

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

Sermon by Associate Pastor Joe Davis

Union Baptist Church – 9/27/2015

I. INTRODUCTION

Well, for those of you who've been here for the last two weeks, I hope you've caught the vision through what we've been studying in Ephesians and are hungry to learn more about how each of us can grow young in our ways of thinking and experience the transformation in our lives and choices that will result when we move forward in this process. 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. As we've seen, the Greek word translated, "renewed," means to make young. And today we're on **Growing Young – Part III** and I'm planning to wrap up this topic next week with **Part IV**. The journey we're on right now in this study is to find out what the Bible as a whole teaches us about being renewed in the spirit of our minds. We're looking for clues and instructions on how this process works and how it can become a reality in each of our lives.

You see what we're doing here on Sunday morning is not just learning some interesting facts about the Bible and filling ourselves with head knowledge that has no impact on our daily lives and choices. What I'm doing here and what I hope each of you are doing here with me is chasing after God and inviting Him to come and have His way in our lives and allow the power of His Word to permeate to the very fiber of our being and begin to affect the way we think and live our lives.

So as we continue on this study today, ask God to open up your mind and heart to His truth. Ask Him to seal these truths in your mind and enable you to believe them and act on them. We're not here just to do church and feel good about ourselves and feel like we've done our duty to God for the week. We're here to seek the God of the universe, know Him through His Word, and experience the life transformation that only He can bring. Are you ready?

II. REVIEW OF GROWING YOUNG – PARTS I AND II

To briefly review what we've learned so far, we began this topic by understanding that with Paul's invitation to be renewed in the spirit of our minds, we are being offered an opportunity to leave behind our old, crusty, hardened heart, calloused and numb. We learned that God instead invites us 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.

During the first week of this study, we discovered that this renewal or growing young is NOT instantaneous, but rather something that occurs over time, day by day. We also 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 on eternal things 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. Then we learned in Psalm 103 that the Lord is fully committed to bringing about this growing young process in our lives and He is daily providing what we need to move forward in this transformation. He wants us to grow young in the way we think and live, and learn to rise up in His power and live as the new creation He has created us to be. He is actively working to bring this about in our lives.

Then Last week we examined several other passages of Scripture that shed more light on the renewal process. First, we saw that growing young involves our minds and brings about a dramatic change in our ways of thinking. Secondly, 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. And finally, last week, we learned that 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. We ended last week by each making a personal assessment of where we think the age of our minds sits on the growing young scale, and I tried to create a vision for each of us of where God is leading us as we grow younger and younger in our ways of thinking and responding to life and other people.

I suggested that in this process God is drawing us back to that childlike faith point, where we can trust our God completely at all times, where we can easily forgive other people, where we're filled with hope and optimism and the firm conviction that all things are possible with God, where doubt and skepticism don't cloud our thinking, and where bitterness and anger and a hard heart are a distant memory.

III. A GROWING YOUNG MIND IS FOCUSED ON THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT (ROMANS 8:5-11)

Turn with me in your Bibles now, if you would, to Romans chapter 8 and we'll read verses 5 to 11. Here we're going to learn another important truth about how we can grow young in our minds and our ways of thinking. What we'll learn is that a growing young mind is focused on the things of the Spirit.

This passage and another passage we'll look at shortly in Colossians chapter 3, give us clear direction as to where our minds need to be focused as they grow young. Let's read Romans chapter 8, verses 5 to 11:

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

So here in this passage we see quite a few amazing truths about how a growing young mind works and about what it's focused on. First we see that a growing young mind is not set on the things of the flesh. Now we've spent a lot of time in recent weeks examining what our old self or our flesh looks like and the activities it tries to participate in, so it shouldn't be too hard for you to figure out what the things of the flesh are. These would be things like jealousy, selfishness, anger,

bitterness, sexual perversion, sensuality, strife, arguing, causing division, pride, refusing to forgive, and working for our own will and agenda rather than God's.

A growing young mind leaves behind these things, the things of the old self, taking them off like dirty clothes and not wasting mental energy and time on them. We're told here that a mind set on the flesh is death. It's not sickness or disease or frailty. It's death. It's complete and utter futility and wasted time that yields no results and leaves us walking around like zombies.

Secondly this passage shows us that a growing young mind, instead of being set on the flesh, is set on the things of the Spirit. Remember last week we talked about the battle going on inside each of us between our old self and our new self. And there's a third party involved: the Holy Spirit who dwells inside each person who has trusted Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. So what we see here in Romans is that a growing young mind is following the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit and is actively focused on the things of the Spirit, rather than the things of the flesh.

My daughter learned a great little ditty about the fruits of the Spirit at school recently, and she came home singing it and showing me how it's done. In addition to the singing there was a bouncing part where she was bouncing up and down with each fruit of the Spirit. So after hearing it several times and getting it forever etched in my brain, I decided I would try to join with her and see if I could do the bouncing part while listing out the fruits of the Spirit. So I started bouncing with her and trying to spit out the fruits of the Spirit while I bounced, but I wasn't quite up to par and she was not impressed that a pastor was struggling to list out the fruits of the Spirit in the right order while bouncing.

Hailey will you come up and help me and we'll show them how it's done?

SING THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT WITH HAILEY WHILE BOUNCING.

Let me tell you that took some practice for me, didn't it Hailey? The "kindness goodness faithfulness" was where I always seemed to get hung up. But of course I had to conquer it after she had shamed me! Thanks for your help, Hailey!

So what we see here in the fruits of the Spirit is in stark contrast to the things of the flesh. Instead of anger, kindness...Instead of selfish ambition, looking out for the interests of others and not just our own...Instead of bitterness, forgiveness... Instead of hate, love...Instead of depression, joy and hope...Instead of worry, peace...Instead of death, life...Instead of judgment, compassion and mercy. A growing young mind gives up on these old, dead and fruitless ways of living and thinking and instead chooses to harvest the fruit that only the Spirit can bring as we choose His ways instead of the ways of our old self and our flesh. And the result is life and peace.

Is there anyone here today who doesn't want life and peace? Would you rather have death and inner turmoil and bitterness? The choice is ours every moment of every day and by the Spirit we can choose the way of life and peace. But to do so we have to let go of those dead things we're holding onto and refusing to release to God. We need to recognize that they're there and ask the Spirit to give us the power and the desire to release them into His hands, and receive in their place life and peace and freedom. If we continue to set our minds on dead things, we will continue to grow old in our minds and will miss out on the life and peace that can only come through the Spirit. As we just read in Romans 8:

If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Don't be deceived into believing you can't grow young again in your mind and leave behind your dead ways of thinking. That's what Satan would love you to believe. He'll tell you it's too late for you, you've gone too far, you're too set in your ways, you're too old to learn a different way of thinking. But the truth is we have the Spirit of God dwelling inside of us, the same power that brought about the very resurrection of Jesus Christ, and He will walk us into life and peace and a brand-new way of thinking when we're ready to cooperate and release those dead things we're holding onto.

But we have to desire it and seek it and call on God to bring about the transformation that we need. If you're comfortable in your old ways and don't want to change, then don't expect to move forward in this process. If that's

where you are, then get on your knees and start asking God to change that about you and bring you to the place where you're ready for the life and peace and freedom only a growing young mind can experience.

A growing young mind is focused on the things of the Spirit and consistently chooses the way of the Spirit over the way of the old self. This is seen again in those familiar verses we all know from Ephesians chapter 4, verses 8 to 9:

8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

What does your mind tend to dwell on most? Is it lovely, pure, honorable, excellent things? Or does it descend most often into negative, hopeless, pointless, and pain filled thinking, spending its energy on things of the flesh and refusing to release problems and pain into the hands of the Father? It's a battle, I know, but one that we need to fight by the power of the Spirit. We need to use the tools God has given us to direct our minds onto things of the Spirit instead of things of the flesh.

These tools include prayer (without ceasing), listening to and singing worship music, Bible reading, fasting, getting alone with God, seeking godly counsel and encouragement, using your God-given gifts to serve others, getting involved in a small group Bible study...And so many others. And what each of these tools can help us do is direct our minds and energies toward things of God and His Spirit and away from our natural tendencies to dwell on and wallow in the empty and pain-filled things of the flesh.

IV. A GROWING YOUNG MIND IS SET ON THINGS ABOVE (THE UNSEEN AND ETERNAL) (COLOSSIANS 3:1-4)

Turn with me now in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 3, verses 1 through 4. In the Romans passage we just looked at we saw that a growing young mind is focused on the things of the Spirit, rather than the things of the flesh. Here in Colossians we discover something similar. We learn that a growing young mind is set on things above in the unseen and eternal realm. Let's read Colossians chapter 3, verses 1 through 4:

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on the things that are on the earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

I want you to spend a moment again analyzing what you tend to think about most in a typical day. What is your mind set on most of the time? Where are most of your mental energies directed? Are you working mostly to accomplish earthly goals, or would you say you're more focused on things that have eternal value and lead you and others into deeper fellowship with God?

Think for a moment about an Olympic athlete. To be able to reach the level of excellence that an Olympic athlete needs to be able to rise to the top of all the best competitors throughout the world, there must be an unwavering focus on one goal and a willingness to let go of lots of other things in order to accomplish this goal. A driven Olympic athlete has his or her eyes fixed on one thing and devotes countless hours to intense training. They give up on lots of activities and fun things their friends may participate in, so that they can have the time to do the training needed in order to be successful. They've decided that the goal they're working for is worth sacrificing lots of other things and worth avoiding any activities or pursuits that may put their goal at risk or slow down their progress. If they're smart, they'll eat healthy, they'll get plenty of sleep, they won't do drugs, and they probably won't go out and get drunk the night before a competition. Their mind is set on one thing and it directs everything else in their life.

This is similar to what we're being called to as our minds grow young again. We've found true and eternal life in Christ. We've received forgiveness and rebirth and have been restored to a right relationship with the One who created us. We've been adopted as God's very own, deeply loved children and have the promise of a truly fulfilling life as we walk with him on this earth and as we one day walk with him into eternity and into life that never ends in a place that is beyond our wildest imaginations. And we are daily given the opportunity to leave behind death and our old ways of thinking and instead choose life and peace and joy and freedom.

In short we have discovered true purpose and a focus for our lives and eternity that goes beyond the temporary achievement of earthly goals, and the passing satisfaction that brings. Our LIFE is now hidden with Christ in God. In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. As we love to sing, “Jesus, you are my reward.” It’s only our love relationship with Him and the endless pursuit of Him that will bring fulfilment and purpose to our lives and allows us to have that single-minded focus that will free us from wasting our time and energies on empty and dead things. Do you believe that?

It's so easy for us to set our minds on earthly things. It comes very naturally to us. We like what we can see and touch and smell and taste. The world offers an endless variety of pursuits and activities and toys that promise to satisfy us and give us pleasure and provide meaning to our lives. And many of these things are not bad in themselves. But the problem for us comes when these earthly things fill up all of our time and take up all of our energy and keep our focus off of Christ and knowing Him more... When we become so busy and consumed with them that our relationship with Christ becomes just a side note for us... When knowing Him through His Word becomes something that we occasionally fit in when we have a free moment and everything else is done.

In contrast a mind that is growing young is constantly in pursuit of God and maintaining that moment-by-moment relationship with Him in every activity, no matter how mundane. A mind that is growing young keeps its focus on knowing Christ and walking in His ways at all times. A growing young mind feels hungry and weakened when not regularly feeding on the Word of God. A growing young mind does not allow earthly toys and pursuits and activities to become the main focus of its energies. A growing young mind is set on things above and maintains that focus no matter what activities it's participating in throughout each day.

Please don't misunderstand me here. I am not saying that you need to give up any hobbies you enjoy or sell any fun toys you have or stop doing any activities that aren't directly involved with the church. God is the giver of blessings and He enjoys giving good gifts to His children. He satisfies our years with good things as we learned in Psalm 103. He has also made each of us unique and with special interests and things that we're good at and we enjoy doing. Please, enjoy these things and be the person God has made you to be.

But as you're doing these things and enjoying the gifts God has given you, don't let them distract you from the pursuit of God and make sure that you continue your constant fellowship with Him even as you enjoy your hobbies and gifts.

But if you notice something in your life that is consuming you and monopolizing your time and energies to the point that you don't study God's Word or you don't have time for church or God becomes just a distant side note in your life, then these things need to go. Anything that's taking our minds off God and His purposes and hindering our close and constant fellowship with Him, needs to be removed from our lives so that we can keep our focus on what's important and our minds set on eternal things.

A growing young mind is set on things above and maintains that focus in any and all activities and circumstances.

V. A GROWING YOUNG MIND HAS RECEIVED A NEW PURPOSE OR AIM IN LIFE (EPHESIANS 4:23)

I want to return now to Ephesians 4, verse 23, as I share with you one more truth today about growing young in our minds. You'll remember that the verse that started this study was Ephesians 4:23, which says, "***and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind.***"

What I'd like to close with today is that little word, "spirit." The verse doesn't just say, "be renewed in your mind," but rather, "***...be renewed in the spirit of your mind.***" I thought there might be some significance to this and that Paul probably put it there for a reason, especially considering this is the inspired Word of God. In looking at the original Greek word, I found that it is the word, *pneuma*. *Vines* dictionary states that this word primarily denotes the wind, can also mean breath, and especially describes "the spirit," which, like the wind is invisible, immaterial and powerful. *Vines* specifically speaks to the meaning of the word when it is used in Ephesians 4:23, and says that here it implies the purpose or aim of our minds.

This would mean that growing young in our minds involves a fundamental change in the goals or purpose or focus of our minds. This of course goes right along with what we've been studying today, where we've seen that a growing young mind is

focused on things of the Spirit and things above in the unseen and eternal realm. As we grow young our minds undergo a complete change from being focused on ourselves and our pleasures and our problems and our old, empty ways of coping with life, to being focused fully on God and His purposes and on allowing Him to pour out His love on us and remake us into people who begin looking a lot like Christ. The goal and focus and purpose of our mental energies is redirected from death and emptiness to life and fullness in Christ.

I think this word, “spirit,” in reference to our minds, also has some connotations about a change in the overall tone or attitude of our minds. Growing young involves a complete change in the direction of the wind of our minds. Think about yourself and various people you know in your life and how you would describe the overall attitude or tone of their minds. We can all probably identify people in our lives whose mind attitude we would describe as being harsh and critical and unforgiving and bitter. And we all come to Christ to some extent in this state, having grown old in our minds.

But what we need to realize and be convinced of today, is that we cannot remain there as true followers of Christ. To remain there is to hold on to our old self like a child’s worn out blankey...dirty, filled with holes and coming apart at the seams. How embarrassed would you be if you started a new job after college, but couldn’t leave the house without your precious childhood blankey? How will people respond to you when you show up at 8:00 am clutching a dirty, worn out blanket and saying you’re ready for your new job?

In the same way, when we come to Christ, the attitude of our minds needs a dramatic change and we can’t be effective ambassadors of Christ without leaving that old, worn out blanket behind. And we don’t just need to leave it at home, we need to take it the dump and leave it there. God is not honored or pleased when we continue to walk around in bitterness and anger, with an unforgiving spirit, desperately clutching all those empty ways of our old self. The wind of our minds needs to completely change directions. And when it does, expect great things to happen.

Remember, the wind is powerful even though it can't be seen with the eyes. In the same way, the wind of our minds can be used powerfully for good or for bad, depending on whether it blows in the direction of the things of the Spirit, or whether it blows in the direction of the things of the flesh.

VI. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

So how would you describe the spirit of your mind today? Is it steadily blowing in the direction of the things of God? Does the wind change a lot in your mind, depending on the day and the circumstances? Or maybe it's just blowing strongly in the direction of the things of your old self? Where is your mind usually focused? What does it dwell on most? Are you using the tools God has given us to keep your mind focused on eternal and life-giving things or are the worries and concerns of this life keeping you too busy and distracted?

I know we can all use some improvement in this area. Our minds are really good at focusing on the negative and being concerned about our rights and being treated fairly. They're also easily distracted from eternal things by lots of busyness and endless to-do lists and other priorities. But let's just take a good look at our lives today and the state of our minds. Let's ask God to show us what things need to be let go and rearranged so that we can keep our minds growing young and focused on knowing Him more and allowing Him to fill us up, instead of trying to find fulfillment in all the empty things Satan tries to thrust in our face.

Let's ask Him to change the attitude of our minds to align with Him and the ways of His Spirit and our new self. Let's ask Him to keep our minds on eternal things and keep us endlessly pursuing relationship with Him no matter what we're doing. We can't do any of these things without His power, so the process always needs to start and continue with humility and prayer...a constant conversation with God where we express our dependence on Him and offer up our heart and lives and minds to His healing power.

Let's ask Him to make us like that Olympic athlete whose mind is fixed on one important goal and purpose and whose life and activities and daily choices line up and support the achievement of that one important goal. Let's be as Paul describes in Colossians 3:17, where whatever we do in word or deed, we do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

God will answer these prayers prayed in sincerity, because they're prayed according to His will. Let's pray and believe and watch Him work!

Next week, Lord willing, we will wrap up this study on growing young and then in the following weeks move further on in our study of Ephesians.