

Colossians 1:21-29 (NLT2) ²¹ This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. ²² Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. ²³ But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News. The Good News has been preached all over the world, and I, Paul, have been appointed as God's servant to proclaim it. ²⁴ I am glad when I suffer for you in my body, for I am participating in the sufferings of Christ that continue for his body, the church. ²⁵ God has given me the responsibility of serving his church by proclaiming his entire message to you. ²⁶ This message was kept secret for centuries and generations past, but now it has been revealed to God's people. ²⁷ For God wanted them to know that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory. ²⁸ So we tell others about Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all the wisdom God has given us. We want to present them to God, perfect in their relationship to Christ. ²⁹ That's why I work and struggle so hard, depending on Christ's mighty power that works within me.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

We are all a people in process. None of us have arrived at full maturity yet in Christ. It is fun to watch our granddaughter roll over on the floor so she can pick up a toy to play with. She does not crawl yet, she rolls, and it is precious to see, more precious than words. I want to shout to the neighbors, "That's my granddaughter." "She is able to sit up on her own and move by rolling."

Yes, we are all a people in process growing in Christian maturity, learning to walk with the Lord Jesus. The church is here to help us grow in Christ. The church gives to us a certain amount of nourishment which our souls crave. On the other hand, you can bring a horse to water, but you cannot make a horse drink. In other words, as a church we can proclaim where the food and water are that makes us mature in Christ, but we cannot make any person eat or drink. That is up to each and every one of you to do this on your own.

Our granddaughter is learning to feed herself. Her mother or father or grandmother will put a partial banana in Addy's hand and yes, she puts it in her mouth and bites down. When I see this, I want to yell outside. My granddaughter is learning how to eat real food all by herself. I am sure they would love to hear this good news, right? Wrong.

Yes, when we are babies, we have to be fed by others. Our lives depend on the work of others to feed us. Then there comes the day when we no longer need to be fed, we feed ourselves with the food that is set before us. It is called growing up. It is called maturing.

My question to you is this. Are you still waiting to be hand fed by others for your Christian maturity? Are you waiting for others to feed you spiritually, or have you moved on to feeding your own self with the great food that God has set before you to eat? Have you learned to feed yourself spiritually or are you still an infant in Christ waiting and maybe even crying to be fed and you are in your 50's feeling bored or empty in church? The level of your enjoyment in worship is directly correlated to your maturity level in Christ. For those who have taken in God's nourishment all week long, coming to worship is like the frosting on the cake. For those who have not eaten all week, coming to worship can be sheer drudgery. The food that is given here cannot even be taken in because your stomach, your soul is not ready for the meat of the Gospel when you are still milk dependent. You might even be in your 70's having not moved forward from milk. So, let's move on.

Hebrews 5:11-14 (NLT2) ¹¹ *There is much more we would like to say about this, but it is difficult to explain, especially since you are spiritually dull and don't seem to listen.* ¹² *You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food.* ¹³ *For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn't know how to do what is right.* ¹⁴ *Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong.*

Whether or not you are a Christian is not for me to judge. Only God knows and only God is the judge. But if you are a believer in Christ, it is time for all of us to move forward, to grow into full maturity in Christ and to leave childish things behind. The closer your walk is to God, it makes coming to worship an absolute privilege and thrill, not mere drudgery. The same liturgy

we use week after week can be used of God to prick you, to stir you, to rile you, to boost your growth in the Lord Jesus Christ. “Oh Lord please have mercy on us all.” When your spirit is open to the Holy Spirit, every part of the worship service has something for you. This is where your will to be spiritually alive plays a huge role. I have been with so many people when they breathed their last breath and what is privilege it is to see a person transition from this life into heaven. At this point their will to live plays a huge role in the timeliness of their last breath. Some wait for a particular person to be in the room. Other’s wait for a particular person to leave the room. The will to live is truly a strong force.

Your willingness to be strong and spiritually alive plays a huge role in your own Christian growth. Bottom line, it is the role of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ inside of you that moves you on to new levels of Christian growth, and growth never comes easy. I am reminded of boys and girls who grow tall, almost overnight and they have growing pains. To grow in Christ can be painful and it often takes pain in our lives that motivates us to grow closer to Jesus. Our souls grow hungry for solid food that brings growth. Milk is no longer enough. You get tired of wearing adult diapers because you have not allowed the Lord God to train you, to disciple you to go on your own.

In my time here I have known the most amazing believers in Christ that I have ever known. Their maturity in Christ makes me look like an infant in Christ. I look up to those mature in Christ believers and wish I could be like them. Some of those who I am thinking about have gone home to be with Jesus. Most are still breathing here on this earth. For the rest of this sermon, I will state what caused their never-ending growth into Christian maturity. There is no specific order of my points other than making the points that brought growth,

*²¹ This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. 1. **Every mature believer in Christ readily acknowledged that they are a sinner in need of being reconciled to Jesus.** Yes, I have*

called us all dirty rotten sinners. That may sound offensive to some. On the other hand, every Christian is also a saint. I put it this way, the more we understand the depths and depravity of our own sins and the harm they cause, the greater we appreciate the forgiveness of all our sins and the price on the cross that Jesus paid to save us.

²² Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. Yes, there are some of you who have known Christ since the day of your baptism. You have never not known Christ. Others come to Christ long after their baptism and what brings them to Christ is the Holy Spirit convincing the person that he or she needs to be reconciled to God. The feeling that there is something missing terribly in your life is the soul crying out to know God and be reconciled to God.

2. Every mature believer in Christ knows with absolute certainty that they are reconciled to God and completely forgiven of all their sins. Often, they sense or feel the very Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit has moved in and has taken up permanent residence. Not only did they acknowledge and repent of their sins they know with certainty that they are completely forgiven for the blood of Jesus has cleansed their souls. Where there is forgiveness of sins there is new life, so says Luther.

Within the last 5 years I had a personal battle with God although I did not know it until a counselor pointed it out. On top of that my friend Bob Blessing said, “Terry, you have a guilty conscience.” At the same time, I read a book that I strongly recommend to all by Dr Erwin Lutzer of the Moody Church. **The Power of a Clear Conscience: Let God Free You from Your Past.** In this book Dr Lutzer makes it clear that what holds so many of us back from moving forward in Christ is a lifetime of guilt and shame we have held onto since birth. Yes, we have prayed to receive forgiveness but for whatever reason we still feel the guilt and shame of them. Guilt knows you have done something wrong. Shame weighs you down, feeling that everything about you is wrong. Guilt knows you have made a mistake. Shame is the feeling that you are a

mistake. At the heaviest, this can often lead a person to take his or her life. The guilt and shame become unbearable, literally. Those in your own home see the worst of you and do not understand what is happening.

The Good News is Jesus is our rescuer. Jesus is our salvation. Jesus bore all that guilt and shame on the cross. All your sins are forgiven. All my sins are forgiven, never to be held against me again. Those who have moved forward in Christ are no longer carrying the heavy baggage of guilt and shame. They know in the deepest part of their soul that they are forgiven, completely forgiven, and reconciled to God. As Paul writes, *“As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.”* That my friends is your position in Christ. That is who you are in Christ. That is your identity in Christ, a fully forgiven sinner faultless before God. You no longer have to carry the guilt and shame of your sins.

3. Those who have grown past the elementary stages of Christian growth know they have a message to give, and they give it. When you truly love Jesus, you cannot help but talk about Jesus. More than words, when you truly love Jesus, you want there to be an integrity in your life between what the Bible teaches and how you live. Your complete identity is wrapped up in Christ as discovered in Scripture. You want to get the message out of God’s saving grace, of God’s love displayed on the cross, of forgiveness of sins and eternal life to all who will listen. I have sat and listened to such people in this church and oh how I want to be like them. They put their spiritual gifts to great use for God and God honored their efforts. They never stopped giving the Good News of Jesus and were delighted to give it away.

Everything Paul wrote, spoke, and did, he did to build up the church and all out of love for Jesus. For the rest of our time in Colossians, Paul will be giving to us the steps we can all take to move on toward maturity in Christ. Paul gives to us the food that we each need to take in and digest.

I close with Paul's own words. **4. And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory.²⁸ So we tell others about Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all the wisdom God has given us. We want to present them to God, mature in their relationship to Christ.²⁹ That's why I work and struggle so hard, depending on Christ's mighty power that works within me. Amen and Amen.**