

INTRODUCTION

We continue our verse-by-verse study of what I am calling, “God’s Guidebook for Growth.” Last week we talked about the church and what a true charismatic church is: A church where the gifts of the Holy Spirit are operating according to the Biblical principles. Today, I want to continue that same passage, and keep talking about the church and the importance of growing up and becoming a mature believer. The title of the message is, “Are You Growing Up or Just Older?” Many of you have heard this expression so you can fill in the blank. Oftentimes, you receive a birthday card saying something like, “You’re not getting older; you’re just getting better.” That may or may not be true. As some people get older, they do get better, but as some people get older, they just get bitter. Some people are adding years to their lives; others are adding life to their years. The same can be said spiritually. There are a lot of people who are not growing spiritually. They are not growing up they are just growing older.

A number of years ago Amy Grant had a song that went something like this: I know a man / Maybe you know him too / You never can tell / It might even be you / He knelt at the altar / And that was the end / He’s saved / And that’s all that matters to him / His spiritual tummy / It can’t take too much / One day a week / He gets his spiritual lunch / On Sunday he puts on / His spiritual best / And gives his language / A spiritual rest. It went on to talk about how this guy has been a Christian for many, many years but he is a fat, fat baby. There is no growth. That’s what we are talking about today. Is there any sign of spiritual maturity or growth in your life?

What is a mature Christian? Charles Swindoll says, “A grown-up Christian displays wisdom, self-discipline and commitment to a consistent walk with Christ. He or she is determined to obey God regardless of the cost, to seek regular nourishment from his word also, a mature Christian strives to reach out and care for others whether they be friend or foe. Such an individual willingly shoulders his or her responsibilities with a contagiously positive attitude. That’s what a mature, grown-up Christian is.”

Think back for just a moment. When did you become a Christian? Do you remember what year it was? I was nine. I have been a Christian for 33 years. I just want to say to you I don’t feel like I am a mature Christian yet. In a lot of ways, I feel like I am still in my spiritual adolescence. I am trying to grow as a Christian. I think I am a long, long way from where I ought to be and where God wants me to be spiritually. So I’m still in school spiritually speaking. I’m struggling and I’m striving to grow as a Christian. Is that your attitude? Or have you just sort of said, “I’m just going to kind of cruise along now. I’m going to go to heaven when I die. I know my name is written down in the Lamb’s Book of Life and so my ticket to heaven is punched. That’s all I need to do is just wait until I die and go to heaven.” You ought to desire to grow as a Christian and if you don’t have that desire, something is wrong.

I want us to read this text now that talks about the importance of growing up and becoming a mature Christian.

Ephesians 4:11-16. “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith

and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness 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 men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into 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.”

Paul says, “I don’t want you to remain a spiritual baby.” The Guinness World Book of Records says the average weight of a newborn is 7 pounds, 6 ounces. The smallest surviving newborn was born in London, England, and weighed only 11 ounces. The largest newborn ever recorded was a child born in Turkey in 1961 weighing 21 pounds, 4 ounces. That’s a big baby! I’ve seen bigger babies than that on Sunday morning in churches, some weighing 150 pounds, 180 pounds, maybe even 200 pounds plus. I’m talking about someone who has been a Christian for many years, but there is no evidence of spiritual growth in their life.

The key part in our text today is verse 13. Paul says, “I want you to become mature.” If you have a King James Bible, it says “to become a perfect man.” That’s an unfortunate translation, because it misleads so many Christians. Many Christians read that word “perfect” and say, “That leaves me out right now because I’ll never be perfect. There are so many faults and shortcomings and flaws in my life, I will never be perfect!” So they give up. It’s not the word “perfect,” it doesn’t mean “without fault” it means “mature” and you can become “mature.” It is the Greek word used to describe a tree when it produced fruit. It is talking about a person growing to the place of fruitfulness and maturity.

I. MOTIVE FOR MATURITY

1. Understand our diversity

Let’s talk about three things about spiritual maturity. Number one: What is our motive for maturity? Why do we want to grow up? Why is it important to grow as a Christian? Let me give you a couple of reasons. Number one, to understand our diversity. Paul is talking about the body of Christ here. How diverse the body of Christ is. One reason you ought to want to grow up is because immature Christians have a hard time appreciating the diversity of the body of Christ. The more mature you are as a Christian, the more you can celebrate the diversity in the body. Have you discovered there are all different kinds of Christians? There are short-haired Christians, long-haired Christians, no-haired Christians; there are white collar Christians, blue collar Christians, no collar Christians; there are Baptist Christians, Methodist Christians, Pentecostal Christians—all different kinds of Christians. An immature believer has a hard time accepting anyone except somebody just like them. Paul is talking about the beautiful diversity of the body. Diversity is very important, because if you were exactly like me, one of us would be unnecessary. I think there are no two identical people in the body of Christ. We are all so different. We look different. We have different gifts. We have different ministries. So, appreciation of the beautiful diversity of the body is something that comes with maturity.

2. Improve our unity

Number two is to create or to enjoy or to help our unity to improve our unity. Paul writes there in verse 13, “until we all reach unity in the faith.”

We do not create unity; it is something the Holy Spirit creates. We ought to protect it and strive toward it. Verse 13 says, “Unity is something you are always working toward.” I don’t think you ever come to the place as a church where you say, “We have found unity.” It is always striving for more and more unity. Does that mean unity in a church is that a sign nobody ever disagrees? That nobody has their own opinion? No, that’s part of the diversity. You can disagree with me sometimes. Many times, and that’s okay, as long as you love me and I love you and Jesus is our Lord, there can still be unity. I think churches have unity sometimes and unity is not even demonstrated until you get threatened from the outside.

When I was growing up, the family next to us was a retired couple. They were always arguing. One would think they just hated each other. Sometimes, we could even hear them arguing in our house next door. My mother was a nurse and often went over to help the man, who had some health problems by delivering some medicine, or taking his blood pressure or temperature or something. She always came back so frustrated, because they were always fighting and “at each other.” She never took sides. One day she made the mistake of taking sides, stepping in and stood with the wife and they kind of ganged up on the husband. She said then, an amazing thing happened. She said, “When I took sides, both of them ganged up on me.” There was unity there—you just didn’t see it. When that unity was threatened they go together in a hurry. That’s something beautiful about the unity in the body of Christ. Sometimes, churches may not look like they have unity, but when the threat comes, the unity is there underlying. It’s not the unity we create; it’s the unity the Holy Spirit creates. It is a miracle. That’s the motive for our maturity. That’s why you want to grow in order to appreciate the unity and the diversity of the body.

II. THE MEASURE OF OUR MATURITY

Number two, let’s talk about the measure of our maturity. What is our standard? When you start measuring yourself and ask, “How can I tell if I am a mature Christian? What is my standard?” Let me tell you what it is NOT. Number one it is not the finest of mankind. Sometimes we look at somebody like Billy Graham and we say, “Wow! He is a mature Christian and if I could just be like Billy Graham; he my standard. That’s my measurement.” That’s the wrong measurement. Sometimes we look at somebody like Mother Theresa and we say, “Oh she’s a wonderful Christian. That’s my standard.” No that’s not to be your standard. It is neither the finest nor the frailest of mankind that is our standard. Sometimes we look at a bum in the gutter, and we say, “Huh! Look at that I am so much better than he is and we start assigning values to people.” The Bible never talks about that in fact, Paul warns against comparing yourself to others.

Some of you heard the funny little story about a little boy who had a puppy. He told his mother he was going to sell the puppy. She said, “How much are you going to ask for him?” He said, “Well he’s a pretty good puppy. I’m going to ask \$10,000 for him.” She laughed and said, “Good luck.” He came back before lunch and he didn’t have his puppy. She said, “Did you sell your puppy?” He said, “Yes, ma’am.” She said, “Did you have to come down off your price any?” He

said, "Not a penny." She said, "Do you mean to tell me you got \$10,000 for that puppy?" He said, "Not exactly. I traded him for two \$5,000 cats."

That's the mistake we make. We look at somebody like Billy Graham or Mother Theresa and we say, "That's a \$5,000 Christian." We look at some bum in the gutter and we say, "That is a \$2 person. I'm better than them." We start assigning all of these values. That's *wrong*. Any other human being is not our standard. Our measurement is the fullness (and you might even say the filling) of Jesus Christ. Look at the last part of verse 13. It talks about becoming mature. It says, "attaining to," meaning something you are moving toward, "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." That's our standard.

Some of you are saying. "Now that's even more frustrating because I look at Billy Graham and I think at least he's a human being I can maybe one day be like him, but when you put Jesus up as my standard, that is indeed hopeless! I can never be like Jesus." You are right! You can never be like Jesus. I'm not talking about you trying to imitate Jesus. I'm not asking you to try to copycat Jesus. I'm talking about you coming to a place in your life when you surrender to the filling and the fullness of the person of Jesus.

In Charles Sheldon's book, *In His Steps*, he says when you come to a place and you don't know what to do, ask yourself this question "What would Jesus do if he were here?" (WWJD) And you would do that. That is a great place to start, but there are some inherent dangers in it and it can really prevent true maturity if that is the only question you ever ask, because basically that question has some problems. "What would Jesus do if he were here?" and then you do it. What's wrong with that question? First, it presumes you would know what Jesus would do in any given situation. I don't know about you but, I am not smart enough to figure out exactly what Jesus would do in any given situation. I can guess. I can surmise. But I'm not omniscient. I don't know what He would do. The second problem with that question is it also presumes you could DO what Jesus could do even if you knew what Jesus would do. One time Jesus was confronted with five thousand hungry people. He took five loaves of bread and two fish and fed five thousand people. Can you do that? I can't. One time Jesus was on the mountain. There was the ship on the sea and he needed to get from the mountain to the ship, so He walked on the water. Can you do that? No. The biggest problem with that question "What would Jesus do if he were here?" is he IS here! He is not off somewhere. He is not some historical character dead and buried. Jesus is HERE! In the person of his Holy Spirit and where is he? In the person with the Holy Spirit. He lives in you and he lives in me. That's a good place to start, but true maturity comes to the position of saying, "I don't have to ask that question. Instead what I need to do is yield myself to the fullness of his Holy Spirit and let Jesus simply live his life through me. You must surrender to him. You don't have to imitate Jesus. You have to surrender to the lordship of Jesus in your life.

A lot of people say, "I'm just doing the best I can for Jesus." Well good for you! But it's a lot better to let Jesus do his normal through you than for you to try to do your best for him. That's meat for some of you. I can see some spiritual babies choking on that right now. But when you come to a place of spiritual maturity, you will let him live his life through you, rather than you trying to imitate him. He is our standard our measure.

III. THE MARKS OF A MATURE CHRISTIAN

That brings us to number three. What are the marks of a mature Christian? How can you tell if you are a mature Christian? There are some marks. There is a doorjamb inside my closet door at home with a series of marks on it. One of them says “Laura Grace” and the other says “Jenni.” The lowest marks are next to the date we first moved to Tyler. Then, a little higher is another mark. And more marks, each a little higher. Of course, there is one for me and it hasn’t changed. There is one for Cindy and it hasn’t changed. One time our good friend, Chet Haney, pastor of First Baptist in Woodville, was over at our house and we were measuring. He’s 6’6”, so there is one up there that says, “Uncle Chet.” Those are marks that can tell us there has been some growth in the lives of our children.

1. Emotional stability

What are some marks you are growing as a Christian? There are three in this passage. Number one, there is emotional stability. Verse 14 says, “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.” It is okay for you to be a spiritual baby for an acceptable period of time; because that’s the only way you enter the Christian life. You are born into the family of God. Jesus said, “You must be born again.” There is an acceptable time for you to be a baby. A baby needs food. You feed on the milk of the word. A baby needs exercise. You find a ministry in the church. A baby needs warmth and fellowship. That’s why you come to a church. A baby needs to learn how to talk. That’s what prayer is. The problem is some of you have been baby Christians for ten, twenty, maybe even thirty years. That’s what Paul is talking about. So how can you tell if you haven’t grown? Is there instability in your life? He uses two pictures here. He uses waves. Do you ever feel like spiritually and emotionally you are just tossed back and forth? Is the way you feel determined by the weather or how other people treat you or by how the stock market is doing? Are you bouncing back and forth, emotionally? The Bible says a mark of spiritual maturity is stability.

Have you ever noticed how an immature child never guards his emotions? If he is angry, you know it. If he is happy, you know he is happy. If he is sad, you know he is sad. They have no control over their emotions. It’s similar to how waves come and go.

When I was a kid I was playing checkers with one of my family members. I was losing and I am so competitive (I really hate to lose!). When I lost that checker game, it made me so angry, I hit the checkerboard. Checkers flew everywhere. I picked up the checkerboard and started hitting my opponent over the head with it! My dad came in and said, “Son, that’s no way to treat your grandmother!” (It was actually my brother) But that was just a sign of immaturity. I got mad and I expressed it. There are a lot of people going around today saying, “If you have an emotion, express it immediately.” That’s the way a kid acts. Jesus said, “You are to be childlike but not childish.” An emotional stability is a sign of maturity.

In 1824 there was a lawyer in Illinois with a hot-temper. He publicly criticized another attorney. (This was back in the days when they still had duels) The attorney who had been criticized challenged the offender to a duel. They chose swords, but the hot-head was afraid he was going

to die, because he was not much of a fighter. They met on a sandbar in the middle of the Mississippi River, swords drawn. The critical attorney was afraid he was going to die because of his mouth and his temper. Fortunately, the seconds intervened, negotiated and the two attorneys were reconciled. The hot-tempered lawyer apologized for what he had said. He was so shaken by the experience, that for the rest of his life he decided he would not shoot off his mouth until his brain was in gear. That lawyer later became President of the United States. Abraham Lincoln was a man who had to have a cool head in the midst of one of the greatest crises our country has ever faced. He realized his anger was an act of immaturity. With maturity he learned he could keep his emotions under control.

2. Spiritual stability

It's also talking about spiritual stability. Have you ever noticed any time any little nuance or spiritual flag comes up, some people jump on it immediately? There are some people who go from church to church to church. It seems like whoever has the newest little turn on the truth that's where they want to go. They are blown about by every wind of doctrine. Stability comes from getting in the Word and staying in the Word. You will not be led astray. Who do you think comprises the membership rolls of all of these cults today? Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians who didn't know the Word. Somebody came knocking on their door on a Saturday morning and gave them a messed-up translation of the scriptures and said, “I want to tell you there is no Hell.” Some Baptist says, “I kind of like that idea. I want to join up with you folks!” They are not grounded in the Word and are spiritually immature. Some of these folks have been in churches for twenty and thirty years. Do you have emotional stability or are you still blown about? Do you have spiritual stability? That's a mark of maturity.

3. Loving speech

Number three. There must be loving speech. Verse 15 says, “Instead, speaking the truth in love,” the sign the mark of a mature Christian is you will speak the truth, but you will always speak it in love. There are a lot of people who will come up to you and say, “I just want to warn you the truth hurts.” What they are about to say is, “I'm about to hurt you!” There are a lot of people who are long on truth, but short on love. Write down these three words: Brutality, hypocrisy, maturity. I want to show you the difference in those three. Brutality is when you speak the truth, but there is no love; truth without love is brutal. Some people think that is a wise attribute. No that's brutality. Hypocrisy is love without the truth. Telling somebody you love them but you are not willing to be truthful with them. You don't really love them— that's hypocrisy if you are not willing to be truthful with them, because honesty and truth-telling are the basis of a meaningful relationship. Now maturity is speaking the truth in love.

Look at brutality; that's the way a kid acts. Have you ever noticed a child will say anything? They don't care about hurting your feelings—they'll just say anything. That's why if you are a parent and have a three-year-old here in the nursery, that's why right now the nursery worker is probably bending down saying, “Now, what did Mommy do after Daddy threw the casserole at you?” They tell everything that happens at home. That's like the little boy who was standing in line at the grocery store. Standing right in front of them was a large man, so the little boy says out loud, (loud enough for everybody to hear) “Daddy, that sure is a fat man!” “*Son be quiet.*”

Don't say that!” Suddenly, the man’s beeper went off and the little boy said, “Watch out, Daddy! He’s backing up.” You know a kid or an immature person will say anything. I don’t know about you, but I know some grownups who are that way, grownups who just say whatever comes into their minds. It is never filtered through Christian maturity. True Christian maturity means you will speak the truth in love. How can you tell the difference? Anytime you are going to tell somebody the truth and you are telling it to them to hurt them, that’s not speaking the truth in love but anytime you are speaking the truth to them because you genuinely care for them and you want to help them that’s speaking the truth in love.

When I was in college, I was a youth minister and in this youth group there were several high school guys who felt called into the ministry. These are young men I still talk to and meet with and tried to disciple through the years. There was one young man, a sharp, high school guy whose parents did not attend church. Honestly, his parents did not care for him too much if you know what I mean. They were more involved in their lives than his, but he was a Christian who came to our church and felt called into the ministry. He had a real problem. You know how cruel teenagers can be. This guy had terrible body odor. I’m not talking about normal perspiration. It was something unusually unpleasant. Every Wednesday night at Bible study, there were always two empty chairs on either side of him. Whenever we took a youth trip on the bus, nobody ever sat by him, because it was just so obvious. He was a sharp guy, except for this problem—and he seemed to be unaware of it. Nobody wanted to tell him. One weekend I brought him back up to Samford University and drove all the way back up there with my windows down. He stayed with me in the dorm room and I decided the next day to tell him about his problem, because I loved him. I was terrified! I didn’t sleep a whole lot that night. I was trying to figure out, “How am I going to say it without hurting him?”

The next morning after breakfast, I said to him, “Do you really believe I love you?” “Oh, yeah!” “Do you really believe I really want the very best for you?” “Yeah!” This guy is only 3 or 4 years younger than I was so I said, “I just want to tell you that you have a real problem with body odor.” At first he thought I was just kidding, because we kidded around a lot and I said, “No, you really do! And everybody notices it. If you want God to use you, you are going to have to deal with that. I am telling you this because I love you.” It was so hard for me to do! It was one of those things I just had to get the courage to say. I said, “The first thing I would suggest is you go to a doctor, because I think it is some kind of problem.” He took my advice and went to a doctor and I don’t know exactly what he did, but the problem disappeared and he hasn’t had it since. Today that young man is pastor of a church that today with over 2,000 people in attendance. God is blessing him. We have never said anything about it since. Several years ago he got me aside and he said, “I just want to tell you how much I appreciate your being willing to love me enough to tell me about that problem.” I’m glad I did; *he’s* glad I did. The thing I want to ask you this morning is “Is there someone you know and love that you need to say something to them truthfully?” You’re not saying it to tear them down, but because you love them and you want them to be the very best for God that they can be you tell them in love. That’s a sign of maturity. Loving speech, but if you are someone who is going around trying to assassinate people verbally, that is a sign of immaturity.

4. Living service

Number four: Living service. A mature Christian is serving God in the living body of Christ. Look at 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.” Are you part of the body of Christ? Are you doing your work? Is there some ministry or some service you are involved in?

We have a strange idea about service. It’s like the little boy who went to church one Sunday and when he went home he said, “Momma, why did they have that American flag in the sanctuary?” She said, “Honey, that was in memory of the men who died in the service.” He gaped and said, “The morning service or the evening service?” I have been in some like that. And it is that way for a lot of people, because there are some who “serve” in this experience but this is really worship. Worship can be a form of service, but when you leave these doors in just a few moments, that’s where the “service” begins for many of you. Now, Paul says “You are part of the body of Christ.” It’s like a body that when every part is moving then, the body is moving.

CONCLUSION

Have you ever known somebody whose hand did not work? The brain was sending impulses “Move, move...” but the hand is paralyzed. That’s so unfortunate. Do you know what we call a part of the body of Christ that doesn’t do anything? We just call them a church member and the head Jesus is trying to tell you to do your ministry. He has gifted you. He has called you to some area of service, and when you don’t do it, the body of Christ in that sense is paralyzed. And so a mature Christian has emotional and spiritual stability a mature Christian speaks the truth in love and a mature Christian is involved in some area of ministry. Are you simply a spectator? Do you come on Sundays, go home, and come back the next week? You are not serving God anywhere? If you are not that part of the body of Christ is paralyzed. We are not working against each other. We are all working together.

Did you hear about the business meeting the tools held in the toolbox? Mr. Hammer presided because he was sort of the biggest and the strongest. He called the meeting to order. Mr. Saw stood up and said, “I think we ought to get rid of Mr. Hammer, because he is always knocking people and making so much noise.” Mr. Plane stood up and said, “If you get rid of Mr. Hammer you have to get rid of Mr. Saw, because Mr. Saw is always cutting people down.” Mr. Ruler stood up and said, “If you get rid of Mr. Saw, you have to get rid of Mr. Plane, because Mr. Plane only does surface work he is so superficial.” Mr. Sandpaper stood up and said, “Well, if you get rid of Mr. Plane you have to get rid of Mr. Ruler, because Mr. Ruler is always measuring himself by other people and he always thinks he’s right.” Someone stood up and said, “If you get rid of Mr. Ruler, you have to get rid of Mr. Sandpaper, because a rougher guy you have never met. He is always rubbing people the wrong way.” So they just continued to argue and fuss and fight about who was the most important, until the carpenter of Nazareth walked in and picked up those tools and built a pulpit from which the whole gospel could be preached to the whole world. When those tools found out what they could become in the hands of the Master Carpenter, they decided they would quit fussing and fighting, and just surrender to the use of the Master Carpenter. That’s what you and I need to do.

OUTLINE

I. MOTIVES FOR MATURITY

1. Understand our diversity
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III. THE MARKS OF A MATURE CHRISTIAN

1. Emotional stability
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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes