

MATURITY

“What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father” (Gal. 4:1, 2)

This text deals specifically with “immaturity” under the law compared with “maturity” in Christ. The law treated people like children who needed constant supervision. For example, the law required all sacrifices to be brought to the Tabernacle and overseen by the priests. Any Israelite failing to do so would be “cut off from his people”. The specific purpose for this was to prevent the Israelites of making sacrifices to idols (Lev. 17:1 -7). In short, under law, the Israelites couldn’t be trusted! In Christ, however, we can be trusted. Now, in Christ, we can worship God in spirit and in truth wherever we may choose to do so (Jn. 4:20 – 24).

Paul continued to the Galatians: **“So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.” (Gal. 4:3 – 7)**

The contrast between law and grace is dramatic. Just as new wine cannot be contained in old wine skins, the freedom we have in Christ cannot be experienced under the law. Note that our transition from being a slave to a son involves the Holy Spirit. Something supernatural happens to those who are “born again”. Those who are born of the flesh are flesh, but those who are born of the Spirit are Spirit. There is a spiritual dimension to those who are born of a Spiritual Seed (Jn. 3:1-12). The law sought to “conform” us by fear of punishment and it failed. In Christ we are not “conformed” we are “transformed” (Rom. 12:2). This, of course, happens because of His indwelling Spirit (Rom. 8:1 – 17). Just as we grow physically to be more like our physical father, we also grow spiritually to be more like our Heavenly Father. Those who are sons of God do not continue in sin because His Seed abides within us (1 Jn. 3:9).

The purpose of this brief study is to focus on the importance of maturity. In particular, we will focus on the need for maturity for those who are in Christ. Those who are born again are supposed to “grow” in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter said it like this: **“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” (1 Pet. 2:1 – 3)**

There is something wrong when babes in Christ do not grow!

MATURITY IN CHRIST

Under the law maturity was assumed because of age. A Hebrew man had to be at least 20 years old to serve in the army (Nu. 1:3). A Levite could not minister in religious duties until he was 25 (Nu.

8:24). Priests could not officially begin their service until they were 30 (Nu. 4:3). Note that Jesus didn't begin His ministry until he was about 30 years of age (Lk. 3:23). It is possible, as you know, for people to grow physically without growing spiritually. The fact that the Corinthians were "infants in Christ" had nothing to do with how long they had been believers (1 Cor. 3:1). In this lesson we will focus on spiritual growth.

It is normal for children to mature. This maturity should involve every aspect of life. Jesus, for example, ". . . **grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men**" (Lk. 2:52). We also need to mature in these same ways that Jesus did. The Scriptures remind us that Jesus was obedient to His parents (Lk. 2:51). This is also a good example for everyone . Obeying our parents helps us to mature. As we have said, Jesus waited until He was about 30 years old to begin His ministry. The point is, if Jesus needed to mature so do we!

When Jesus was an infant He was not even able to care for Himself, let alone be the Savior of the world. He needed go mature! When the aged Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms he said: "**Mine eyes have seen your salvation**" (Lk. 2:30). This, of course, was a statement of faith. Simeon realized that the baby Jesus would grow to maturity. Jesus had to mature in order to complete His mission and so do we. While Jesus was a little child He was no different from a slave. His parents told Him what to do. As a child He was taking orders, not giving them. Unfortunately, believers who are immature also initiate nothing useful on their own and have to be told what to do. With maturity, however, Jesus learned to speak with authority, and so can we. Jesus learned obedience (Heb. 5:8), and so can we!

In 1950 Pearl S. Buck wrote a heart rending book about her firstborn daughter who was mentally retarded. The book was titled "The Child Who Never Grew Up". How sad! This poor child was forever a child. Sadder still, however, is eternal childhood for the Christian.

Spiritual immaturity was a problem in the early church and remains so today.

- The Corinthian church came behind in no spiritual gift, yet was pathetically immature. Please note: "**Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?**" (1 Cor. 3:1 – 3).
- A similar problem was revealed in the Hebrew letter: "**We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.**" (Heb. 5:11 – 14).
- Paul explained to the Ephesians that God gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers for the specific purpose of building up the Body of Christ to maturity, even to the measure of the fulness of Christ: "**Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth**

by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Eph. 4:14 – 16).

THE ROLE OF CHURCH LEADERS

The role of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers was **“to prepare God’s people for works of service” (Eph. 4:12)**. Church leaders are to bring God’s people to maturity. One way men demonstrate their ability to lead in the church is by the way they manage their own family. Paul explained: **“If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church” (1 Tim. 3:5)**.

If a child went to school at the age of 5 unable to feed himself, the school would have reason to investigate. Either the child was severely retarded or the parents had failed in their responsibility. Yet it is common for many who have been believers for 5 years to be incapable of studying the Bible by themselves. By contrast, when the Jerusalem church was scattered by persecution “they preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:4). Note the difference. They didn’t go everywhere seeking for someone to preach to them, they went everywhere preaching to others.

The word “feral” means “wild”. Abandoned animals are often referred to as “feral”. Occasionally children are also abandoned. Some have been adopted by animals. One such child was discovered in India in May 1972. He was about four years old at the time. The boy was playing with wolf cubs and had apparently been raised by a she wolf. Consequently, he behaved like a wolf. He had very dark skin, long hooked fingernails, matted hair and calluses on his palms, elbows and knees. He had sharpened teeth and craved blood. He loved the darkness, ate raw chickens, and was friends with dogs and jackals. He was named Shamdeo and taken to the village of Narayanpur. Although weaned off raw meat, he never talked, but did learn some sign language. In 1978 he was admitted to Mother Theresa’s Home for the Destitute and Dying in Lucknow, where he was re-named Pascal. He died in February 1985. He was only about 17 years old.

Adolf Hitler was born an illegitimate child to a practicing Catholic and was baptised in the [Roman Catholic Church](#). Even though he expressed disbelief and hostility to Christianity, in 1904 he acquiescing to his mother’s wish and was confirmed at the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Linz, Austria. Apparently Hitler never again attended [Mass, went to church](#), or received the [sacraments](#) after leaving home. Hitler, however, saw that the future was in the hands of young people and therefore began training them from the age of 10 to think as he thought. From the 1920s onward German young people were carefully indoctrinated with Nazi beliefs. By 1936 the “Hitler Youth” numbered 5.4 million. They were indoctrinated with the “supremacy of the aryan race” and other obscene beliefs. They were even trained to break up Church youth groups.

Chairman Mao did the same thing with the young people of China. They became part of the infamous Red Guard. Pol Pot followed suit in Cambodia and empowered teenagers to execute those deemed to be enemies of the state.

How different the world would be if only Adolf Hitler and other godless dictators had a Christian father to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

GIVING ACCOUNT

“So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12).

When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden they both tried to avoid responsibility for their own actions. Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent. In the final analysis, however, “each one of us shall give account of himself to God”.

This principle is repeated many times and in many ways in the Scriptures.

- In the parable of the talents each individual was responsible for his own actions (Matt. 25:14 – 28).
- In the parable of the unjust steward each individual was held responsible for their own personal decisions (Lk. 16:1 – 13).
- The same is true with reference to the parable of the ten minas. The master said to the man who was condemned “I will judge you by your own words” (Lk. 19:11 – 27).
- Paul reminded Timothy that Alexander the metal worker did him a great deal of harm but the Lord would repay him for what he had done (2 Tim. 4:14).
- The letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation also indicate that we will all be saved or lost as individuals. Note this gracious invitation: **“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20).**
- Etc.

The fact that you may have come from a bad home or a bad church does not relieve you of your own personal responsibility to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). If you have invited Jesus Christ into your heart he will help you to grow and will never leave you or forsake you (Col. 2:19, Heb. 13:5).

In addition to the help of the indwelling Christ there are a wide variety of human helpers whom God has provided to help you grow: **“All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future – all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God” (1 Cor. 21 – 23).**

Moreover, we also have the help of angels. They are ministering spirits sent forth for the specific purpose of serving those who will inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14). Jesus had angels minister to Him (Mk. 1:13; Lk. 22:43; etc). Since Jesus was tempted in all points like as we are (Heb. 4:15) we

know that we too can have the help of angels. In fact, we may have already encountered angels without knowing it (Heb. 13:2).

There is no reason to be negative for we are “ . . . **confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ**” (Phil. 1:6).

GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES

“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.” (2 Pet. 1:3, 4).

Please note that it is the “very great and precious promises” that cause us to grow in Christ and participate in His “divine nature”. Commandments like “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do have an appearance of wisdom, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence (Col. 2:20 – 23). The point is, the promises about knowing God are a greater incentive to mature than threats.

At this time you are probably not thinking about chocolate candy. The command to “not think about chocolate candy” is therefore counter productive. Now you are thinking about it. Similarly, Paul said that he would not have known about coveting if the law had not said “Do not covet” (Rom. 7:7, 8).

Obviously God knew this. He therefore did not give the Law to make men holy, but rather to make men aware of their sinfulness and consequently their need of salvation. Note these verses from the book of Romans:

- **“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.” (Rom . 3:19)**
- **“The law was added so that the trespass might increase” (Rom. 5:20).**
- **“For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.” (Rom . 7:5, 6).**
- **“What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead.” (Rom. 5:7, 8).**
- The law was “powerless” to change us and God knew it (Rom. 8:2).

- God therefore did not give us the Law to save us, but to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith (Gal. 3:24).

The point is that commandments, no matter how harsh, do not cause us to mature and be like Christ. We become partakers of the “divine nature” by means of the “very great and precious promises”.

Let us suppose, for example, that you intend to fast for forty days like Jesus did. Which would help you more?

- Forty commandments against food, or -
- Forty promises.

The point is that God’s exceeding great and precious promises help us to mature and be partakers of His divine nature.

CONNECTION WITH CHRIST

As a branch cannot bear fruit unless it abides in the Vine, neither can we unless we abide in Christ (Jn. 15:4, 5). Paul emphasized the same truth to the Colossians, but used the illustration of Christ as the Head of His Body. When describing someone who is unspiritual Paul wrote: **“He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its Connection with Christ is an integral part of becoming mature. Remember! One man plants, and another waters, but only God can make things grow (1 Cor. 3:7, 8).**

If you remain in contact with Christ you will grow! He will not abandon you like an orphan (Jn. 14:18). He will never leave you or forsake you (Heb. 13:5, 6). If your faith is as weak as a bruised reed he will not break you. Or if you almost giving up like a smoldering wick, He will not snuff you out. Jesus specializes in healing the infirm and setting the captives free (Lk. 4:18).

Christ in you is the hope of glory (Col. 1:27)

Just as the Spirit of God hovered over creation (Gen. 1:1) Jesus invites every one of us to come to Him for shelter. As a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, Jesus wants to hover over us (Matt. 23:37).

I’m sure you are familiar with the story of Jesus walking on the water. When Jesus invited Peter to walk on the water he was able to do so as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus. Note: **“Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of**

little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God” (Matt. 14:25 – 33)

IF YOU STAY CONNECTED WITH CHRIST YOU WILL GROW TO MATURITY!

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