

What A Mature Christian Looks Like

Ephesians 4:14-16

When we were children, we couldn't wait until we turned thirteen, because that meant we were finally teenagers. When we were teenagers, we couldn't wait until we turned 18 or even 21, and we dreamed of the freedom we would have when that happened. But when we got older, we looked back and realized how quickly those years flew by. When you ask a child how old she is, she may say, "I'm nine and a half." But an older person will never include that "and a half" designation, because we don't want to rush it! Ray Stedman, in his book, *Body Life*, said that he once asked a boy how old he was. "Quick as a flash he said, 'I'm twelve, going on thirteen, but soon to be fourteen.'" That was a boy who couldn't wait to grow up!

When I talk to my daughter about how often her children are having birthdays, she sighs and says something about how they seem to be growing up so fast! And then she will say something that many mothers have said through the ages, "I wish they just could stay this age."

But then comes the time when as a teenager that child does something out of character for a young person that age, and in exasperation the parent will say, "I wish you would grow up!" When an adult behaves in a way which seems to be out of character for his or her age, someone might say in disgust, "Oh, grow up!" You see, when a child acts like a child, we all think it's cute. But when an adult acts like a child, it's not very attractive at all. Complaining about life's circumstances, failing to act responsibly, consistently making bad decisions, acting as though the whole world revolves around him or acting selfishly—they all indicate that a person needs to grow up. But when the day comes that we realize that it's not all about us, after all, we have begun the process of maturity.

Christian maturity is what Paul is talking about in our passage today. Just before this particular passage, Paul was telling us about four important gifts God has given to the Church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors/teachers. He told us in verse twelve that these gifts are given "*to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*" The goal, as we see in verse thirteen, is that "*we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature.*"

In other words, in the great plan of God, we are all to "grow up" into Christ. But just because someone has lived a long time does not mean that he or she is

spiritually mature. So how do we know if we are actually growing in Christ? What does a mature Christian look like? There are so many different passages in the Scriptures that address this, but here in Ephesians 4 I see three important indicators as to what a mature Christian looks like.

1 A Mature Christian is stable in his beliefs, v. 14

Look again at verse 14: *“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 men in their deceitful scheming.”* Paul mixes his metaphors here. First, he says we will no longer be infants; the *King James Version* uses the word “children.” It literally means “one not speaking,” so he’s talking about the very youngest.

He has just referred to us being “mature” in verse 13, then for emphasis goes to the opposite end of the spectrum by saying that *“we will no longer be infants.”* Think about that: an infant is a human being which is completely dependent on others. An infant thinks differently than does an adult. An infant demands its own way, and gets very upset if denied. An infant is easily distracted by the next new thing that comes along.

Here he refers to the immature individual as being like that spiritually. His way is the only way. If things don’t go to suit her, everyone hears about it. The latest and shiniest teaching that comes along grabs his attention, because he can’t tell the difference between it and the truth. His spiritual attention span is very short, bouncing around from this idea to that teaching to that philosophy, whichever offers him the most enjoyment at the moment.

On the other hand, the spiritually mature person is stable in his beliefs. He or she is not easily shaken, disturbed or distracted either by the circumstances of life or by the latest teaching that comes along. His belief system is based on what God has said in the Scriptures, and he is confident and unwavering in that belief.

Then Paul says that we will no longer be *“tossed back and forth by the waves,”* or blown about by every wind of false doctrine that comes along. The original language paints a picture of a piece of driftwood being tossed around by a wave that dashes violently against the boulders on the shoreline. Used here it describes that immature individual who doesn’t have any direction of his own, but just goes along with whatever he’s told. It means to get upset or disturbed mentally. The world’s system of beliefs is like a storm rolling across the ocean, churning up the

waves until they are dangerously high, and the spiritually immature is the driftwood that gets tossed back and forth.

What tosses them back and forth, as we see at the end of verse 14, is “*the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.*” The word that is translated “cunning” there referred to gambling with loaded dice. It was a deliberate attempt to deceive someone. The point there is that this is not an accident! The culture of our world is steadfastly running away from what God says is right, and is seeking to pull everyone it can with it.

You’ve got to see this: the original word for “craftiness” here in this verse conveys the idea of manipulating what is false to make it look like truth. Doesn’t that describe the world we live in? Children are easily deceived, and so is the spiritually immature.

On the other hand, the spiritually mature Christian is more like the boulder on the shoreline, bearing the violence of the storm without being shaken. The world may try to tell us in our day that what is right is wrong, and what is wrong is right, but the spiritually mature Christian is not swayed by public opinion or shifting moral values. His “hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” A mature Christian is stable in his beliefs.

2 A Mature Christian lives the truth, v. 15

Now in verse 15, Paul says, “*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.*” The word “truth” here means what is real, versus what it appears to be. It goes deeper than mere perception and sinks down to the level of actual reality. It stands in contrast to the falsehood and deceit we see in verse 14.

This is a little tricky, because what exactly is “speaking the truth in love”? Some interpret this to mean that we can say whatever we want to, as long as we preface it with, “Now, I’m telling you this in love.” Our idea is that we are going to straighten somebody out—but if we do with gentleness, then we’ve done it in love.

No, no, no! It has nothing to do with correcting the behavior of someone else. It has to do with living a life that faithfully follows truth. The verb here is difficult to translate; in English we include the word “speaking” but it literally reads, “truthing in love”—in other words, the emphasis is not so much on what we *say* being true, but on our *being* true. It includes speaking, of course, but it’s so much more than

that. Naturally, when we live that kind of life, the things we say will also be true. One follows the other.

It means that in the face of the cunning and craftiness of men in our society, we oppose that way of life by being true, by focusing on what is real and not merely what is perceived. It means that our lives are lived according to what is true, and our standard for truth is the revelation God has given us in His Word—even if everyone doesn't believe it.

This growth into spiritual maturity does not happen by accident. So if we want to be mature Christians, as the Scripture teaches us, then we must determine in our hearts that we are going to focus on what is true, and *live* that way, and not be pulled aside or distracted by the manipulations of the world. Listen to *Him*, and not to those who do not know Him!

3 A Mature Christian works with and supports other believers, v. 16

That's what we see when we read verse 16: *"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."* Tie the thought together: in verse 12 Paul talked about the body of Christ being *"built up,"* and here in verse 16 he uses another architectural term. The *King James Version* says "fitly joined together" and describes how the various pieces of a building are cut and shaped so that they fit together. When that happens, the structure is stronger and more secure.

The wording here tells us that this is God's design. His Church is not a heap of stones or a stack of lumber. The different parts, by design, have been fitted together. We have been cut and shaped and chiseled so that we fit together. The wording also tells us that this is an ongoing process, in progress all these years and continuing to this very day. The Church is a living organism, and Christ is the Head. You and I as functioning parts of that Body have a part in building the Church of God!

God's plan is that in the Church we might find strength and support from one another. You can't build a house from a single two-by-four, and the Church does not even exist with just one individual. But sadly there are too many Christians who go through their lives without any connection with the Church, or at least, not until there is some tragedy in their lives. Someone has written, "Far too many Christians try to function in isolation from their brothers and sisters" (Malcolm Tolbert).

It may not make much sense to you, but the way God has designed His Church is such that we need each other if we are going to grow spiritually into this maturity Paul is writing about here. We cooperate together because we belong to each other. The growth comes from the Head, which is Christ, but the growth occurs as “*each one does its part.*” The message is that just as every ligament in the body has an important role in the body, so each and every member of Christ’s Body has an indispensable part to play.

As we saw last week, we each have been assigned at least one spiritual gift, and as we use that gift for His glory we contribute to the spiritual growth of others! You need their support and they need yours.

This means that I’ve got to guard the integrity of my heart, and you must guard the integrity of your heart, so that we all stay true and faithful to Him. If I am unfaithful to Christ you’re going to be affected, and vice versa. We are each a supporting ligament in the Body of Christ, and every one of us is necessary.

What does a “mature Christian” look like? Though there are many Scripture passages that address this, from Ephesians 4 today we’ve seen at least three characteristics: The mature Christian is stable in what he believes, lives the truth, and works and supports other believers. When all this is functioning the way it should, the Body of Christ is built up.

If someone said to you, “Oh, grow up!” they would probably say it in disgust over something you had said or done that was childish. But when the Bible says, “Grow up!” we’d better sit up and pay attention.

So the question before us today is “Am I a mature Christian?” Am I a growing Christian? Am I closer to Christ and more mature in my life with Him today than I was this time last year? And where will I be this time next year? What steps am I taking so that I actually grow in my walk with Christ?