

PRESSING ON: A FAITH THAT REFUSES TO SETTLE



BECAUSE CHRIST HAS FULLY TAKEN HOLD OF US, WE PRESS FORWARD TOWARD HIM—NOT IN PERFECTION, BUT IN FAITHFUL PURSUIT.

Here's the tension:

What if maturity isn't about arriving—but about refusing to stop pursuing?

So the question becomes:

What does real spiritual maturity actually look like?

"Spiritual maturity is not reached by the passing of the years, but by obedience to the will of God. Some people mature into an understanding of God's will more quickly than others because they obey more readily; they more readily sacrifice the life of nature to the will of God."

~ Oswald Chambers

1. The Goal Is Not _____ It's Knowing Christ.

Philippians 3:10-11 NLT

I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead

Notes:

2. Spiritual Maturity Is Marked by Relentless _____, Not Arrival.

Philippians 3:12-16 NLT

I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.

Notes:

3. Our Citizenship Shapes Our _____ and Our Hope.

Philippians 3:12-16 NLT

Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example. For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth. But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.

Notes:

Personal Application

Spiritually mature people agree on a few things:

- We are far from perfect
- We don't have all the answers
- We can be wrong
- Growth is still happening

Maturity doesn't mean:

- Pretending you've arrived
- Comparing yourself to others
- Giving up because you're not "there yet"

Maturity means:

- Grace for yourself and others
- Honest pursuit
- Faithful endurance

Stop playing the comparison game.

Instead:

- Rest in the growth God has already done
- Keep pressing forward toward Christ

Life Group Discussion

1. Get to Know You

When you think about spiritual growth, what makes you feel more pressure: *feeling like you should be further along, comparing yourself to others, or feeling stuck after past failures?*

How do you usually respond when you feel like you're "not where you should be" spiritually?

2. Digging Deeper

Paul openly admits that he has not yet arrived at perfection, yet he calls this posture *spiritual maturity* (Philippians 3:12–15).

- How does Paul redefine spiritual maturity in this passage compared to how we often define it?
- Why is it significant that Paul's pursuit flows *from* Christ having already "taken hold" of him, rather than his effort to take hold of Christ?
- How does this perspective help us understand passages like Romans 8:1–11 or Hebrews 12:1–2, especially the balance between grace and effort?

3. Living It Out

Paul says he presses forward by *forgetting what lies behind and straining toward what is ahead* (Philippians 3:13–14).

What is one thing from your past—either a failure you can't shake or a success you still lean on—that may be holding you back from faithful pursuit today?

What would it look like this week to press forward toward Christ with endurance rather than comparison or discouragement?

Mature [Gk. *téleios*—‘complete, perfect’] (1 Cor. 2:6; 14:20; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 3:15; Col. 1:28; 4:12; He. 5:14); AV PERFECT, FULL AGE, MEN, PERFECTION; NEB also RIPE, GROWN UP, GROWN MEN; [*telesphoréō*—‘bear fruit to maturity’] (Lk. 8:14); AV PERFECTION; MATURITY [*téleios*] (He. 6:1); AV PERFECTION. See also Perfect.

Maturity results from a full knowledge of the apostolic teaching about Christ and salvation and from correct application of this teaching to everyday life. Thus maturity is the Church’s goal for its members.

Although the concept of Christian maturity occurs mainly in the Epistles, Luke contains an important illustration—the parable of the Sower (8:14). Here Jesus tells of optimum spiritual growth, from initial reception of the gospel to steadfast discipleship, and warns that those who become overly concerned with their material goods and other affairs of this present age will not bear mature “fruit,” i.e., a life of righteous behavior and Christian endeavor.

A child-adult metaphor is the basis of Paul’s exhortations to mature conduct in 1 Cor. 2:6; 3:1–3 and in 14:20. These passages must be understood in relation to the various problems in the Corinthian church.

In 2:6, 10–12 Paul speaks of Christian wisdom, i.e., the mystery of salvation, formerly hidden but now revealed to the Christian community by the Spirit of God. This wisdom is from God and is not the worldly rhetoric popular among the Corinthians (1:20; 3:18). The “mature” of 2:6 are those who competently discern the doctrinal and spiritual matters of the Christian life. The “mature” and the “spiritual” person (2:15) are counterparts.

Because some of the church members are divisive, Paul addresses the Corinthians as “people of the flesh” (*sárkinoi*) as opposed to “spiritual people” (*pneumatikoi*) in 3:1. The actions of the Corinthians are typical of “babes” (*néploi*) in Christ. They are no longer “natural” people (RSV mg, 2:14), for they have believed in Christ and have been incorporated into His body. But neither are they “spiritual” people, for they are squabbling about leadership in their church (1:12; 3:1–4). Hence they are immature, and Paul addresses them as such. The implication of his argument is that mature Christians will not glory in various teachers such as Paul and Apollos but instead will discern that church growth ultimately comes from God (3:6) and that the Church is built by Him (v 9).

The child-adult metaphor in 1 Cor. 14:20 also concerns proper conduct. The Corinthians’ preoccupation with unintelligible ecstatic speech had resulted in confusion in church worship. Paul repeatedly points out the value of speech that is understood (14:3–5, 9, 12, 15, etc.), offering several simple analogies to illustrate his reasoning (vv 7f, 10f, 23). The direct appeal for maturity (v 20) calls for agreement with these simple

truths. The Corinthians are not immature in the sense that they lack Christian knowledge. Rather, their practical application of the knowledge they possess is defective. Behavior that is immature by the standards of apostolic doctrine is the usual target of Paul's argument. This is made clear by his statement, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways" (13:11). Similar is his closing exhortation in 16:13 to "be manly" (*andrízesthe*; RSV "be courageous"; NEB "be valiant"; cf. Shep. Herm. Vis i.4.3).

In similar fashion the author of Hebrews chides his readers for being immature children, still living on milk. In contrast, those who eat "solid food" are the mature, who are described as able "to distinguish good from evil" (He. 5:12–14).

Paul speaks of those who have attained maturity (1 Cor. 2:6; Phil. 3:15) and describes his effort to attain conformity with Christ in his ministry (Phil. 3:11–15). But an absolute state of maturity is not possible in this present evil age, and maturity nowhere in the NT implies sinless perfection (cf. 1 Jn. 1:8–10).

In Colossians Paul makes clear that his objective and that of those who minister with him is to bring every member of the believing community to maturity (1:28). This is to be brought about by the proclamation of Christ, by admonition, and by teaching all that Christian salvation involves. This active, thorough instruction intends to instill in every Christian an "assured understanding" of Christ, God's mystery (2:2). The doctrinal knowledge necessary for maturity is not like the intellectual mastery of esoteric formulas that Gnosticism proclaimed as the way to salvation. Rather, this knowledge is a developing of the believer's understanding of Christian truth and is thoroughly christocentric (2:3, 6, 9f), because the believer matures "in Christ" (1:28). Christian knowledge is not only intellectual but also experiential and personal. The believer "walks" in Christ and is "rooted" and "built up" in Him (2:6f.). Paul certainly has in mind an ongoing process of growth through daily Christian experience and assimilation of teaching. Maturity will prevent deception by erroneous teachers who promise spiritual maturity and perfection through philosophical and other worldly means (vv 8–23).

Ephesians, too, presents maturity as an antidote to the popular religious speculation that threatened to undermine the teaching of the apostles. Mature Christians will not be like children, who are easily deceived and swayed by new ideas (4:14). As in Philippians, maturity is a goal desired for the body of Christ and is realized through those who teach and proclaim Him. This cooperative ministering will result in the "perfecting" (*katartismós*) of the saints, the development of yet more ministerial activity, and the building up of the body of Christ (v 12). The Church will then be unified in faith and mature in "the knowledge of the Son of God" (v 13). Essential to Paul's concept of growth here is Christian love (*agápē*, vv 15f.). As in Col. 2:6f, spiritual growth is not exclusively intellectual but also results from the personal experience of being in Christ.

It is significant that in the NT the idea of growth into maturity is in each instance related to obedience to the apostolic teaching. The concept of maturity is communicated in both parabolic and analogic fashion to Christians of the early Church; those who have not moved toward this goal are reproved (He. 5:11–6:1; 1 Cor. 14:20). Christian maturity is a result of acquiring a comprehensive knowledge of Christ and His salvation. Such knowledge prevents deception by erroneous doctrine and enables the believer with discernment and competence to apply the apostolic teaching to everyday life (He. 5:14). Thus the life of the mature Christian, both in thought and in action, is in accordance with NT teaching.

Bibliography.—C. K. Barrett, comm on 1 Corinthians (HNTC, 1968); TDNT, VIII, s.v. τέλος κτλ.: τέλειος (Delling).¹

¹ R. J. Wyatt, “[Mature](#),” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised, ed. Geoffrey W Bromiley (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 289–290.