

Growing Young – Part IV – *Ephesians 4:20-23*

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Union Baptist Church – 10/4/2015

I. INTRODUCTION

Well I have good news and bad news for you this morning. The good news is that today we'll be finishing our 4-part series on growing young. The bad news is: today we'll be finishing our 4-part series on growing young. It could be considered bad because today will be our last day to get a grasp on this all-important concept that is so essential to experiencing the life transformation to which God is calling each of us.

This concept of growing young was introduced to us in Ephesians 4:23, where Paul calls us to be renewed in the spirit of our minds. And in this series we've also looked at many other passages of Scripture that 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 IV**. On this journey we've been trying to find out what the Bible as a whole teaches us about being renewed in the spirit of our minds. We've been looking for clues and instructions on how this process works and how it can become a reality in each of our lives.

II. REVIEW OF GROWING YOUNG

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 can actually be used by God to enhance the growing young process, rather than preventing it, as we keep our eyes fixed on our Savior and on eternal things and experience Christ walking with us and working even the most difficult of circumstances 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 is actively working to bring this about in our lives.

The second week we looked at several other passages of Scripture that shed more light on the renewal process. First, we saw that growing young involves our minds and a dramatic change in our ways of thinking. Secondly, we learned that 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, in the second week of this study, 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.

Then, last week, we examined several more truths about the growing young process. First we saw that a growing young mind is focused on the things of the Spirit and consistently chooses the ways of the Spirit over the ways of the old self. Secondly, a growing young mind is focused on things above in the unseen and eternal realm, having an unwavering focus on knowing Christ and allowing that focus to direct and affect all other aspects of life. And finally, we learned that a growing young mind has received a new purpose of aim in life...The wind of our minds starts blowing in a completely different direction. 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.

Now today we're going to spend the majority of our time in Colossians chapter 3, so if you'll turn there in your Bibles we'll start by reading verses 8 to 17. In our study we already touched on this passage one time when we saw that growing young involves our minds coming to a true knowledge. But today we're going to look at three other important points that are found in this passage and that relate to this process of being renewed. Let's read Colossians chapter 3 verses 8 to 17, and as we do, see if you notice not only the truths relating to growing young, but also an echo of so many of the truths we've been learning in Ephesians about walking worthy:

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. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

This is such a beautiful passage and if you want a picture of what it looks like to grow young in the spirit of your mind, you can find it all right here. In the coming week I'd encourage you to meditate and pray over and think about these 10 verses and ask yourself, is this what my life looks like? Is this the way I'm thinking and conducting myself on a daily basis whether I'm at work or whether I'm interacting with my fellow believers at church or whether I'm spending time with my family and friends?

It's so easy to read this passage and think it sounds great, all the while telling ourselves that it's unrealistic and impractical and something we could never do on a daily basis. And if that's where you are, it's time for repentance because this IS where God is leading us and is absolutely a way that we can live our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to stop making excuses and justifying behavior that is out of step with who God is and who He's calling us to be, and instead acknowledge our mistakes and ask God to start working on us and guiding us into this path and way of living that is so different from what we've come to accept and tolerate in our own lives on a daily basis.

III. A GROWING YOUNG MIND IS ALIGNED WITH OUR CREATOR AND HIS WILL (COLOSSIANS 3:8-17)

So as we begin to examine parts of this passage in detail today and how it relates to the process of growing young in our minds, I want you to first notice that a growing young mind is aligned with our Creator and His will. This renewal to a true knowledge is ***“according to the image of the One who created him.”***

A growing young mind is a mind that is coming into alignment and agreement with the One who created us...the One who formed us in our mother's womb...The One who designed us and knows exactly how we operate best. When we begin to grow young, God leads us to leave behind our twisted and futile ways of thinking that have been developed over a lifetime of trying to live without Him. These old ways of thinking are ingrained in our minds and we're comfortable with them. We've learned to survive and deal with life in certain ways and it can be very hard to leave these ways behind. But leave them behind we must if we are ever to grow young.

And when we begin to leave them behind, God replaces these old ways of thinking with new ways that are so much better and so much more effective and so much more able to provide us with what we need to handle whatever life throws our way. This new way of thinking is so effective because it's God's way of thinking. It's a way of thinking that is consistent with the One who designed the universe and knows exactly how it works.

I want you to imagine that the lights were suddenly turned out in the world and we had to figure out how to live and operate and function in complete darkness. Now I'm sure we could figure out a few things by feeling around and talking to other people and slowly walking around. But imagine how difficult it would be to get anything done, to find food, and to even just avoid hurting or killing ourselves. Just getting back to our house from here could be a life threatening experience.

Contrast that situation with the well-lit world we have around us right now, and you'll get an idea of how much better life operates and how much more effective we can be when we align our thinking with the One who designed the universe and everything we see around us and who also knows us inside and out and can see where we will fail and where we will succeed.

Yes we can function somewhat by walking in our old ways of thinking that were developed as we walked around in darkness. But we won't be anywhere near as effective, we'll hurt ourselves and other people along the way, and we'll waste lots and lots of time trying to clean up the messes we've made. We'll waste valuable time trying to figure things out by trial and error when a perfectly written instruction manual is sitting right beside us.

And as we've already mentioned in this study, that perfectly written instruction manual, called the Bible, is so essential in this process of growing young in our minds. As we look at the universe around us we might be able to come to a few conclusions about the One who designed and created the world. But the only way we really know what He's like and how He thinks is through the written Word that He's left with us. In order for our minds to be aligned with Him, we need to know His Word and be studying it and allowing the beautiful promises and truths contained therein to start making our minds young again as we choose to believe and act on them. Let's not just let the Bible collect dust on our bookshelf, but as the apostle Peter says, let's pay attention to it ***"as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts."***

Now I know that we're all well aware that we SHOULD be reading and studying the Bible on a regular basis. When someone asks us how we can grow in our faith and know God more, we all know that the "correct" answer is to read the Bible and pray. But how do we get to the point where we move from knowing we SHOULD be doing it to the point where we long for it and where we feel dried up and empty when we're not regularly feeding on the Word? How do we get to the point where we realize that it's as important to our spiritual growth as eating food is to keeping our bodies alive?

Scripture has a lot to say about itself and the power it has to transform our thinking, discern right from wrong and show us the path to freedom in every area of our lives. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that:

...the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The Bible is not just good literature that can give us some more head knowledge to puff us up and make us feel smart. It is living and active and sharper than the sharpest sword. It can bring light into the darkest parts of our hearts and minds and expose unhealthy areas that we would be terrified to share with other people. It can show us our motives and intentions and enable us to see where we are messed up in our thinking or where we are working for our purposes and not God's. And it not only exposes these areas, it also shows us the path to freedom and how we can leave these ways behind. It doesn't just leave us there in hopelessness and despair.

Psalm 119:105 says:

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

We don't have to grope around in darkness when God's Word is allowed to speak into our lives. It shows us the clear path ahead and keeps us from tripping and falling and causing harm to ourselves and others. It keeps us from wasting our time and energies on dead-end trails.

Or how about Psalm 19:8-11:

***The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.
The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.
They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.
Moreover, by them Your servant is warned;
In keeping them there is great reward.***

The Word of the Lord brings joy to our hearts. Wouldn't you like more joy in your heart and life? You can find it daily in God's Word. The Word of the Lord enlightens our eyes and enables us to see clearly. When we put on the glasses of God's Word we can suddenly see things in high definition.

I remember the story when one of my older brothers first got his glasses and he was just in awe at how clearly he could see things. He said, "Mom, I can see the leaves on the trees!"

The Word of God also gives us our only completely trustworthy source of truth in this life. It contains eternal and unchanging truth that is completely true and altogether right. The Word of God also provides us with the warning signs we need to keep from straying into dangerous areas and walking down paths that lead to pain and heartache and death. And in walking by the truths of Scripture there is great reward.

Psalm 1:1-3 puts it this way:

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.

Feeding on the Word of God is the only thing that can give us the roots we need to endure every season of life and remain healthy and strong even in the midst of terrible drought and famine.

And finally, to remind us again that the Word of God is not just dead words on a page, consider 1 Thessalonians 2:13-14, where Paul says:

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

When we study the Word of God, it is actively performing its work in us as we believe it. It has the power to transform our minds and cause us to grow young again as we challenge ourselves to believe it, rather than just writing it off as unattainable and impractical. And that really is the key to the effective study of God's Word: believing it as we read it.

If we're just reading it to put in our time and feel like we've done our duty to God for the day, our growth will be very slow.

We need to ask God to help us develop the attitude toward His Word that I once heard expressed in a Margaret Becker song, where she described facing the dark times in her life by studying God's Word in a café and "sipping the truth like delicacy." That image always stays with me as I study God's Word...the idea of savoring God's Word as we would savor some really expensive, amazing tasting food that we could only afford to buy once in a blue moon...Enjoying the flavors and making each bite last. It also carries with it the idea of realizing the amazing gift of truth we have in God's Word. In a world full of darkness and lies, where truth is hard to come by, we have been given a treasure map of truth that we need to hold tightly to and study with diligence. When we do that, always asking the Spirit to open us up to the truth as we study, the Word of God will perform its work in us and begin making us young again in our minds and aligning us with our Creator and His will.

IV. A GROWING YOUNG MIND VIEWS ALL PEOPLE AS HAVING EQUAL VALUE IN CHRIST (COLOSSIANS 3:8-17)

As we look further in Colossians chapter 3, the next truth we learn about the renewal process is that a growing young mind views all people as having equal value in Christ no matter their background, financial status, sex or race. We won't spend a lot of time on this, but I don't want us to miss it, because it's an important concept that we need to resolve in our minds.

Paul speaks of "***a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free man...***"

This way of thinking is so different from what we see happening in the world around us and of what each of us have at times been guilty. We are so very good at categorizing people and making assumptions based on appearances, clothes that people are wearing, hairdos, neighborhoods that people live in, jobs that people have, and on and on and on. We like to put people in categories and pick and choose who we want to associate with and make sure that we stay in certain social circles.

But clearly this is not the heart of our God, who sees beyond appearances and looks at the heart. And when we look at the people God has used throughout the ages to accomplish His purposes, we find that He most often chooses to use those who are not at all impressive by the world standards, but who rather come from humble backgrounds and will rely on him rather than their impressive set of credentials or amazing talents and abilities.

So as we grow young in our minds, we are also called to leave behind that old mentality of treating people differently based on their social status or their background, and instead regard all people in Christ as having equal value and importance in the kingdom of God. God doesn't make distinctions on these things and neither should we. As we learned in Ephesians 4, every believer in Christ has a gift and a role to play in the body of Christ.

V. A GROWING YOUNG MIND IS ALL ABOUT JESUS CHRIST AND ALLOWING HIM TO HAVE HIS WAY IN OUR LIVES (COLOSSIANS 3:8-17)

This brings us to the final truth I'd like to focus on in this Colossians chapter 3 passage and in our growing young study as a whole, and that is that little phrase: ***but Christ is all, and in all.*** After saying that a growing young mind makes no distinction based upon nationality, background or social status, Paul says that instead Christ is all, and in all. In other words, we see all things and all people through the lens of Jesus Christ. This includes ourselves. Our value comes only through Christ and what He's accomplished for us and the new life he has brought to us. A growing young mind is all about Jesus Christ and allowing Him to have his way in every area our lives and in all our interactions with other people.

And this is the key to the entire growing young process. Our love relationship with Jesus Christ, starting with new birth when we placed our faith in Him as Savior and Lord, and continuing moment-by-moment for the rest of our lives and eternity, is what it's all about. We can only grow young when we are in passionate pursuit of Him and allowing Him to have His way in every area of our lives.

Notice that Jesus Christ is ALL. He's not just where we find a little satisfaction and little fulfillment in our lives. He is the ONE place where we find true life and love and purpose for our lives.

Jesus is that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow...the buried treasure that is worth selling everything for...He's the pearl of great price...He's the bread of life...He's the Door and the one way to true and abundant life...He's the living water that never runs dry...He's the Rock we can build our lives on...He's the Good Shepherd who leads and guides and provides for us...He's the Light of the world. And I could go on and on.

What we need to ask ourselves today is: do we truly believe that He is all these things and the only One who can fill us up and meet every need we could ever have? Or will we continue to sing with our lives and actions, *I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For*? As long as we continue to spend most of our energies on finding fulfillment and meaning in life apart from Christ, we will struggle to grow young in our minds. It's only when we finally realize that all the empty things we are pursuing are just that: EMPTY; that we are at the right place to begin growing young again through the pursuit of the only treasure worth pursuing: Jesus Christ.

There have been several times in my life when I've come to the point where I've been convinced that Jesus is all I need and want and that He truly is worth any price I may have to pay. One of those times was when I was a Junior in high school and we had a special speaker come to school who gave me such an amazing picture of who Christ is and His deep love for me that I was just blown away and knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that He was all I wanted and that I was willing to follow Him wherever He would lead me. I expressed that to Christ at that point in my life and it truly was a transforming moment for me in my life, and my relationship and fellowship with Him grew like never before. I experienced Him communicating His love for me in so many practical ways and His Word began to come alive and make sense.

But you know what? Life and the devil have a way of drawing us away from that close fellowship with our Savior and offering us many exciting things that can slowly distract us and pull us away from our pursuit of God. And that definitely happened in my life over the years. There were many things other than God that I began to subtly place my hope and focus on over the years. I never threw out my relationship with Christ, but I allowed myself to push it to the side many times and pursue other dreams with much more passion.

But fortunately God keeps working on us and sometimes He lets us pursue those dreams until they're finally washed up and shown to be empty and unfulfilling. God has a long-term plan for our lives and He knows that sometimes we have to learn the hard way and be allowed to find out for ourselves how much we truly need Him and how empty life can be when our passion becomes anything but Him.

So when I look back on my life, I can see the ebb and flow of the closeness of my relationship with Christ. I can see times when my vision was renewed and crystal clear and Christ was my main focus, and I can see times when my eyes got distracted with other pursuits. But what's encouraging to me is that I see growth and over time God has allowed me to learn that there really is nothing in life that can fill me up like Christ and nothing that is worth pursuing if it gets in the way of my relationship with Him. He has also showed me in so many ways how deeply He loves each of us and how much He cares about every aspect and struggle of our lives, no matter how small.

Have you ever had a moment in your life when you experienced God expressing His love to you in an extremely personal way? He does this for all of us throughout our lives and sometimes at the most unexpected times. So if you haven't experienced this, keep your eyes open. I truly believe that what will really be the turning point in our lives and in our progress in growing young again is when we begin to come to a deep and full understanding of how much Christ loves each of us personally. He doesn't just love humans as a group, He loves you individually and personally. And He loves you in practical ways and is daily expressing that love to you as you share your life with Him. Keep your eyes open and you will begin to see it.

Sometimes Christ's love is expressed to us in small and quiet ways. Other times it's big, and we're left in awe and moved to tears. One of these big experiences for me involved an amazing display of the northern lights in Alaska, which I may have shared with some of you in the past. More recently, on a day when I was just feeling weighed down with people's expectations and the weight of life and feeling inadequate, God spoke to me in the car on my way to La Grande. As usual I was listening to music on the way to town and a song by The Piano Guys came on called, "Just The Way You Are." It's a very quiet song with just piano and strings. But as I listened to it, I was moved to tears as I heard God speaking to me,

“Joe, I love you just the way you are. I’ve made you and designed you and I love you just the way I created you. You don’t need to try to be what people want you to be or try to please everyone. Just be the person I’ve created you to be and rest in my perfect love.” I can’t tell you what a load was lifted at that moment and how moved I was by the personal love of God for me and by the fact that He cared about the weight I was carrying and knew what I needed to hear at that moment.

Folks, there is nothing that will lead you into growing young and the life transformation that brings like knowing and understanding the depth of the love Jesus Christ has for you personally. And my prayer today is the same prayer Paul prayed in Ephesians chapter 4, verses 14 to 19:

That the Father would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

There’s nothing else that can take us there. We need the strengthening power of the Holy Spirit to open our eyes up to the deep and personal love of Christ and the fullness only He can bring.

VI. CONCLUSION

As we close today, I’m going to play and sing a song for you as you reflect on where you’re at in the growing young process. This is a song about a prodigal son. And I think it’s so appropriate here because when we’ve allowed ourselves to grow old in our minds, we have walked away from what God has for us and are like a prodigal son whose chosen to do life his own way. We’ve sinned and grown old. It’s a song that also gives us a beautiful picture of the deep love God has for us and how He’s waiting for each of us with open arms...Waiting for us to give up on our old self and our old ways of living, and instead run back to Him and choose His ways...the only ways that can bring us true freedom and allow us to experience life and love as God designed it.

Let this song be an invitation to anyone here today who longs to grow young again. It's appropriately titled: "Growing Young."