiracy against the unborn. And what about egotistical hedonism? The idea that you can enjoy sex without facing up to commitment and responsibilities flowing from it, playing games with words so that people speak of pro-choice when what they mean is dare to kill, pro-freedom when what that really means is freedom to take another life.

And having passed this milestone, is it only a matter of time before society will decide that there are some disabled people, people who are defective by our standards, who for our economic benefit should also be put away? What about the unproductive agent? Are they too not candidates for the same conspiracy to be done in? Lord have mercy upon us for we have sinned. The Apostle explains this way of spiritual progress and exposes false philosophies that are hollow and deceptive and dangerous. But he doesn't end there.

He concludes by exalting Jesus Christ, and that certainly is our purpose, not only in this service of worship, but in our lives. How does the Apostle exalt Jesus Christ in the words of this text? He tells us that Jesus Christ is a unique person and that he exercises a saving power. He is a unique person because the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him.

Any view of Jesus Christ which does not take into consideration the fact that he is God visiting this planet is a sub-Christian, unbiblical view. The Apostle John describes this phenomenon at the very beginning of his gospel. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Jesus Christ is the one in whom the fullness of deity or divinity dwells. He not only has divinity, but humanity, for the fullness of God dwells in him bodily. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and all who had eyes of faith could see in him the glory of God's unique Son, full of grace and truth.

Deity belongs to him, and therefore it is right that we should worship him. Humanity belongs to him, for us and our salvation he became a man and experienced our trials and endured our temptations and died in our place. But he not only has deity and humanity, he possesses authority, for the Apostle tells us that he has been given authority over all things.

He is sovereign, he is supreme, preeminence belongs to him, we must bow before him, we must give up all our stubbornness and resistance in his sight, we must say, yes, Lord, and govern our lives accordingly. And he has a saving power, as well as being a unique person. How is that saving power realized? The Apostle speaks about our fullness in Christ.

When you receive Jesus Christ, when you open your life to follow him and to trust in him, you have everything that you're ever going to need to lead a Christian life. If you haven't got Jesus Christ, you can have everything else and be a spiritual pauper, but if you're open to Christ and you received him, then you have all that you'll ever really need to live a godly life. Are we filled with the fullness of Jesus Christ? Has

he filled the open, empty spaces in our hearts, or are our lives still devoid of the fullness of his presence? And worse yet, are we trying to stuff and are we trying to fill the vacant parts of our life with things instead of with the person of Jesus Christ? Fullness in Christ and circumcision in Christ, cutting away not of flesh, but cutting away our sinful nature, putting it away from us by a radical disjunction and rupture, so that from henceforth we will face toward God and not the world for our standards, so that henceforth not I but Christ will live in me and not the egotistical affirmation of my own will and way.

And to be buried with Christ, to say goodbye once and for all to the old nature, and to be resurrected with Christ. In the future we shall experience the resurrection of the body, but here and now we must experience a resurrection. We who were dead in trespasses and sins can be made spiritually alive and we can have new life, life that is everlasting, living day by day in communion with God in step with Jesus Christ.

If you've got Jesus Christ, you've got all that you will ever need to grow to spiritual maturity. The hymn writer understood this well, for Charlotte Elliott once put it like this, just as I am poor, wretched, blind, sight, riches, healing of the mind, yea, all I need in thee to find, O Lamb of God, I come. And Charles Wesley surely was on the right track when he said, Thou, O Christ, art all I want, more than all I need in thee I find.

And I urge you and I encourage you this day, if you've been trying to go it alone, to take Jesus Christ into your life. And if you have already received Jesus Christ, I plead with you to treat him as an honored guest, as one who comes not only to redeem but to rule, who comes not only to forgive but to give us strength for the living of these days, for the good of our fellow men and the glory of God. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, by the truth of your holy word and the inward work of your Holy Spirit, you have begun in our lives the work of reshaping us after your likeness. Be pleased to bring that work to perfection, so that day by day we may make spiritual progress, day by day we may be like trees firmly planted and ever fruitful, day by day we may be built up as a sanctuary of the Spirit and the shrine in which you are worshipped. Lord Jesus Christ, enter our lives, fill us with your presence and your power, and so may we live in love with one another and to the glory of God our Savior.

Amen.

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