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Biblical Suffering

## Suffering Because of Spiritual Growth

### Lesson 8

#### THE MARKS OF AN ADULT IN CHRIST

The goal of every new Christian should be to move out of babyhood into maturity in Christ. There are characteristics or marks of an adult in Christ. An adult in Christ is one who has reached spiritual maturity in his Christian life.

Spiritual maturity is the peak of adulthood which a Christian reaches after a continuous process of growth in the things of Christ, having moved through the babyhood and adolescent stages of spiritual growth.

#### WHAT SPIRITUAL MATURITY IS NOT

It is not a list of taboos. A person has not reached spiritual maturity because he has outwardly learned to keep a list of man-made, legalistic rules. Surely a mature Christian will gladly set aside certain questionable practices, which are not inherently sinful in themselves, to have a better testimony before men, but this maturity came from a growth in grace and not through legalism.

Maturity is not just what we no longer do, but what God does through us. It involves growth in grace as well as removal of sin. The mature man in Christ loves to study his Bible, pray and share the good news of Christ with others.

It is not traditionalism. A person does not become mature by going through external forms of worship.

A spiritually mature person is not someone who has picked up the spiritual talk of the Christian religion.

It is not church attendance. Spiritual maturity is not gained by attendance at meetings, whether it is the Sunday school, church services or the prayer meeting. For sure, the spiritually mature person will do these things, but one does not become mature by doing these things. There are multiple thousands of professing Christians who attend regularly all the meetings of their church, yet they are really very immature in their Christianity.

It is not activity. One may be terribly busy in the Lord's work and not be a mature Christian. A person may be barren and busy, exerting perspiration with little inspiration; bustle but no blessing. Surely, a spiritually mature person will become active in some ministries for the Lord, but his motivation will be completely different. He will have zeal based on knowledge and be motivated by the love of Christ for faithful service.

#### THE KEY TO SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Maturity is bound up with one's understanding and application of the Word of God. ***"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation" (1 Pet. 2:2). "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18).*** A mature Christian is one who studies the Bible on his own and also places around him men who are gifted Bible teachers.

***"From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."*** (1 Tim. 3:15-17.)

Paul encourages Timothy by reminding him that from a child he had known the Scriptures. He had been taught by his faithful grandmother and mother the Word of God. ***“I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.”*** (2 Tim. 1:5).

Timothy was raised in a home with a strong Christian influence and this was a tremendous advantage because he knew the Word of God extremely well. Apparently Timothy had some of the characteristics of indifference some second generation Christians have, because he had to be exhorted by Paul to move along and continue in his Christian life. Children from Christian homes tend to take their Christianity for granted, but it is a tremendous advantage to have learned the Bible from one’s youth. Never regret being raised in a Christian home.

How many people have become Christians and given themselves over to full-time Christian service because they had faithful mothers who prayed for them and taught them the Bible from the time they were old enough to understand! It was the knowledge of the Word that would make Timothy wise concerning his salvation. A knowledge of the Bible is the key to a deeper life with Christ.

Paul then exhorts Timothy to remember that all Scripture is inspired by God and it is profitable for teaching (doctrine), for rebuking (convict, reproof), for correcting (restoration to a right state of life or character), and training in righteousness (teaches ethics and morals).

Scripture is given for the purpose that Christians might be equipped. The word “equipped” means furnished completely, referring to maturity. The mature man is prepared to produce good works in his life through knowledge and application of the Word of God.

C.H. Spurgeon and D.L. Moody both had written inside the cover of their Bibles this saying, “Sin will keep you from the Bible or the Bible will keep you from sin.”

## **SPIRITUAL MATURITY BIBLICALLY CONSIDERED**

He is able to teach the Word. ***“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!”*** (Heb. 5:12). The spiritually mature person is able to be a teacher of the Bible. This does not have to be public teaching, but it involves knowing the Bible well enough to defend it and to teach it to others on a personal level.

He can take in strong meat or doctrine. ***“But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”*** (Heb. 5:14). Those who are mature in Christ love the Word and are open to new truth when the Holy Spirit reveals it to them. They know that God’s Word is authoritative and open their minds to it. They become willing to conform to scripture because they know that the Bible comes from God. He is able to discern good and evil. The spiritually mature person has a keen sense of ethics and morality. He is always misunderstood by the non-Christian world and is often misunderstood by babes in Christ.

He is constantly discerning (judging, examining) all things. ***“The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment”*** (1 Cor. 2:15). The spiritually mature person has keen spiritual insight and is constantly checking all things with the Word of God, his only rule for faith and practice.

He knows how to deal effectively with the brethren. ***“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”*** (Gal. 6:1). Only one who is spiritually mature should really rebuke another brother in Christ, for he has the wisdom from God to handle the situation. I am convinced that much of the rebuking of disobedient Christians should be done by the elders of a local church. This would eliminate much confusion in discipline.

## **SPIRITUAL MATURITY LOGICALLY CONSIDERED**

A spiritually mature person knows doctrine and applies it to his experience in life. Maturity is not how much we know but how much we apply. It is not how many times we have been through the Bible but how many times the Bible has been through us!

A mature person has great wisdom and operates on divine, Biblical principles. He views life from the divine viewpoint. He knows how to rest in God and has a certain calm about life, for he relates everything to God’s sovereign plan.

A spiritually mature person lives by faith and not by experiences. He knows how to mix the promises of God with faith. He does not get frustrated every time something goes wrong. He trusts in God in spite of adverse circumstances.

The adult in Christ produces to the maximum of his capacity. God has given each Christian certain natural and spiritual capacities. They are like light bulbs—some are fifty watts, some sixty, some one hundred, some two hundred and some are five hundred watts. The mature believer learns to operate to the maximum of his capacity. Those who are fifty watts can never be five hundred watts, but a person who is a one hundred watt and only operating on sixty watts in spiritual matters is not mature in the Christian faith.

## **PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS**

You must honestly evaluate your own degree of spiritual maturity and trust God to do a continual work of grace in your life. Maturity comes through time and use of the Word. It is possible for a person to be saved only a short while and be a dynamic Christian, but without time there is no maturity. It is also possible for a Christian to have been saved for thirty years and still be a babe because there has been no consistent use of the Bible.

Someone asked me some years ago if I thought I was a mature Christian. My answer was that I think I am now beginning to enter into adulthood in spiritual matters, but I do not believe I have walked long enough with the Lord to call myself mature. I have been given knowledge but it takes time to become mature. I do believe there are some men who are mature in Christ. They have knowledge and time on their side plus the fact that they desire to apply the Word to their experience. For myself, I believe that I am passing out of the adolescent stage and moving into adulthood with an exceeding amount of maturing yet to do.

You must see that maturity is related to knowledge of the Word. Therefore, you must be diligent to study the Bible and to know the truth. One of the biggest deceptions ever placed on the people of God by Satan is that the layman cannot read and understand the Word of God. You must have knowledge, for you cannot live by truth you do not know.

For you who are reaching some degree of spiritual maturity, be careful not to think yourself so mature that you are past the stage where you no longer need to grow. It is possible for a mature person in Christ to get overconfident, believing that he has arrived spiritually. We never stop growing or learning in this life, for if we did, we would be perfect. Our roots can always grow deeper in Christ.

Spiritual maturity of the already spiritually mature can be compared with the giant red wood trees in California. They say that these gigantic trees are no longer growing in height but each year they become bigger in diameter and their roots grow deeper. Their development is in quality and not quantity. So the adult Christian can always grow deeper in quality of spiritual matters.