

Growing Young – Part II – Ephesians 4:20-23

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Would anyone here like to grow young again today? Well, if you do, you're in the right place because today we're going to be continuing on in Ephesians chapter 4 and looking further into what we started last week: a close examination of what the Bible teaches us about the concept of growing young again in our ways of thinking. Today's message is called **Growing Young – Part II**. This concept of growing young is introduced to us in Ephesians 4:23, where Paul calls us to be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and many other passages of Scripture provide us with more details about how this process works and how important it is in our lives.

I. REVIEW OF GROWING YOUNG PART 1

You may remember from last week that the Greek word translated, "renewed," means "to renew or make young." And with this beautiful word we are introduced to a vivid contrast to the way we used to live with an old, crusty, hardened heart, calloused and numb. We find God instead offering each of us the opportunity to reverse the spiritual aging process and leave behind the skepticism and doubting and bitterness and negativity of a hardened old person and return to simple childlike faith and sensitivity and moldability in the hands of our loving Father.

Briefly reviewing last week, we first discovered that this renewal or growing young is NOT instantaneous, but rather something that occurs over time, day by day. It's a process that's going on right now and will continue throughout our lives.

Secondly, we saw that afflictions and challenges and difficulties do not need to de-rail this process of growing young, but can actually be used by God to enhance the growing young process as we keep our eyes fixed on our Savior and experience Christ walking with us and carrying us through even the most difficult of circumstances, working each of them together for good in our lives.

We are truly growing young in the spirit of our minds when we can rejoice in sufferings, because we know that God is using them for good in our lives and is developing our character and showing us time and time again that He is able to see us through even the darkest of times.

Then we ended last week in Psalm 103, verses 2 to 5, where we discovered that the Lord is fully committed to bringing about this growing young process in our lives and is daily providing what we need to move forward in this transformation. We saw that He is working diligently to cause you to grow young in the spirit of your mind and rise up in His power.

We were reminded of five ways that He encourages this process: 1) He forgives all your sins. 2) He is your Healer, spiritually and physically. 3) Through Christ He has taken you out from under His wrath and removed you from the path that was leading to hell and eternal punishment for your sin. 4) He daily pours out His lovingkindness and compassion on you in a multitude of ways. 5) He provides for you and takes care of your daily needs and provides you with many other blessings and gifts to satisfy your years and show you His love. And He does these things so that you will grow young in the way you think and live, and learn to rise up in His power and live as the new creation He has created you to be, leaving your old self behind and stepping into the beautiful new self He created for you when you trusted Christ as your Savior and Lord.

So as we continue on today in examining what Scripture says about this renewal or growing young process, let's start by reading again verses 17 to 24 of Ephesians chapter 4:

17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that

you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

II. GROWING YOUNG INVOLVES OUR MINDS (EPHESIANS 4:23; ROMANS 12:1-2)

Now as we zero in on verse 23 of Ephesians chapter 4 this week, I want us to first notice that this renewal or growing young to which Paul is calling us involves our minds. Verse 23 says, "***and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind.***"

Remember my illustration from last week about the young girl who over time and through various experiences and difficulties and choices ended up growing old in her mind and in her ways of thinking and viewing life. And when we each think about our own lives, we can see a similar process taking place. Before we come to Christ this is an inevitable process. No matter what our background or our family life was like or how many good choices we make, every single one of us has faced and will face in the future many challenging and painful and heartbreaking experiences that will tend to cause our young and trusting and forgiving minds to start growing old and calloused and hard and unforgiving. This is why we need the renewal that only Jesus Christ can bring. We need a renewal of our minds and our ways of thinking and viewing life that have been developed over a lifetime of pain and hurt and bad choices.

When you think about where we are when we come to Christ and place our faith in Him as our Savior and Lord, we are all coming to Him with bodies and minds that have been trained over all the years of our life up to that point, to survive and cope with life apart from God. We've trained ourselves to look out for number one and to trust no one and to get back at anyone who hurts us and to blame others for our problems and to run away from pain and to fear death and to find our hope in anything but God. We have a mind that thinks this way and a body that's been trained with this mindset and has many bad habits and addictions and a wide variety of ungodly ways to cope with and deal with life. And guess what? Even though we've accepted Christ as our Savior and become a new creation, we're still living with this old body and our natural tendency and our first response will be to continue dealing with life and responding to problems the way we always have. Our minds desperately need to grow young again.

Fortunately, at the moment of salvation God creates for us a new self, or a new inner control center as one of my former pastors used to call it, and He also gives us His Holy Spirit to dwell inside us. In doing so He makes it possible for us to finally leave our old self and our old ways of thinking behind. But the old self isn't going to go without a fight. It's had a lifetime to run your life and it's very set in its ways and will continue to tempt you to follow it instead of the Holy Spirit inside and the new self God has created for you.

This battle between your old self and your new self will play out in every choice you make, and your ongoing challenge will be to choose your new self each time by the power of the Holy Spirit. And in order to win this battle your mind needs to be renewed day by day... In short, it needs to grow young again.

There's another familiar passage that connects the renewal process with our minds. Turn with me to Romans chapter 12. This is a passage most of us have probably studied or at least heard many times. Let's read verses 1 and 2 together:

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Here again Paul is talking about this process of leaving our old self behind and being transformed into a person who is walking worthy and looks completely different than the people in the world around us who do not know Christ. And notice that the transformation occurs as we offer up our bodies to God in worship and allow Him to renew our minds. We can't be transformed without growing young in our minds and our ways of thinking. And interestingly enough as Paul continues in Romans chapter 12 in verses 3 through 21, and describes how this transformation process works and what our life will look like when our minds are renewed, he talks about many of the same things we've been looking at in Ephesians chapter 4.

His first statement is that we are not to think more highly of ourselves than we should. In other words we need to walk in humility. He reminds us that we are members of one body, each with different gifts and parts to play. We are to work with each other and be unified and recognize that each person has a valuable role in the body of Christ. And then he goes into a detailed description of what a transformed life will look like. Sounds familiar doesn't it? That humility of mind keeps coming back because it really is the heart of developing a walking worthy life....A deep sense of our moment by moment need for God and His Spirit and a recognition of our own failings and weaknesses that allows us to bear with the failures and weaknesses of others and forgive them just as we have been forgiven. Humility, humility, humility... Please don't underestimate how important it is in your own life.

III. A RENEWED MIND IS FILLED WITH HUMILITY AND WORKING FOR UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST (PHILIPPIANS 1:27-28; 2:2-4)

This brings us to the second point I would like to emphasize today about the growing young process: A renewed mind is filled with humility and working for unity in the body of Christ.

Turn with me now to the book of Philippians. We'll start in chapter 1, verse 27 and go into the first part of chapter 2. In this passage we get another picture of what a walking worthy life looks like, and we find a reference again to our minds and the unity we will be striving for when our minds have been renewed. I'll start reading now in verse 27 of chapter 1:

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents - which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear to be in me. Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty

conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Paul starts out here in Philippians by again mentioning our call to walk worthy of the gospel of Christ, and once again he stresses that walking worthy will lead to unity in the body of Christ. He calls us to be of the same mind... To maintain the same love... To be united in spirit with other believers... And to be working together for the same goal. If the way we are living and acting and relating to other people is not contributing to unity and oneness with our fellow believers, then we need to take a serious look at our motives and the choices we're making and the attitude of our hearts. We cannot walk worthy while simultaneously causing division and tearing down the body of Christ. A mind that is growing young does not walk this way. Scripture even tells us that it's better to be wronged than to bring disrepute to the name of Christ.

I recently had a conversation about feelings and how when our feelings get hurt, they can lead us to do some very hurtful and divisive things in response and to become very irrational in our behavior. And what's happening when this occurs is that we are allowing our old self to rise up and take over and lead us back into all those old empty ways of living and thinking.

The remedy for this is to have a humility of mind and to realize that we do make mistakes and other people make mistakes as well. And when those hurt feelings come in and we struggle to let them go, rather than stewing about them and telling other people about them and allowing them to create bitterness within us, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to give us the courage to go to the person who brought about the hurt feelings and in humility try to work together with them for a solution. It's when we skip this step and instead start complaining to other people, that division and disunity start to arise and we get off-track with our call to walk worthy and be unified in the body of Christ.

Now we all get our feelings hurt from time to time and not every time we get our feelings hurt do we need to go have a big conversation with the person who hurt us. Many times we can just let it roll off and forgive and move on. How many men out there love it when your wives say, "We need to talk?" I don't see many hands up! But even men know there are times when things reach a certain level or when

the hurt was very deep and we find ourselves holding bitterness in our heart toward someone, that we must go to them and try to resolve the problem. Yes, it's extremely hard sometimes. But no one said the Christian walk was going to be easy and God has promised to provide us with the strength and power to do it as we trust Him. Let's not excuse ourselves from this process just because it's difficult.

Now I'm convinced that the key to handling this process effectively and working for restoration of relationship is to walk in humility of mind. When our minds grow young they are drawn to humility and to leaving behind pride and arrogance and the belief that we are always right and pure in our motives. And even the most painful hurt can be resolved with another person when we approach them in humility and love and gentleness and the desire to restore relationship. We also need to be willing to admit our own mistakes in the process, because very rarely is one person completely right while the other person is completely wrong. We all make mistakes in any situation and being willing to admit them is extremely helpful in the reconciliation process.

Now when we follow the way of humility in trying to resolve hurt feelings, it doesn't mean that the person who caused the hurt is always going to just jump on the bandwagon, admit their mistakes and ask for forgiveness. Sometimes people are simply blinded to their own failings and may not be in a healthy place in their walk with the Lord. But our responsibility is still to go to them and work for resolution one-on-one. And sometimes you both may not be able to agree on who's at fault, but if both sides are in the right place with the Lord they should be able to continue in relationship and forgive each other, even though they may still disagree on the cause of the issue.

A mind that is growing young is filled with humility and working for unity in the body of Christ. An old mind is walking in the old self and holding onto bitterness and hard feelings and refusing to forgive, to the point that it is even willing to create division in the body over an issue. And what we must remember is that we're each called to forgive just as we've been forgiven by God, even if the other person doesn't come to the level of repentance that we would like. Because when we refuse to forgive, we not only hurt ourselves but we harm the body of Christ.

We need to look at the example of Christ clearly described in Philippians 2:5-11, and consider how He responded to injustice, realizing that sometimes in life we are going to be treated poorly and unfairly and our feelings are going to be hurt. When that happens we need to work to resolve those situations. But when they can't be resolved because of unwillingness on the other person's part or a refusal to admit any wrongdoing, sometimes we just have to accept being wronged and hand it over to God. Entrust yourself into the hands of God and into His care, and by His power let it go and forgive and move on.

If Jesus had just been concerned with justice and being treated fairly, how far do you think He would've gotten on His journey to the cross and on His mission of giving us a beautiful picture of what God is like and providing a way for us to be forever reconciled to Him? He would've instead probably been viewed as a champion of human rights. In the same way when we focus on justice only and refuse to forgive and walk in humility, we get off-track from the purpose to which God has called each of us: to know Him and to make Him known.

IV. GROWING YOUNG INVOLVES COMING TO A TRUE KNOWLEDGE (COLOSSIANS 3:8-11; 2:2-3)

The third aspect of growing young that we're going to look at today is addressed in the book of Colossians, chapter 3. Here we're going to see that growing young involves coming to a true knowledge. So turn in your Bibles a few pages to the right to Colossians if you would. Let's read verses 8 to 14:

But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him - a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

Here in this passage we see an echo of what we just heard in Philippians chapters 1 and 2. As we take off our old self and put on the new self that is in the process of growing young, we give up on anger, wrath, malice and slander. We stop lying and claiming that we have it all together and are always in the right and that it's always other people's fault. Rather than holding onto bitterness, we forgive and bear with each other and walk with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Just as the Lord forgave us, we forgive other people. And we are able to do this because we have found our value and our identity in God instead of in ourselves and in what people think about us.

Notice in verse 12 that it's in knowing that we are chosen of God, holy and beloved, that we are then able to walk in humility and grant forgiveness and compassion and kindness to other people, even in the face of hurt and injustice. We simply cannot walk this way until we give up on finding our value in ourselves and in what people think of us, and instead accept the fact that our value is in God alone and in His love for us and that we are now His very own beloved children. And this can only happen when our minds are renewed to a true knowledge.

Remember last week how we talked about truth being in Christ. We saw that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Jesus Christ. And in order to grow young again we need to immerse ourselves in the truth and wisdom and knowledge that is found in Him alone. We need to be renewed to a true knowledge.

All of our lives up to the point of salvation in Christ we lived in worldly wisdom and guidance and a worldview that left the one true God out of the picture or at best placed Him on the sidelines as a distant observer. And this worldly wisdom and these ways of responding to the difficulties in life, caused us to grow old in our minds and walk in futility and emptiness, groping around in the darkness. But now a light has been turned on and we can finally begin to see the path in front of us. We've been given a guidebook that gives us all we need to know for life and godliness, and we've also been given a Helper who will guide us into truth and into the correct understanding of this guidebook. A massive retraining of our minds has begun as we began to look for wisdom and truth in the pages of Scripture, asking the Holy Spirit to transform us by the renewing of our minds.

Without submitting our minds to the profound truths of Scripture on a regular basis, we will continue to cave to the pressures of our old self and will continue to walk in those old ways of bitterness, anger, slander and a refusal to forgive. The growing young process is tightly entwined with the truths of Scripture, and it's only through an understanding of and submission to these truths that our lives can be transformed so that more and more we begin to look like our Savior Jesus Christ. Remember, this renewal is to the image of the One who created us. Growing young in our minds will bring about a transformation in our behavior that will make us look more and more like Christ in the way we live and love.

And the beautiful truth is that this opportunity to grow young again is available to people from any background or walk of life. We all have equal value to God and are viewed equally as His children when we come to Christ. So no matter how bad you been hurt, no matter what mistakes you made in the past, no matter how others may look down on you, you can grow young again when you come to Christ and allow Him to transform you through the renewing of your mind. This is a renewal ***“in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all and in all.”***

So as we begin to wrap up today, we've learned several more things about growing young this week. 1) Growing young involves our minds and a dramatic change in our ways of thinking. 2) Growing young will lead our minds into humility and cause us to work for unity and oneness in the body of Christ, even when we are wronged or treated unfairly. 3) Growing young involves our minds coming to a true knowledge, something that can only happen when we immerse ourselves in the truths of Scripture and allow the wisdom in its pages to affect the way we think and live and the choices we make.

V. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

So what does this all mean for you and I today? How's your mind doing? Thinking in terms of the average lifespan of a human being, let's just say 80 years, where would you place the age of your mind? Are you feeling like you're about 79? Or maybe you feel a little more middle-aged, somewhere in your 40s or 50s? Is your mind about 20 years old? Take a moment and make your best guess of the approximate age of your mind on the growing young scale.

I don't know about you, but I'm excited and encouraged to know that God is in the process of causing me to grow young again and bring me fully back to that childlike faith point, where I can trust my God completely at all times, where I can easily forgive other people, where I'm filled with hope and optimism and the firm conviction that all things are possible with God, where doubt and skepticism don't cloud my thinking, where bitterness and anger and a hard heart are a distant memory.

I can see the way He has been moving me along in this process throughout my life and I can see in many of you that He is doing the very same thing. Let's not do anything that will slow down this process and keep us off this path. I'm very aware that I still have a long way to go, but I know and trust that God will continue to grow me younger each day and that He will do the same for each of you as you offer your minds to Him and ask Him in your moment-by-moment choices and feelings and struggles to renew and refresh your mind and make you young again.

When your old self tries to rise up and you find yourself holding onto bitterness or wanting to tear someone down or refusing to forgive, get on your knees and ask the great Healer to work on your mind and your heart and root out your old ways of thinking and your old ways of trying to survive and protect yourself. His way is so much better and there is freedom, true freedom when we relinquish these things into His hands and rest in His perfect lovingkindness...When we begin to accept and relax in our new identity as holy and dearly loved children of God Himself and are then able to entrust ourselves to Him in any suffering and hurt and leave it in His hands.

And the only way to get there to that deep security in your new identity whereby any kind of injustice can be forgiven and handed over, is to immerse yourself in the living and active and powerful word of God found in the Bible, asking the Holy Spirit to renew your mind and free you from the lies you've believed all your life. If study and meditation on the Word of God is not a regular part of your life right now, rearrange or drop something until it is. You can't grow young without it.

We still have more to learn about growing young in Scripture and we'll pick up here next week with **Growing Young – Part III**.