

No Longer Children

by Tim Conway

This sermon emphasizes the importance of growing in maturity in Christ, moving beyond spiritual infancy and being vulnerable to deceitful teachings. It highlights the need to focus on attaining the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, staying centered on Christ in all doctrines and teachings to avoid being led astray by cunning and deceitful schemes. The key message is to know Christ intimately, walk with Him daily, and let Him be the central focus in all aspects of faith and life.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:13, Matthew 7:15, Colossians 2:8, 2 Corinthians 11:13, Philippians 3:8, John 14:21, Hebrews 5:12

Topics: "Spiritual Maturity", "Staying Centered on Christ"

Description

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Transcript

Well, I would have you to turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 4. Yes, I want to deal with that negative aspect of being a child. In a certain sense, we are supposed to be children. It's desirable.

But there is also a sense in which being a child is not desirable. It's important that we know the qualities in a child that need to be found in us and those that we need to run from. Let's pick up reading in Ephesians 4.11. And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

Now, that prepositional phrase, of the Son of God, applies to the knowledge and to the faith. We are to attain to the unity of the faith of the Son of God and of the knowledge of the Son of God. To mature manhood.

To the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the Head, into Christ, from Whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is

equipped when each part is working properly makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. I've entitled my sermon, No Longer Children.

David was calling us to be children. This sermon is No Longer Children. You see the apostles' words there at the beginning of v. 14.

You see them? So that we may no longer be children. Now think about that. If we just isolate that statement right there, that portion of Scripture, those few words.

So that we may no longer be children. If you just isolate that all by itself, it tells us at least three things that jump right off that page at me. One, think about this, it affirms the reality that in the spiritual realm, there is such a thing as a spiritual child.

This has nothing to do with physical age or physical maturity of the person. Paul is expressly in these verses speaking in spiritual terms. You know what this means? It means that within the church, within our church, we have this.

Paul sees Christians that he would classify as children. And you know, I believe that that's exactly what John does. Have you ever noticed how John deals with children? And what are the other two categories? Young men, fathers.

I believe he's doing exactly the same thing there. I don't think you want to read age parameters into those statements. Because when you watch how he defines the children over against the young men over against these fathers, you will notice he ascribes particular spiritual realities to each classification.

You know, people in the church, they may be 15 years old, they may be 55 years old. Age has little bearing on what Paul is talking about right here. Somebody can be 65 years old and be a spiritual child.

Second, another thing that jumps out is this, you can see that every Christian starts out as a spiritual child. Notice, Paul includes himself here. So that we, he's including himself in that pronoun.

We may no longer, don't you like that? No longer. What does that imply? That implies that that's how we start out. That means we all start out that way and Paul is pressing us to move beyond that.

In the spiritual realm, we don't start out like Adam. He was created mature on the first day of life. There's a growth process.

In fact, look at v. 415. Rather speaking the truth in love, we are to... what's the next two words? Grow up. There's that reality.

We must grow up as Christians. A third thing that jumps out at me besides the first two, one, that there is the reality that there are spiritual children in the church. Two, that we all start there.

In other words, when you get saved, that's where you're at. You're a spiritual child and we need to grow up beyond that. The third reality that jumps out at me is it ought to be obvious that Paul believes that it's very much within the realm of possibility for Christians to move beyond being spiritual children.

I mean, that's obviously what he's pressing us for here. In fact, not only does Paul believe it's possible, look at v. 14. He believes it's altogether necessary.

Remaining a child is not safe. That's the point. You see that.

Starting v. 14 the way he does by saying, so that you may no longer be children. Notice that. So that.

Where does that come from? So that you may no longer be children? It means he just got done describing what needs to happen so that you may no longer be children. You see, whatever it might mean to be a spiritual child, Paul is pressing these believers to no longer be one. It's obvious he believes that the resources exist that can carry the Christian beyond childhood.

Now, let's just think for a second. What does it mean to be a child? Because we want to grow beyond this. And so it's pretty important that we understand just exactly what he's talking about.

Because there are childlike characteristics as we heard in the first hour that ought to be realities in us, and we don't want to grow beyond. We want to actually grow into more and more of. There is a childlikeness that we want to be embracing more and more.

So what does Paul have in mind here? Look at the text. Verse 14, "...so that we may no longer be children." There's something that he doesn't want us to be any longer. What is it that he no longer wants us to be? You can see in v. 13.

Look at v. 13. You see where it says mature manhood? That would be the opposite of being a child, right? Maturity. So there's a maturity issue.

We can see that. Child carries the idea of immaturity. In v. 15, we just looked at it a second ago.

Look at it again. V. 15, "...rather speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up." So you see that the idea of being a child is that you haven't grown up. The idea of being a child is immaturity and not being grown up.

That's clearly what he says in these verses. But notice something else. Notice v. 14.

"...so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine." Notice that. Being a child has to do with doctrine. You see, when we think maturity, growing up, Paul's got in mind doctrine.

What's doctrine? Teaching. Instruction. Read further.

"...tossed to and fro by the waves carried about by every wind of doctrine by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes." Look, what kind of doctrine is he talking about that he would associate with human cunning, craftiness, and deceitful schemes? Just take that word deceitful. Deceitful. This is obviously bad doctrine.

This is bad teaching. A child is a person whose immaturity in not being grown up comes right down to this reality. They can't handle error.

Bad teaching. They're unstable. They're spiritually ignorant and undiscerning.

Listen, that doesn't mean that they can't articulate good doctrine. That doesn't mean that they can't tell you what each of the letters in TULIP means. It doesn't mean that they haven't spent some time really studying some debatable doctrine and can articulate it in theory.

Listen, they're not stable when they're confronted by the waves and the winds of erroneous teaching that blow at us from every direction. And you can find people that can articulate certain doctrines really well today, but they're blown off into something else tomorrow. They can have a high IQ.

That's not what's being spoken about here. They can have a doctorate degree. Listen, just because somebody is well-educated because somebody has lots of degrees behind their names doesn't mean that they're not children.

And just because somebody has not the most impressive learning in this world, they may be very mature and very discerning. This person, think about it, unstable, blown around. We talk about the proverbial pendulum.

People swinging over here and they swing over there. It's that kind of thing. It's a person that goes to extremes.

It's a person who's out of balance. It's a person who doesn't rightly divide the Word of Truth. Or they may have the Word of Truth.

They may be wrestling with the Word of Truth. They may be able to articulate certain things. They may have the big authors at home on their shelf and they've got the commentaries and they've got the systematic theologies, and they may be able to even quote to you from them.

But when it comes to practical realities, they can't get things right. They don't properly discern. They can't put truths together.

They don't rightly divide. They lack discernment as to the implications of what Scripture teaches. They can't read the Scripture and come to the proper conclusions about how it applies to life.

They're ever learning. You read about these people in Scripture. They're ever learning.

And I know that they may... Look, I recognize there's classifications here where somebody doesn't know the Lord altogether at all, and then there's people that are children. I recognize that. But the thing is, the way Scripture talks, the assumption when people are childish is that you want them to grow.

Why? Because there is erroneous doctrine and it sweeps lots of people away. And so we deal with people, they come to know the Lord, we deal with them as though they're children and they need to grow, but the reality is that one of the dangers about being in this position is people get swept away. You say, were they saved or weren't they saved? That isn't the issue.

The issue is being a child is not safe. And if you just say, well, I'm a Christian and so being a child is okay, then you're in a dangerous place. And you need to get beyond that.

And I'm not saying the Lord's grace isn't sufficient. He protects His children. Thank the Lord He protects His children.

He protects us from lots of things undoubtedly. But the whole point of Paul here is that we need to no longer be these spiritual children. We see this idea of what it is to be a spiritual child in very emphatic language in Hebrews 5. So why don't you turn over there.

I think this will be the only place where we get away from Ephesians 4 today. But it's very helpful. It's very descriptive.

It's right along the same lines of what we're talking about. Hebrews 5.12 Now, the author of Hebrews is addressing these people that he's writing to. He's not pleased with where they're at.

I heard John MacArthur one time. Somebody asked him, what is the most discouraging thing in your estimation about being in the ministry? And he says people that don't live up to the truth that they have. This author is grieved by the same kind of thing.

Notice, by this time... Okay, that alone speaks something to us. By this time. You know what? There is an accepted amount of time for being a child.

It's just like with our physical children. When Joshua was five years old, it was okay for him to do five-year-old things. It's not okay now.

Because we would say by this time, you should not be sucking your thumb. He doesn't. We're thankful for that.

But if he did, we'd say that's childish. That needs to be put away by this time. Now, if he was five years old and he was doing that, you don't look at him, you don't look at a person like that and say by this time, you should be driving and you should be going to work every day.

We don't say that. Because by that time, it's not what we expect. But you see, spiritually speaking, it's just like it is with the physical.

You give people enough time and it's expected that they're going to be in a certain place. By this time, you ought to be teachers. In fact, you ought to have embraced Scripture.

You ought to know it well enough and be able to apply it to your own life. You ought to have worked this out sufficiently so that you can actually go and teach someone else about what you know. But when enough time has gone by that you ought to be a teacher, notice this.

Oh, by the way, just look at the last five words or so of v. 13. You'll see, since he is a child, you see, we're dealing with spiritual childishness. That's exactly what's being spoken about here.

So, at a time they ought to be teachers, they need somebody to teach them again the basic principles of the oracles of God. In other words, look, you're straying from Christ. You're toying with falling away.

You're toying with unbelief. You guys have been saved sufficiently long, but you need somebody to go back. You know, the oracles of God.

We're talking about Scripture. You need somebody to go back and teach you again the most basic fundamentals of Christianity. That's what it is to be a spiritual child.

Now keep going here. You need milk, not solid food. Everyone who lives on milk, notice this, is unskilled in the word of righteousness.

That's what being a child is since he is a child. You give babies milk, not meat, not steak. It's the same in the spiritual realm.

You see what it means to be a child? You see why every wind of doctrine blows these people all around when they're children? Because they're unskilled in the word. They don't know how to defend. Remember Jesus? When He came face to face with the devil, He knew exactly how to handle Scripture three times.

He went, He pulled out that text that was perfect to answer what He was being confronted with. But children don't know how to do that. Verse 14, solid food is for the mature.

This is really helpful. Those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Wow, the child is undiscerning.

You see that? Powers of discernment. You want to know what makes a spiritual child? Look at their powers of discernment. They don't discern things properly in the spiritual realm.

They get it wrong. They may know lots of theology. They may be really smart people, but they miss it.

He doesn't realize. The hot stovetop is dangerous. He comes to wrong conclusions about things.

That's what children do. He often thinks very unimportant things to be of the greatest importance. You get around certain spiritual people like that and they're pumping something where it's like that.

It just is not that important. And yet, oftentimes like the Pharisees and religious leaders of Jesus' day, they neglect the weightier matters. You ever see people? They're just taken up with things all the time, but the weightier matters, it seems like, where are they at? To be a child spiritually has to do with a lack of ability in handling the Word of God.

It's got to do like Ephesians 4 says with doctrine. Doctrine. He needs to be taught the basic principles rather than being fed with meat.

He hasn't learned the simplest spiritual lessons. The simplest spiritual truths. He may have a high-paying job.

She may be extremely intelligent. Now you go back to Ephesians 4 with me because I want you to see something. Brethren, I'm telling you, this has to do with our growth.

Paul wants us to grow up into Christ. That's what he says in Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4.13 Our spiritual growth rides on these realities. And what happens is Paul gets even more specific about what he means when he says children.

Look at Ephesians 4.13. Notice what's at the end of this verse. "...to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that you may no longer be children." Okay, this is what you want to achieve, attain, so that you may no longer be children. Well, what's that? What's stature? What is somebody's stature? Their height.

Yeah, it's very simple. We often associate growing up with what? You know, a little guy comes up to you and he's 2 1/2 feet tall. You recognize he's got growing to do.

A guy comes up to you and he's 6'2". We do identify maturing with getting bigger, broad shoulders. That's kind of the idea.

That's the manner in which he's talking here. The idea here is that to no longer be children, we must grow up. Think about how we read this.

I know you read this. We've been reading this for probably a month or better now. But think about this.

The measure. Somebody brings the tape measure out and they measure you. Do you see that? We must grow up so that when somebody puts the tape measure to us, how tall are we? How tall are we? So that we may no longer be children.

Yeah, we're as tall as Christ. Isn't that an amazing thing for him to say right there? How can you tell when the guy's grown up? We would say measure him. You know, if he's 5'7", 5'8", he's grown up.

6'0", yeah, he's grown up. 6'6", he's really grown up. Do you want to no longer be a child? When the tape measure gets brought out and somebody measures you, are you as tall as Christ? Does your height resemble His height? Your dimensions, do they resemble His dimensions? That's the issue here.

That's mature. You back up a little bit. From the measure of the stature of fullness of Christ, that's mature manhood.

But notice what Paul equates to attaining to this mature manhood and to this measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ if we back up a little more. It's like he says this three different ways here. Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

Now, Paul's idea of growing up here in these verses is not to get responsible, stop playing video games, get your own job, move out of your parents' house. Notice what it is. What is mature manhood? It is you attaining something.

Attaining to the unity of the faith of Jesus Christ. And you attaining to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Notice, it's the doctrine of Christ, and I would say knowing Christ goes beyond doctrine.

Knowing. That's eternal life. There's intimacy.

There's personal intimacy in that. But you know that captured in here is the idea, the doctrine of Christ, the experience of Christ. That is what is necessary to lift us out of childishness.

Let's think about these two things. The faith. The faith.

That's what we believe. The faith of the Son of God. What do you believe about Him? Listen to two places where Paul uses similar terminology.

To the Corinthians, be watchful, stand firm in the faith. You know what that's over against? These children that are blown all around. Tossed about by the waves.

That's not standing firm. That's thrown around. He says, stand firm in the faith.

Act like men. Isn't that interesting? Stand firm in the faith. That's how you act like a man.

Children, they're blown around. See, there's no stability. The faith.

There's no stability in what's believed. Or to the Colossians, continue in the faith. There it is.

The faith of the Son of God. Continue in the faith. Again, the opposite of being a child.

Stable and steadfast. Stability. Not shifting from the hope of the Gospel you have heard.

Now catch that. What's the faith? It's the hope of the Gospel that you have heard. Brethren, I would ask you this.

Do you really know what you believe about the Lord Jesus Christ? I mean, do you really know what you believe? When you've got a son with lymphoma, you begin to ask the question, what do I really believe? You know, right here in this space where I stand, there was a body yesterday. When you're a young woman with two young children and you're standing in front of an open casket with your husband in it, you start asking yourself what you really believe. Do we know what we really believe? See, this is what lifts us out of childishness.

Because this idea of waves and this idea of wind, that's an idea of storms and they come. And what he says is they're doctrinal. We get hit with truth and error.

Lots of error. Bad doctrine. You know what it does? It tests what we believe.

It's constantly pulling us. And we're confronted by waves and winds and storms of bad teaching and waves and winds and storms of what life brings upon us. And the issue is what do we really believe? Do you really know where your hope is set? When things don't go your way, when the bottom begins to fall out, when the foundations are giving way, do you really know what you believe about the Son of God? And you don't want to leave that part off the end.

This is not just the faith in some ambiguous way. What do you really believe about the Lord Jesus Christ? What do you really believe that He is to you? Who is He? You see, this is the issue with mature manhood. Yes, it's that we rightly handle the oracles of God.

It's that we know them. It's that by practice, our powers of discernment. But I'll tell you this, this comes down.

Paul is very specific here. Paul is specific about the Scripture, about what we believe, and it's got to do with the Son of God. That's the issue.

Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the sure, steadfast anchor of your soul? When the devil rushes in, and he will, because he's looking for opportunity and he's looking for people to devour, and we see what he did to Job and we see what he did to Peter. We see that he came upon the Lord Jesus Christ and he's looking for opportunity with each one of us. When he rushes in, have you so tried and proven the Lord Jesus Christ that you know exactly where to run? Have you so tried and proved the promises? All those promises that we can stand back and on the good, sunny day, we can say, oh, all those promises are yes and amen in Christ.

But I'll tell you, when the storms come, you know where the children go? They go to the Internet. Where do the children go? They go to the TV. Where do the children go? They go to the distractions.

They go somewhere else. They go to whatever's sedative in this world. Have we tried and proven Christ that we know He's our only refuge? You see, this is what brings people up out of childishness, childhood.

You have an arsenal of promises that you have tried and proven. I find that true when you find mature Christians. In fact, you may almost get tired of how some mature Christians will say the same verses over and over.

It's like, there's a big Bible here. Why do you always say that one? I'll tell you why. You may see that as simplistic, but they've tried that promise.

And they keep going back to it again and again to do battle with. It's like the sword in Christian's hand in Pilgrim Progress. Rejoice not against Me, O My enemy.

You know where that comes from? It comes from Micah. I love that. Because you see what's happening.

The devil comes back. He's ready to put him away. And Christian reaches over and his fingers reach over there and grab hold of that sword.

And what is the sword? The sword is the Word of God. It's the promises. And he grabs hold of that promise out of Micah.

And there he does battle. O my enemy, when I fall, he says, I will rise. And he thrusts that sword through him.

You see, this is spiritual maturity. But then there's knowledge of the Son of God. Paul says, Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

You remember how he speaks? Oh, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection. Yes, the path to spiritual maturity is learning the basic principles of the oracles of God. It's learning to apply Scripture to life in order to have your powers of discernment honed and trained.

But it's especially learning what is true about Christ. That I may know Him. Know Him.

The real powers of discernment. I mean, think about that you may have just that ability to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth. And to know, to know.

This is what Paul is praying for these people. Oh, that you might know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. See, this is the knowing.

You've got to recognize that in normal reading time, he just dealt with that moments before. That you might know. It's knowing Christ.

It's walking with Christ. It's learning Christ. Not just facts, but you know this.

Eternal life is to know the true God and the Christ that He sent. Strength to comprehend with all the saints. Strength to know Christ.

He says in Scripture, you remember this? John 14. He says, those who keep My commandments, I will manifest Myself to them. Do you know that? Do you know about that? Have you experienced that? See, the question here is do you know Him? Do you know Him? Is He real to you? Look, what Paul is saying in this is apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor, teachers, they're given to the church to equip the church for the work of ministry.

This thing is all being built up, the body of Christ being built up until we all attain. We're all moving somewhere. We're moving to this attainment.

This attainment is the faith of the Son of God. It's the knowledge of the Son of God. That brings us to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ so that we may no longer be children.

It is being inundated with Christ. This is a personal knowledge of Him. An intimate knowledge with Him.

Brethren, just let your eyes move down the page a little bit to v. 20. We're going to get to this. See how Paul talks.

Notice v. 420. What's that coming off of? He says in v. 17, you're not to walk like Gentiles. Why? Because they're futile in their minds and they're darkened.

You've got all this problem going on. Notice what he says in v. 20. This is not the way you have learned Christ.

That's amazing. You see what Paul is saying? To know Him. To know Christ.

To really know Him. That is controlling. That fixes everything.

That lifts you out of being a child. Notice, that is not the way you learn Christ. Of course, assuming that you've heard about Him and were taught in Him as the truth is in Jesus.

See, Paul's assuming that. This is the guiding principle of all this aspect of the new man that he's going to bring out here. It's got to do with us learning Christ.

Now, brethren, in all of this, there's something that I don't want us to casually just move past. Notice, what's that at the end of v. 14? There's a connection with what we... notice this, there's a connection. Verses 13 and 14 are just a continuous thought here.

To attain to. There's a connection with what we attain to at the beginning of v. 13 and something that has to do with human cunning and craftiness and deceit at the end of v. 14. We're all to attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, mature manhood, measure the stature of the fullness of Christ, no longer children who what characterizes them is they're tossed to and fro by the waves carried about by every wind of doctrine by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes.

And if you've got eyes to see this attaining to the faith and the knowledge of Christ, that's exactly the right thing that sets us right, that brings us maturity over against this every wind of doctrine, human cunning, craftiness, and deceitful schemes. We're talking about the opposite over here. The King James reads, it reads, "...by the slight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie and wait to deceive." New King James, trickery of men in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.

Notice what's said. By human cunning. There's human things happening here.

This first thing is human in nature. It's human cunning. The term literally has to do with throwing dice.

That's where the term comes from. Cunning. It seems that Paul's seeking to convey look, when I was lost, I gambled.

If there's anything about gambling, it's it caters to cheaters. People cheat. Gamblers want to win.

There's something associated with an element of deceit and trickery and cheating in this by human cunning. Why? What happens? Well, while you're not watching carefully by some slight of hand, a man is able to deceive in cards. I remember it happening.

The Apostle is clearly indicating that false teachers are involved in this every wind of doctrine and that spiritual children are especially vulnerable. But keep reading, by craftiness and deceitful schemes or in cunning craftiness, lying and wait to deceive or deceitful plotting or deceitful scheming. That word, scheming, schemes, you know it only shows up one other time in Scripture.

Right here in this epistle where Paul says this, put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. Here's the thing about a scheme or plotting, it's intentional. They know what they're doing.

You know, several years ago, I preached on each one of those churches in Asia Minor. I come out of Revelation 2 and 3. I preached some of those over and over throughout the years. I just brought up the church at Philadelphia to the brethren up there in Fond du Lac.

I'm reminded all over again, there's a very haunting statement sent by the Lord to those at Philadelphia. Listen to these. I am coming soon.

Hold fast what you have so that no one may seize your crown. I mean, just read that. Yes, I see it.

I hear it. So that no one may seize your crown. But you ever stop and think, why would He say that? Why does He look at His people and say, you better watch out that nobody seize your crown? That's an odd thing to say.

Unless of course, there are people running around and there are people in the crowd real close to you who are crown seizers, then that would be a healthy warning. Remember, they know what they're doing. There's craftiness.

And you know what Scripture says? There's these men who, it says, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared. You've got people around you. They're liars? Oh, and the picture is they infiltrate the church.

They're here among us now. They're liars. You see, when you look at somebody and say, how could they be so bold? Listen, you have to hear what's said there.

Their consciences are seared. You get people around you they can't feel. They don't care if you go to hell because they can't feel.

They don't feel any sympathy for you. But you know what it says? It says that in the later times, you're going to have these people that depart from the faith, and it says they're going to be devoted to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons. Even if men's consciences are seared, even if there's an ignorance aspect to some of the things that people do, you can know this, there are spirits and demons behind these things.

And even if men sometimes are ignorant and don't know what they're doing or their consciences are so seared they can't feel what they're doing, I'll tell you this, the demons know exactly what they're doing.

Now when you get to chapter 6, that's where it talks about the schemes of the devil. And this is the thing about being novice.

This is the thing about not knowing how to handle the Scriptures. This is the thing about being a child spiritually. There is a danger.

And when you hear about cunning and craftiness and deceitful schemes, when the Lord says to His church, and this was a healthy church at Philadelphia, beware that nobody take your crown. There are people who by scheme and plot are reaching for it. That's the picture in Scripture.

And the warnings are profuse. Constant warnings against this kind of particular danger throughout Scripture. Didn't Jesus Christ say it? Matthew 7, we know there on the Sermon on the Mount, He said, beware of false prophets.

Why? Why must you beware? Don't fall to sleep. Why? Because they come to you in sheep's clothing. But inwardly, they're ravaging wolves.

Do you know what that means? You see what's so difficult about this? We hear about crown stealers. And you envision this really ugly, scary guy. And he's reaching for it.

It's like the guy you meet in the dark that you'd never want to meet in the dark. But that's not what they look like. They come in sheep's clothing.

They look like a Christian. In fact, you may remember me saying in the past, Lloyd-Jones was quite convinced that it's the guy rough around the edges and the guy that's ugly that is usually God's man. You get people, they look good.

They look good. The problem is these people have names. And they're often friendly and likable.

And at least externally, they're nice guys. They're attractive. Listen, the devil is behind these people.

And he wants to take your crown and he wants to damn your soul. And while we're children, we're vulnerable. This is why you need to grow up out of this.

Because we're vulnerable. But inside, they are ravenous. They have faces and they have names that you associate with Christianity.

You associate with going to church on Sunday. And you call them brother. But I'll tell you what eternity will show.

When the veil is pulled back, you're going to be startled by some of the people and they knew what they were doing. Or the demons behind them, they full well knew what was going on. And you know where they are? They're in here.

They're on the Internet. They're on Facebook. They're on YouTube.

They're on the radio. Spiritual infants. They're the easiest prey.

These people look like sheep. They're all around us. People who are unstable.

People who never know quite what they believe. They're vulnerable. People always second-guessing.

People who listen to all the voices. People who are constantly full of doubting. Jesus said, see that no one leads you astray.

Why would He say that? See to it. Watch out that no one leads you astray. Because He says this, many will come in My name.

It's not like there's just a few. And He goes on to say this, they will lead many astray. Wow! If you could really see into the spiritual realm, many come in His name, but they're not real.

And they lead many away. False Christs, false prophets will arise, perform signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, the elect. What sort of sinisterness is this? I know, Paul says to those Ephesian elders, I know that when I depart from here, my lead us.

He was unsure. He called them over. He says, I know this.

I'm not going to see your faces again. And they were weeping. And He said, something's going to happen here.

Fierce, fierce, fierce wolves are going to come in among you and not spare this flock. He says they're going to speak twisted. The King James says perverse things.

People speak perverse things. They speak them with flowers all over them. There's a beast.

You may check this out sometime that arises out of the north in Revelation 13. And you know what's interesting? John describes its outward appearance as that of a lamb. Two horns like a lamb, but when it speaks, it's the voice of a dragon.

Beware! Beware! These people pulled disciples after them. The epistles are full of argument, disputation, reasoning, warning. Think of the 11th chapter of the 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians where the apostle warns about false teachers.

What does he say? False apostles, deceitful workmen disguising themselves. Disguise! There it is again. As apostles of Christ, no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

So it's no surprise that his servants disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Just think about all the letters. The Galatian letter.

What's that all about? Some who trouble you and want to distort the Gospel of Christ. Philippians, look out for the dogs. Just think about the warnings in the epistle written to the Colossians.

I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. Just listen to that. Plausible arguments.

What does that mean? Reasonable? Logical? Persuasive? He says, you might want to catch this. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy? That's a love of the wisdom of the world. Empty deceit.

Human tradition. Elemental spirits of the world. That's like the ceremonies and the types and shadows.

And not according to Christ. Hear me, brethren, I'm done with this. But I'm going to drive this home.

The Apostle says to the Colossians again, let no one disqualify you. Insisting on asceticism? It's being severe to the body. Depriving yourself of things.

Worship of angels? Going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason. Sensuous minds? Not holding fast to the head. You see, there's the issue.

Not holding fast to the head. You give yourself to these other things, and this is what happens. Plausible things.

Reasonable things. Listen, listen. It can be biblical things.

You know, one of the things Paul's addressing to the Colossians are things that people dig up out of the Old Testament. Somebody can come along. They want to start talking about limited atonement.

Somebody else wants to start talking about the law. Somebody else wants to start talking about cessationism, the impassivity of God, biblical marriage, the sanctity of life. There's all sorts of things.

Should I immunize my children? You just beware. Because what Paul is saying is this, what you want to attain is the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. That's the test.

That's always the test. If He's not essential, if He's not central, listen, these wolves, these deceivers, these crown stealers, these false Christs, these false apostles, false prophets, false teachers, these that come around, they come swaying their silly myths or vain discussion. Paul talks all about this to Timothy.

The irreverent babble, endless genealogies, controversy, quarrels about words. He even says to Timothy, science. People want to come around and they want to bring all their arguments.

You just remember this. There are those people out there that Paul calls them dogs. John calls them antichrists.

Peter refers to damnable heresies or destructive heresies to the Philippians. Paul says that their God is their belly. This doesn't happen by accident.

This is happening on purpose. Everything is to be tested by the position given to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what you have to ask.

Is He essential? Is He central? Is He all in all? Is He the focal point? Because this is where the devil is trying to move away. The devil hates Christ. One of the reasons he attacks the Scriptures is you know what Jesus said.

People make their appeal to Scripture, but He says they speak of Me. The reason that Satan wants to go after that word is because this is where you find out about the biblical Christ. And he will seek to distort it and he will seek to take you away from it, but the issue is Christ.

Oh, these people are too clever to deny Christ altogether, but they minimize Him. And you can get into your arguments about whatever doctrine you want to bring on the table. And if those arguments take you away from Christ and they take you away from His glory, they take you away from His centrality, they take you away from trusting Him, from knowing Him more, from having greater confidence in Him, watch out.

Watch out. Beware. It doesn't matter how much somebody says, well, you know, this comes out of the systematic theology and I was reading Robert Raymond.

I was reading Grudem. I was reading this. I was listening to that.

But you just listen. Because the dead giveaway is the absence of Christ. Listen.

Listen. We are to be attaining, attaining, reaching the faith of the Son of God, the knowledge of the Son of God. We need to walk around with that heart of Paul, oh, that I might know Him.

Oh, that I might know Him. You see, brethren, what we're looking for is whatever the doctrine is, the aberration when things go wrong is when Christ is left out. When we suddenly become those who argue for some position or another, but Christ is subtly fallen out.

Brethren, children argue all the time. The thing about children is they typically don't know how ignorant they actually are. Your children typically think they're a lot smarter than they are.

If you want to be smart, go learn of Christ. What we heard in the first hour, come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden. He says, learn of Me.

I am meek and lowly. We want to learn of Him. We want to be saturated with Him.

All our doctrines need to come back to Him. This is the dead giveaway. This is the test.

Christ, if He's not unique, if it's not Him at the center, if He's not above and beyond all, if He doesn't dwarf everything else and anything else than the teaching is false, be sure of this, that which detracts from Him, that which takes away from Him, that which promotes something else. Oh, it's subtle. They like to come to you and say this is what you really need.

Anytime you recognize it pulls your eyes off of Christ, you've got it nailed right there. It's false. And even if this person doesn't realize what they're doing, oh, if you've got eyes to see, there's a claw reaching for your crown.

Brethren, learn Christ above all. Oh, that I may know Him. Know Him.

Know Him. Walk with Him. Surround yourself by the preachers that preach about Him.

Surround yourself with the books that write about Him. Brethren, I cannot overemphasize this enough. Wherever you're reading the Bible this year, brethren, please, one chapter out of the Gospels every single day of your life.

Not just this year. Every single day of your life so that you are setting your eyes on Christ, so that you're seeing Him, you're walking with Him, you've got Him close. Brethren, this is what Paul is driving at here.

You've got to see it for what it is. Attaining the faith, attaining the knowledge, this is how we move on so that we may no longer be children who get tossed to and fro. Brethren, you come to know Christ and you have your faith established and then it makes you rock solid.

It makes you steady. When errors come blowing around, you're going to see them. When your heart is overflowing with a love for Christ, that's where your confidence is.

You don't want to trust anything else. You drive up to a stoplight and you see that image of Mary, which I see over by my house all the time. And I know the day is coming when it's going to crumble.

God's going to tear that thing down. Mary with the crown on her head, all glorious, holding this little baby. He's insignificant.

See, they don't do away with Christ. They just minimize Him. It's the Pope.

It's Mary. It's the priest. Brethren, it's not over in the Catholic church.

It's here. It's here. We need to keep our eyes on Christ.

Ever on Christ. Ever, ever, ever. Know Him.

Know Him. Learn Him. Sit in the school of Christ.

And you will grow up to mature manhood. You see what he's saying? You don't walk like the Gentiles any longer if you've learned Christ. You see, it's very impacting.

It's transformative. As you get to learn Him, it will change you so that you'll no longer walk like the Gentiles do because that's not the way you learn Christ. Oh, brethren, this is the key to our growth.

We grow up into Him Who is the Head. That's what we're going to get to in v. 15. I think of the roots growing down into.

How do I grow up into? I'm growing up into His likeness, into His stature, into His image. But remember that truth. As I behold the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, I grow from one degree of glory to the next into His image.

Father, I pray, give us this. Protect us. Help us.

Grow us. Show us Christ. Lord, give us the grace to truly learn.

We don't want to read those Gospels, read Scripture and find it to be a dead letter. Lord, so many of us, we know. We know what it is to read and we didn't get anything out of it.

We know that there's other days when we read and it's like it comes out of those pages and grabs hold of us. We feel our hearts become warm. We feel our brains pressed to its limits.

We know those times too. That's what we want. We so desire that.

And I ask that it might be a reality as we turn our eyes unto Christ. Help us, we pray in His name, Amen.

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