Sermon
Spiritual Maturity

Our focus verse this morning will be Col. 1:28. But we'll be taking a tour of the whole letter. We will be reading lots of Scripture today - so I hope your neck muscles are ready. But we are people of the Book and we can never get enough of it, amen?

Read Col. 1:27-29

What is maturity? How will we know when we get there? How do we know we're heading the right direction?

Is it when we stop laughing at the word "poop"? Is it when we tell people about our 401(k)? Is it when we buy a house and start becoming our parents like in those Progressive commercials?

This morning I want to outline a map toward maturity and then sketch a portrait of a mature Christian.

And by the way we will be doing a whole series on this topic in student ministry this fall - diving into greater detail. Please continue praying for our young people and that the Lord would grow them in His grace and wisdom.

The METHODS to Maturity (the tools we use):

1. **We *proclaim* Jesus**

- The message stays the same. It never changes.
    - If we ever veer away from preaching Christ, then we will end up at the wrong location.
- We keep the main thing the main thing.
- We see in 2:3 that all wisdom is hidden in Christ.

2. **We *warn* in wisdom**

- Warn: *"to put in mind . . . to caution or reprove gently."*
- We warn people that are going astray.
    - We remind them (put in their mind) that the path they are following does not lead to maturity. It leads to death.
    - It would be totally UNloving to see someone going down a stray path and NOT warn them.
- Peter Cullin - voice of Optimus Prime (80's cartoon and the movies)

    - His older brother was a marine and helped him prepare for the audition. He said, "Don't be one of the Hollywood heroes who yells and screams with all the bravado. ***Be strong enough to be gentle***."
- We have on God's authority that sin leads to death. We can be so strong in our warning that we don't have to be frustrated. We don't have to belittle people. We can be gentle.
- So I want to warn you: if you are knowingly and continually saying yes to sin and saying no to God (even if you're good at keeping it hidden and putting on a smile), then that path will lead to hurt - for you and most likely for others.
    - You don't have to continue on that path!

3. We *teach* in wisdom

- We warn people of the path they should not follow. And then teach them the path that they should follow.
- Warning and teaching lines up with Jesus' call to REPENT and BELIEVE.
- We teach the whole counsel of God because it is all helpful in equipping the saint for every good work (2 Tim 3:16).

We don't stop at presenting everyone *converted* in Christ. We teach wisdom so that we may present everyone *mature* in Christ.

- When someone becomes a Christian we don't say "*Great! Their eternal destiny is secure, let's leave them alone till the afterlife and go find more people to convert*."
- This section in Col 1 is about Paul toiling with all the energy God gives him to see to it that all these believers are made complete/whole/mature.
- God has begun a good work in you, and He will bring it to completion.

We want this for all God's people. Everyone, everyone, everyone. No man left behind.
This is why we warn and teach one another (Col 3:16)

The MEANS to Maturity (the path we follow):

G O D ' S W I S D O M

Following the path of God's wisdom leads us to maturity in Christ.

- Used 6 times in this letter. It's a bit of a theme.
    - False teachers were convincing the Colossian church to follow harsh religious practices in order to grow more mature.
    - But Paul calls for God's WISDOM instead of man-made rules.
- Sophia (definition): the skill of applying the truths of God to the situations of man.
    - God knows the kind of world He created. He knows that we find ourselves in all kinds of unique situations. And He knows that His Word does not have a specific

command for all of those scenarios. (8 year-old's bedtime. What career you should pursue. etc.) But He does give us principles.
    - So God wants to grow us in His wisdom.
        - This requires (and starts with) a healthy fear of the Lord. (taking Him seriously)
        - This requires extensive knowledge of God and His Word.
        - This requires experiential knowledge.
        - This requires curiosity and patience to learn about the specific situation.
        - This requires meditation and reflection as opposed to a "quick, easy fix."
        - This requires dependence on the Spirit of God within (being sensitive to His presence and His guidance).
- Following the path of God's wisdom WILL lead to maturity in Christ. (*A long obedience in the same direction*)
    - We must avoid the other paths . . .
- Col 2:20-23
    - Man-made rules cannot get the job done. They will fail you.
    - Legalism can have the appearance of wisdom.
    - We are attracted to strong resolve and clear-cut rules to help us avoid sin.
        - But power does not reside in the law.
- Col 3
    - What we actually need is an identity shift.
    - Our identity leads to how we live. Not vice versa.
        - What comes first - the rules we follow or the identity we have?
    - V.1-4
        - Identity language. We remind ourselves of the identity shift that has taken place.
    - V.5-11
        - Following God's wisdom is saying NO to sin. Putting off the old, sinful self.
        - There are rules here. We must put these things away.
        - The difference between these rules and the rules in ch.2, is that these come from God and His wisdom.
            - They are not man-made. And they are not claiming to have the power.
            - The power is the life of Christ in you! The new self.
        - Avoiding these sins by the power of God will lead to our maturity.
    - V.12-17
        - Following God's wisdom is saying YES to the fruit of the Spirit.
            - It is obeying the commands of God. Following His best design for human life and flourishing. The new self has the ability to obey.

        - Following God's wisdom leads to v.16 - singing, rejoicing, thanksgiving.
        - If your religious approach (or mentality) doesn't lead to that, then you may need to reevaluate.
- Because God wants us to come to a place of being fully assured (2:2, 4:12)

So means to maturity is God's wisdom . . .

- Jesus is wisdom personified (1 Cor 1) and we can find all the treasures of wisdom in Him.
- HE is the ultimate means to maturity. He is the path of God's wisdom (the way), the truth, and the life.

The MARKS of Maturity (what the destination looks like):
From Jonathan Dodson's Gospel-Centered Discipleship.

He calls for balance among these 3 characteristics. It's easy for a Christian to pursue their area of strength and then get off-kilter.

Rational (IQ)

Col 1:9-10 "filled with knowledge . . . increasing in knowledge"

Col 2:3-4 "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge . . . no one may delude you with arguments."

- The mature Christian grows in knowledge to avoid error. This is foundational.

**God is not interested in a bunch of doctrinally accurate jerks.*

Relational (with God and others) (EQ)
Relationship with God: Isn't that what this whole Christian thing is about? Isn't that why you are here today?

- The God/King of the universe said "I want you. I want to know you and I want you to know me." We ran from that relationship and broke it off by our sin and rebellion. But God made a way through Jesus to restore it again.
- God is not a subject to be studied. He is a Friend to be enjoyed. He is a Person to spend time with.
- The mature Christian has a real, authentic, honest, even tangible relationship with God.

But we also relate to others - to the church.

Col 2:2 "hearts knit together in love"

Col 3:12-17 - all these commands are relational.

The word "righteous" in the OT can be understood as rightly relating to God and others.

- The mature Christian puts on kindness (and the very character of Jesus) towards others.

**God is not interested in a bunch of kind, empathetic heretics.*

Missional (SQ and CQ)

Col 4:2-6

- We have been put here with a purpose: to share God's good news with others.
- The mature Christian seeks opportunities to do this!

**God is not interested in a bunch of kind, empathetic, doctrinally accurate hermits. He wants to use us to reach more people!*

Now before you go and try to be all these things perfectly balanced and mature, let me offer you some encouraging reminders:

- Ephesians 4:11-16 is all about the body being built up together. This isn't an individual project. This is a community project.
- Don't try to be the hero.
    - Some of you have rational strength. Some of you have relational strength. Some of you have missional strength.
    - Let's lean on one another to be a mature body. Imitate those who have strengths in your weak areas.
- None of us is as strong as all of us.
    - Individually, we will always have weak areas. But all together?? God will use that!

So this is a community project . . . AND there is One who is stronger than all of us - and gives us our strength:
Jesus is the hero. He was (and is) perfectly rational, relational, missional.
And here's the great news: **Christ. is. in. YOU!** (v.27)

~ P A U S E ~

This is the mystery we proclaim and this is our hope of glory.
Sculpture illustration: "*The sculpture is already complete within the marble block, before I start my work. It is already there, I just have to chisel away the superfluous material*." Michelangelo
The journey towards maturity in Christ is God chiseling away the superfluous material.

APPLICATION: We want to journey together as a church as God chisels away the superfluous materials.
A couple of chiseling tools we offer:

- CGs and DGs - these are tools (methods) we've put in place to help. We proclaim Jesus. And we live out Col 3:16 - warning and teaching one another in joy and gratitude.

Identity group quote: "*Whereas a* [fear-based] *accountability group asks people to get together and be honest about their behavior and whether they are living up to their commitments, an identity group is focused on helping people remember who they are* [in Christ] *and how it is like them to act - how God created them to act.*"

Let's be a church firmly rooted in our new identity in Christ - and may that fuel the methods, means, and marks of our maturity. He is the focus of our methods, the embodiment of our means, and the perfection of our marks.

After prayer:
We will have sign-ups available online and at the Connect Center in the lobby!