

# Following the Mature One

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Date: 26 July 2020

Preacher: Philip Copeland

[ 0 : 00 ] Well now, we're turning to our reading or readings for today. Phil Copeland is our preacher this morning, and he's taking the subject of the importance of maturity and following Jesus the mature one is his title for today.

So we have two readings, first of all from Luke's Gospel, chapter 2, speaking of the childhood of Jesus, and then we turn to Philippians, chapter 3, to hear Paul speaking about growing in maturity. So first of all, Luke, chapter 2, verses 39 to 52. And when they, that is Mary and Joseph, when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.

And when he was 12 years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.

[ 1 : 19 ] His parents did not know it. But supposing him to be in the group, they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances.

And when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days, they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress. And he said to them, Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my father's house?

And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.

[ 2 : 23 ] And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

We're now turning to Philippians chapter 3 and reading from verse 7 to verse 21. Paul speaks of the great change that comes over him as he becomes a Christian and then grows as a Christian.

So Philippians 3 verse 7. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

[ 3 : 57 ] Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Brothers, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Their end is destruction, their God is their belly, and they glory in their shame with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven.

And from it, we await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

[ 5 : 19 ] Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing to us this morning. Well, good morning, everybody. Can you hear me? Yes?

Good. Excellent. Please do have your Bibles open at that passage that we read in Luke's Gospel, chapter 2. And if you could have maybe a finger in Philippians 3, that would be helpful.

Or a bookmark probably better because we'll turn to it a bit later in the service. I don't want your finger losing circulation. Well, if you're a Christian here this morning, then you are someone who's been brought into life-giving union with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

That's who you are. At one time, when you were spiritually dead and incapable of saving yourself, the sovereign spirit of Christ stormed the citadel of your heart and brought you to faith in Jesus.

And at that very moment, at that precise second, all of Jesus' saving work that he accomplished for you 2,000 years ago was applied to you.

[ 6 : 28 ] And at that moment, you were born again. If you're a Christian this morning, that's who you are. You're someone who's been born again into the family of God. But why?

Why has that happened? Why has a Christian been born again from above? Well, the Bible gives lots of different answers to that question. We've been born again so that we will now live for the glory of Christ.

We've been born again so that we will now join in the church's great mission to advance the gospel all across the world. and we've all been born again so that we will grow and mature as Christians.

When a baby is born, it's expected to grow and mature. It's often expected that the baby will take on the likeness of the family that it's been born into. My son, my youngest son, Theo, was born about, I think, three months ago.

I think that's right. Hopefully my wife won't kill me for getting that wrong. But when Theo was born in lockdown, I sent a lot of photographs to a lot of friends. And I kept getting the same sort of messages back from people.

[ 7 : 40 ] Oh, he's such a Copeland. He looks like a Copeland. He looks like you. Or other messages would come in and they would say, he looks just like his big brother, Benjamin. Well, that is just the same with the Christian who's been born again by the Spirit of Christ into the family of God.

We are expected to take on the likeness of the family that we've been brought into. To take on the likeness of our Heavenly Father. And to take on the likeness of our big brother who is also our Savior, Jesus Christ.

And that's why if you were to read through the New Testament with a highlighter pen and highlight all of the times where it encourages us to grow and mature, you would have a very colorful Bible. Because it comes up again and again and again. Let me just give you some examples. No need to turn to these, but let me just read them out to you. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul says, Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking.

Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. In Hebrews 6, the writer says, Solid food is for the mature, for those who have powers of discernment, trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

[ 8 : 53 ] Therefore, let us go on to maturity. James 1 says, Let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect.

The same word is the word translated mature and complete, lacking in nothing. And in Colossians 1, verse 28, Paul says that the ultimate goal of his earthly ministry is to produce mature Christians that he can present to the Lord Jesus on the last day.

This is what he says, and you'll know this if you're a member of the youth team, because this has been our mission statement in the youth ministry at the Tron for many years. We proclaim Jesus Christ, warning everyone and teaching with all wisdom so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Paul says, For this I toil and struggle with all my energy and all the energy that Christ gives me. But here's a question, what does the New Testament mean by maturity?

What does it mean? Well, the Greek word is translated as maturity in our Bibles is the word teleos. Teleos. I learned that word this week. And it belongs to a family of words in the New Testament that

conveys the idea of wholeness.

[ 10 : 09 ] It's sometimes translated as perfect. It would be used to describe maybe a sacrifice that was without blemish. Denotes something that was complete without lacking something.

For example, we might talk back and say, well, that person lived a really full life or that was a really full year that we had last year in the harvest. The word also had other uses in the ancient world.

It meant to reach a high level of competence, to be someone whose powers and talents had been fully developed and skills that had been honed fully. It could also be used to refer to something that was finished in the sense that we might speak of someone being the finished article.

Exhibiting workmanship of high quality or someone whose character was well-rounded. And these different examples, they help us capture the sense in which the New Testament speaks about a Christian being matured.

He or she is someone in whom God's recreating purposes are clearly illustrated. A person who expresses the true qualities of a servant of the Lord because they have been shaped by the Spirit of Jesus.

[ 11 : 23 ] And he has worked in them and filled out in them a character that shows all of the fruits of the Spirit. In other words, mature Christians possess the qualities that only Jesus Christ can produce because he alone exhibited them perfectly.

Maturity, if you like, is the fruit of Christ's work in us. But, at the same time, it is also something that we are to take responsibility for and mature and grow in and to pursue.

So, brothers and sisters, this morning, I hope and pray that as we go home from church or as you switch off your live stream at home, if you're watching, you're over there on that camera. I better look out for that, but you're over there.

Later on, as we switch off live stream or go home, I pray that all of us will have a greater hunger for growing like our Lord Jesus, for wanting to press on in the Christian life and grow in maturity.

And then, God willing, next Sunday, I pray that we will be able to think deeply a bit more about the means that God has given us that promotes growth in our lives. I'll touch upon these means, these God-given means of grace in this sermon a little bit, but I'm going to talk about them next Sunday.

[ 12 : 35 ] So, don't think that I've forgotten about them if I don't mention them this week. Well, here's our first point this morning. It's probably very obvious, but it's good sometimes to be reminded of things that are very obvious.

First point is this, we are to grow mature because that is what Jesus did. We are to grow mature because that is what Jesus did. See, growing in maturity, in Christian maturity, it's not an optional activity for a few keen beings in the church.

It is a necessary part of following Jesus. You see, Jesus is not just our Savior, He is also our example. And this is why the Bible calls us to trust in Him as the only one who can save us from our sin and the Bible at the same time calls us to follow Jesus in His pattern of life.

And Jesus' life on earth was marked by incredible growth and maturity from beginning to end. Now, please don't mishear me. I am not saying that Jesus grew from a position of being sinful to being sinless.

No. He was always sinless. He was always obedient to His Father perfectly. But His life of perfect obedience wasn't static.

[ 13 : 49 ] It wasn't devoid of growth or maturity. In fact, no other person in the history of the world has enjoyed such fruitful, spiritual growth as the Lord Jesus. He is the great mature one.

Now, remember, Jesus was and is fully God and fully man. He has two natures, one fully human and one fully divine, united in His one person.

And His divine nature never, ever needed to develop or grow. In fact, it was impossible, it is impossible for Jesus' divine nature to grow. Nothing can be added to the triune God because within Himself, the triune God has absolutely everything that He needs to dwell perfectly forever as God. For example, the triune God is all-knowing, all-wise. He cannot become any more in these areas. He cannot increase in maturity. He cannot increase in knowledge and wisdom.

And that must also be true of Jesus' divine nature because it is at one with the rest of the Godhead. But as a man, in His human nature, Jesus needed to grow and mature just like the rest of us, just like every other human being.

[ 15 : 06 ] That's just one of the things I take it Luke is trying to teach us here in this incident that we had read in Luke chapter 2, at the end of his chapter 2 in his gospel account that we read earlier.

I'd like to draw our attention to it now. As Edward said, this is the only incident in the gospels that really speaks of Jesus' childhood. He is 12 years old at this point. How did Luke come to find out about this incident?

Well, I think at the end of verse 51, there might be a little hint where he says, his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. Luke probably, we can't be certain, but probably interviewed Mary or someone who had contact with Mary.

And this is how he found this piece of eyewitness testimony. We can't be certain of that, but it's a guess. What we can be certain of, I think, is that Luke is teaching us that Jesus grew.

Now just notice, please, that this is structured like a sandwich. I like a sandwich me. As many of us like a good sandwich, I'll maybe talk to you later about what your favorite sandwich is. I have many favorite sandwiches.

[16:08] But the Bible's full of sandwiches. And notice that verse 40 and verse 52, they're almost identical verses, and they are like the bits of bread in the sandwich. And we'll look at them in a little minute.

But in between verse 43 to 51, if you like, the filling of the sandwich, is this incident where Jesus' family travel to the Passover festival in Jerusalem. They go to the festival, and after the festival is over, Mary and Joseph depart on the long road back to Nazareth with the rest of the traveling party. And they assume as they leave, you know, Jesus must be traveling with family friends further back down the convoy in the traveling party. But after three days, they discover, probably to their horror, that Jesus isn't there.

They've left him behind. He stayed behind in Jerusalem. And so they go back, and they search for him, and they find Jesus in a Bible study in the temple.

Look at verse 46. After three days, they found him in the temple sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. They find Jesus growing in knowledge and understanding of God's words.

[17:24] Jesus was searching the scriptures in a Bible study. He was asking questions. He was listening to the answers. He was sharing insights and thoughts himself. There is nothing in the text that says that this was a meeting marked by hostility and animosity.

Quite the opposite, in fact. It seems to be that iron is sharpening iron here. Jesus is learning, and of course, he also showed great understanding for someone so young.

But how could he have that understanding as someone so young? Was it because he was fully God? Well, do you know, I don't think that's the conclusion that Luke wants us to take from this incident because of the bits of bread around the sandwich.

In verse 40 and 52. Let's read them. Please look at verse 40. And the child, Jesus, grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of the Lord was upon him.

And then please look at verse 52. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. Now, I take it Luke has put these verses here on purpose so that we will use these two bits of bread to control how we interpret the incident that comes in the middle, in the temple.

[18:38] He wants us to see that Jesus, in the temple, as he sat there listening to the Bible being opened up before him, he was growing, he was learning, he was meditating on the word and it was helping him to grow in wisdom with other members of God's people around him.

And because he was in the temple, he obviously would have taken part in public prayer as well. Friends, these are just some of the means that Jesus employed to grow and mature.

And just notice, please, the wee phrase that's used at the end of verse 40. Do you see the little phrase used at the end of verse 40? And the favor of God was upon him.

I can't be certain of this, but I've been thinking a lot about that phrase. It sounds a lot to me like the way in which Isaiah the prophet spoke about the coming Messiah, the coming man who would come in to lead God's people.

In his prophecy in the Old Testament, Isaiah says that the coming Messiah will be a man in whom God delights. The favor of the Lord will be upon him. And Isaiah says that God will show his favor to this man by putting his spirit on this man, the spirit of wisdom and understanding.

[19:53] And I'd like to suggest that that is what Luke is subtly alluding to here. He is saying to us, here he is at last. This little boy in the temple, this tiny 12-year-old boy, God delights in him.

He is none other than the spirit-anointed Messiah. This 12-year-old will continue to grow and mature in the spirit of wisdom and understanding. He will continue to study the scriptures and he

will grow and grow until he eventually becomes the spirit-filled man par excellence.

He will be the one to live a fully human, mature life in the power of the spirit and he will one day pour out that spirit of human holiness and human maturity into our hearts and into our lives so that we will have the ability to follow him and grow in maturity.

Well friends, I wonder what you make of all this. I wonder what you make of all of this. Do you know that some Christians in church today, they find these verses very surprising, even shocking, and I think it's because of two common reasons why they find them surprising.

Firstly, they find these verses surprising because they assume that just because Jesus was fully God, he doesn't need to grow and develop. I remember chatting to one chap about these verses and he was shocked by them and after we chatted for a few minutes, I was able to, I started to realise what it was his problem.

[ 21 : 23 ] He thought that Jesus' divine nature permeated his human nature and basically set his human nature aglow, rather like the way in which a piece of iron is set red hot and affected when you bring it towards the heat of a furnace.

That's kind of what he thought. In other words, he believed that Jesus' divine nature turned his human nature into some kind of a superman substance, giving Jesus' humanity divine attributes. But I want to say I don't think that's right from scripture. scripture. If that were the case, then what we read in Luke chapter 2 would be a lie because Jesus wouldn't be growing. Jesus instead would be in Luke chapter 2 according to this man's view, he would be a fully grown matured man, superman at that, trapped in a child's body.

I don't think that is how we should speak about the person of Christ and if you look back through church history, you will find that the belief that Jesus' divine nature permeates his human nature. That's actually a view held by Roman Catholics and Roman Catholic theologians.

Jesus was not a superman trapped in a child's body. Rather, if you look at what the Bible teaches about the person of Christ, it teaches us that his human nature grew and matured not by the immediate influence of his divine nature, but by the spirit working in him and as he employed the same God-given means of growth that you and I have been given.

[ 22 : 56 ] Studying the Bible, listening to Bible teaching, praying, obeying the commandments of God. That's how he grew. Elsewhere in the Bible we're also told that Jesus grew through suffering and through life experience.

Go home and read Hebrews 5 verses 7 to 9 and you'll see that that was the case. It says he learned obedience through the things that he suffered and became perfect. So please don't think that because Jesus had a divine nature, it turned him into some kind of a superman who didn't need to grow like us.

Another reason why some Christians today find these verses in Luke 2 surprising is that they don't actually believe that Jesus had a human mind at all. They think that when the eternal son became incarnate, when he assumed a human nature, he took on most of human nature but he didn't take on a human mind.

Or, they think that in the incarnation when he took on a human nature, his divine mind sort of replaced his human mind. But again, that is wrong.

That is actually a belief called Apollinarianism and the church fathers declared it to be heresy. When the son of God took on flesh, he also took on a full human, a reasonable human mind that was just like us, our minds, in the sense that it needed to grow and develop.

[ 24 : 19 ] So Jesus, let me just say this, it's quite important, Jesus had two minds. A divine mind which he shared with the other members of the Godhead, but he also had a fully human mind that needed to learn, develop and grow just like ours and was always without sin.

And the Bible says that throughout the vast majority, not all, but throughout the vast majority of Jesus' life, Jesus chose not to draw upon his divine mind or all of the limitless divine resources that were at his disposal.

Think about Philippians 2. What does the apostle Paul say? He says that Jesus did not count equality with God something to be grasped. And that didn't apply to Jesus, apply to Jesus before he took on flesh, but it also applies to the every day that Jesus lived his life.

Every day on earth, for the most part, Jesus seemed to choose to humbly submit himself to live within the limits of his humanity.

He chose to live like us. And that means that when he grew and matured, it wasn't easy for him. It was hard. It was hard work.

[ 25 : 30 ] And yet he matured in the spirit day after day through all sorts of terrible trials and suffering. He matured every day in sinless perfection as a man, not drawing upon his divine resources.

Let me just illustrate that. Imagine we go down, we're watching telly at home and we see footage of a man swimming the channel between England and France. And the man is swimming away in his own strength and behind him is a rescue boat, a safety boat.

Now at any point in that journey, the man could stop swimming and draw upon the resources that are at his disposal. He could get into the boat and the boat could carry him along.

And complete the journey that way. But the man doesn't. He chooses to painstakingly stay in the water and persevere and keep going.

Throughout his life, Jesus was like the swimmer who stayed in the water. And never once did he fall back upon his divine resources. He is our great savior.

[ 26 : 36 ] He is the greatest man who ever lived, the greatest human being. And he matured. He grew and grew and grew. Listen to Sinclair Ferguson on this.

He says this, We think too infrequently of this. Of course, we must safeguard our Lord's uniqueness as the Son of God. But the New Testament also teaches us that he was made like us in order to be the pioneer of our salvation.

He was like the one who blazed the trail so that through his activity, others will reach the same destination. In this sense, Jesus was the first one whose life manifested perfect obedience, wholehearted service, a complete exhibition of the fruit of the Spirit and maturity of character.

Listen to this. Having accomplished that, being made mature through suffering, he now calls us to share in what he has done for us. We are to draw on his resources in order to imitate him in the way he grew into maturity, in the way he grew into a complete servant of God.

Let me say that sentence again. We are to draw upon his resources in order to imitate him in the way he grew into a mature and complete servant of God.

[ 28 : 00 ] So friends, let me just stop there and ask you this question. Do you really believe this? Do you really know and believe just how important it is to mature and grow in the Christian life?

This is not an optional thing. This is an absolute necessity for all those who want to follow Jesus. If you're not bothered about following, if you're not bothered about growing in maturity, well then you're not bothered about following Jesus.

I don't know how you're feeling this morning but, and I don't know how lockdown has affected you but let me just be honest here and say that I have hated lockdown.

I have deeply struggled through lockdown. I've found myself retiring into rooms in my house alone. Maybe shed a bit of a tear through lockdown because I've found it hard.

Being stuck in the house, knowing that my other brothers and sisters in the church have been stuck in the house and I tell you I have felt absolutely sluggish spiritually.

[ 29 : 07 ] I felt that this lockdown has had a terrible effect upon my keenness to grow as a Christian. Maybe that's not you because maybe you're not as perverse as I am and if that's the case well good but I confess honestly that this lockdown has made me spiritually sluggish and over these past few weeks you know what has really helped?

What has really helped is preparing this sermon and looking at my Lord Jesus and looking at my Saviour and the way in which as a man he grew and developed in the power of the Holy Spirit and he did that for me and you.

And as I've looked at him and all his beauty and all of his perfect manhood as well as being perfectly divine I see the one that I'm to follow and the one who wants me to follow and wants to help me and the one who sent his spirit the same spirit that was upon him through his earthly life lives in me.

What a colossal encouragement that is. And he wants to help me to grow and mature in the ways that he did. And that's true of your life as well.

The spirit of the son the God man is in you and he wants to help you to grow all of us more and more like our Lord Jesus. So let me ask you will we seek to do this as a church and as individuals?

[ 30 : 28 ] Will we get serious about growing more Christ-like if we're not serious about it already? I hope we will be. That's the first point we are to grow and mature because that is what Jesus did.

Well one man who was serious about growth one man who was helped by the spirit to follow our Lord was the apostle Paul. And now if your finger's still got blood circulating in it if you've been

using it as a bookmark if you could flick over to Philippians 3 that would be most helpful. And we won't spend as long on this point our second point and final point this morning and it is this we are to grow and mature to the very end. We are to grow and mature to the very end. Growing in maturity is a lifelong daily duty that we are to do every day until we breathe our final breath. This never stops. There's no retirement from growing in maturity if you're a Christian. Please look at verse 12. Paul says not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect. [ 31 : 37 ] The this that Paul is speaking about here the this thing that he's not obtained yet is full maturity or in other words it's full physical resurrection from the dead.

That is what he's been talking about in context. That is what he's spoken of back in verse 11. Now he will obtain that on the last day on the day of glory when Christ returns and when he appears in power Jesus will just have to speak and like that all of his people will be raised physically to beautiful eternal life as fully mature humans fully Christ-like freed completely from sin's presence forever and ever and ever.

He says I've not obtained that yet. I have not obtained that yet but he says in verse 12 I press on to make it my own. In other words Paul says even though I know I will never be perfect in this life even though I will never be a mature Christian I will be a maturing Christian but not a mature Christian I know that even though that is the case I'm going to try more and more and more to transform myself in the power of the spirit to be more and more like the man that I will be on the last day when Jesus comes.

I am never going to stop doing this. And please look at verse 13. He says only one thing I do forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ.

Now what does Paul mean here by that phrase he forgets what lies behind? Is he talking about the fact that he will forget all of the mistakes he's made in the Christian life all of the failures all of the time when he's come up to a hundredth that's kept him from growing?

[ 33 : 20 ] Is Paul going to forget about all of that? Well maybe. It's certainly not a good thing for a Christian to be constantly revisiting past failures I think.

I think what Paul's really saying here is this he's going to forget all of the progress that he's already made in the Christian life so far.

Because if Paul was to stop and look back and look at all of the progress all of the growth and maturing that he's made he might be tempted to rest upon his laurels. And that would be a disaster. Because if Paul spent all of his time looking back he would never look forwards. Yes? He would take the eyes of his heart off of the great prize that's to come of that last day the gift of grace that will be given to him the eternal physical mature resurrection life from the dead.

Paul doesn't want to take the eyes of his heart off that. It's really not helpful for a Christian to be looking back and constantly thinking check me out look at the progress that I've made look how good I am look at what I've done I've listened to thousands of sermons I've been to hundreds of prayer meetings I'm well on in my years you know what I think I can ease off now Paul says do not do that back at the start of lockdown I was listening to a podcast I don't usually listen to podcasts but I listened to this podcast and it was of a very mature well respected senior pastor from another country talking about his church and he was being interviewed about his church and this man has years of experience leading this church and the interviewer asked the pastor this question what stops different people in your church from growing well the pastor said firstly some people some members in our church don't grow because actually they're not

[ 35 : 17 ] Christians they just come to church because they're trying to be morally good people and they're religious and they think that that's what it's all about and so they come but they're not united to Jesus and if you're not united to Jesus if you're not united to Jesus then you can do nothing then the pastor said that some not all but some of the people aged in their twenties to forties in his church well they don't grow because they fill up their lives with so much stuff that in the end they're crazy busy and he says we hardly see them we hardly see them at growth groups midweek things he also said that folks in this age group oh they love they love a weekend away they love a weekend away it's especially true of young married couples in that age bracket they love their weekends away and again the interviewer said how did you back this up and he said well we have the figures to say that this is so and he says that majority of people aged 20 to 40 they only come for about 40% of Sunday services each year and that really hinders them from growing do you love

a weekend away something to think about well then the pastor addressed people aged 50 and upwards and he said this from his experience these are his words not mine a good number of these folks aged 50 upwards they do not grow why because they are living off of previous growth that came about in their Christian lives when they were younger he says this is especially true of retired folks in his experience it is common for them to look back in their lives to times when they were younger when they went through great big periods of growth they took great strides of progress in maturity perhaps when they were a student perhaps when they were in their 20s they look back at the progress they've made in the past and they think well that was so good wasn't it and they stop growing in the present they become content and their keenness to become more Christ like diminishes this is exactly what Paul is warning against in Philippians 3 any progress you've made in the Christian life is great brilliant but you're better off forgetting about it forget what lies behind and instead keep your eyes ahead on what's to come that great prize of resurrection life and eternity with Jesus for if you keep your eyes on that it will keep you living for eternity and it will spurn you on in the present to grow and to become more and more mature and maybe later on today this afternoon when you go home or at home if you're at home already why not in the quiet why not open up your

Bible to these verses read what Paul says and think to yourself is that the attitude that I have is that the mindset that I have do I need to change my thinking do I need to change the priorities that I hold in my heart verse 17 says that we should all imitate Paul's way of thinking so that we will never be content with the level of Christian maturity we've already gained and it's serious business by the way serious business because in verse 18 and 19 Paul speaks about those who at one time seemed to be going strong in the Christian life but because they took their eyes off of eternity they stopped growing and maturing and now Paul says they live solely for the things of this world and Paul as he speaks about these people he speaks about these people with tears in his eyes because these people who I take it were once part of the church maybe even still part of the church well Paul says they're enemies of the cross Paul says they're headed not for resurrection life but they're headed for destruction now friends of course there is absolutely nothing wrong with enjoying the good things of this world nothing wrong with enjoying a good meal other parts of the Bible teach us to enjoy God's creation and the gifts that he has given us but when the things of this world consume us and become more important to us than growing and maturing in Christ likeness and when they become more important to us than living for eternity and the world to come then it's a really really bad sign and Paul says if that's us then we must repent we must repent can a real believer fall away the answer that the New Testament gives to that question is don't don't but instead do everything that you possibly can to press on in the power of the Spirit and just by way of final reminder let's give ourselves a great vision of what's to come please look at verse 20 this is what's to come this is why going the hard way down the road of maturity is so worth it verse 20 but our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a saviour the Lord Jesus Christ who will transform our lowly body to be like his body by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself friends this is where following Jesus down the road of maturity will take you glorious eternal resurrection life why would you ever reject such a future as this if you're here this morning and if your heart like mine has grown cold and you're tempted to stop growing and maturing in the Christian life then let these verses invigorate you so that you will with the help of the spirit of Christ press on so that you will not fall away so that you will not look back and give yourself a pat on the back but instead you will look forward with great joy and excitement to become more and more like the mature one we'll come back next Sunday and we'll think a bit more God willing about the means of grace that God has given us that help us grow well let's take a moment of quiet now let's bow our heads close our eyes I'll take a minute to respond to the word of God in our own hearts and then I'll pray for us oh dear heavenly father we praise you for the Lord Jesus we praise you that he is our savior our example is fully God and is fully man thank you for his life and we thank you for the glorious and breathtaking future that you promise to give all those who trust and follow your son eternal physical resurrection life as fully matured and perfect human beings in your glorious presence oh Lord please help us to fix the eyes of our hearts upon that prize so that we will not love the things of this world more than your son and we ask that you will give us the strength that we need to live for eternity we confess that we are weak our Lord Jesus lived a life that was sinless that was perfect but father we are sinners and the old remnant of Adam still remains in us and so we need your help we pray that your living word would transform

our hearts by the power of your spirit more and more throughout all the days of our lives we pray that we would encourage each other and keep each other and minister to each other so that we will keep growing never becoming stagnant never becoming content in the progress that we've made already but always wanting to be more like

[ 43 : 52 ] Jesus in his perfect humanity so please give us an appetite this day to follow the mature one give us a hunger that the apostle Paul had thank you that the spirit of Jesus is in us and he is ready and willing to help us grow so we pray that you would help us to draw upon the great resources that have been given to us by your grace and we pray all this in Jesus precious name and for his sake amen