

Encounter Church
Wednesday January 03, 2024

Spiritual Maturity

Ephesians 4:11-16- “Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won’t be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.”

God’s will is for every person to grow. God says grow up!

Hebrews 6:1- “So let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding.”

That’s why one of the purposes of our church is to help help everybody grow spiritually, emotionally, mentally, in every way and have a balanced Christian life.

What is maturity? How do you know when you’ve arrived?

This is the teaching that Satan doesn’t want me to share. Why? Because most churches are destroyed by immature people. Many marriages are destroyed because of immaturity. Healthy relationships become unhealthy because of immaturity.

WHAT MATURITY IS NOT:

Maturity is not age. It has nothing to do with how long you’ve lived or how long you’ve been a Christian. You can be a Christian for 50 years and not be mature. Maturity has nothing to do with your age.

Maturity is not about appearance. Some people just look mature. Some people just look more mature than the rest of us. They look kind of dignified, they look like they’re holy! And for the rest of us it’s just tough look. Maturity has nothing to do with appearance.

Maturity has nothing to do with your achievements. You can accomplish a lot and still be immature.

Maturity has not to do with academics. Maturity has nothing to do with your intelligence or how many degrees you have. Just because you're intelligent and you may even know a lot of the Bible on an intellectual level. That doesn't make you mature!

God says that maturity is ATTITUDE. Attitude is what makes the difference.

God says it's your attitude that determines whether you're mature or not.

God wants you to grow up and have Christlike attitudes.

HOW DO YOU MEASURE SPIRITUAL MATURITY? Not by comparing yourself to other people but by comparing yourself to the Word of God!

In the book of James we have a manual on maturity. The word "mature" in the Greek is "teleaos." It's translated ***mature, complete, perfect!***

James uses the word five times in five chapters. James is a manual on how to become mature.

JAMES GIVES US FIVE MARKS OF MATURITY.

1. A Mature Person is Positive Under Pressure

James 1:2-4- "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

How do you handle trials? The first test of maturity is how do you react to problems? Do they blow you away? Do you grumble and gripe? How do you handle problems?

What is your natural attitude, your natural bent when things don't go right and you're irritated? Are you negative or positive? Are you a supportive person or a skeptical person? Is your life filled with gratitude or grumbling? Are you affirmative or are you angry most of the time?

ARE YOU POSITIVE UNDER PRESSURE? *A mature person is positive under pressure.*

2. A Mature Person is Sensitive to People

James 2:8- "Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

A mature person is sensitive to other people. He or she doesn't just see their own needs, you see other people's needs.

When our children are small and immature they see only themselves. "I want this, I want that." "IT'S MINE!"

James 2:1-7- "My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others?"

For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor"—well, doesn't this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?

Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? But you dishonor the poor! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?"

Matthew 25:31-46- "But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.' "Then these righteous ones will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?' "And the King will say, 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!'" "Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, 'Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons. For I was hungry, and you didn't feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn't give me a drink. I was a stranger, and you didn't invite me into your home. I was naked, and you didn't give me clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn't visit me.' "Then they will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?' "And he will answer, 'I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.'" "And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life."

It's interesting to me that in the Matthew 25 judgement the one thing we'll be judged for is how we treated other people. Not by how many bible verses we know, how many times we were in church, not by a great reputation we had as a Christian leader, but how we treated other people.

A Mature person is sensitive to people.

3. A Mature Person has Mastered Their Mouth

James 3:2- “Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.”

One of the first things a doctor would do when you went for a visit was say “stick out your tongue.” They use that to check your health.

God does that as well!

Loose lips destroy lives! They hurt people!

Definition of gossip: hearing something you like about someone you don't like! It's mouth to mouth recitation.

Self-control comes from tongue control! We get ourselves into so much trouble by what we say!

What you say directs your life or what you say can destroy your life. It can delight people's lives or it can discourage people's lives.

Your tongue is a powerful force for good or evil!

Have you ever heard someone say, “Well I just say what's on my mind!” They're kind of proud of it! Maybe what's on your mind shouldn't be said. ***The Bible says, that's not frankness it's immaturity!***

Ephesians 4:29- “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

“Do not let any...” Watch what you say!

When you talk you don't just say things to build you up! You say things to build others up as well! ***If it doesn't build others up don't say it!***

A mature person manages their mouth! It doesn't matter how long you've been a Christian, if you can't master your mouth you've missed the point!

James 1:26- “If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.”

If I've memorized a thousand verses and been through every Bible Study in the book and go to church and never miss a service, but if I'm a gossip, my religion is worthless.

If I spread rumors, it's worthless! If I'm always saying things that are not always accurate or exaggerate or speak impulsively, it's worthless.

The test of maturity is to manage your mouth so that no corrupt communication, no negative talk comes out of your mouth.

The Bible says, "Speak the truth in love." That means the right attitude, the right timing, the right place, the right motive. The Bible is very practical. It doesn't matter how much you know about the Bible, if your attitude isn't like Christ, you're missing the point!

A mature person has mastered their mouth.

4. A Mature Person is a Peacemaker not a Troublemaker

James 4:1- "What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you?"

He's talking about conflict here. He says there are quarrels and fights and they come from our own inner desires.

Am I a peacemaker? Am I a troublemaker? Do I like to argue? Am I a contentious person? Do I always get my feelings hurt? Do I get defensive easily? Do I hurt other people's feelings? Am I a peacemaker or am I a troublemaker?

The mark of a mature person is the lack of conflict in their life.

Paul told the Corinthians church, "You guys are a bunch of babies." They argued about everything. They argued about the Lord's Supper. They argued about gifts, leadership, everything. THAT'S THE MARK OF IMMATURITY!

Why is there so much conflict in my life? Why is there conflict in my marriage? Why is there conflict where I work? Why is there conflict between me and a former friend? Why is there conflict between me and another Christian? Why is there conflict between me and God? Why is there conflict?

James says there are two reasons.

James 4:3- "And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure."

The first cause of conflict is selfishness! The issue is pride!

Proverbs 13:10- "Pride leads to conflict;..."

When my wife and I have conflict it's because I'm proud and I don't want to admit when I'm wrong or she was proud and she didn't want to admit she was wrong or we both were wrong and didn't want to admit it.

Pride guarantees conflict at work, church, home, school, wherever. Selfishness, we want things for ourselves.

James 4:11-12- "Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you. God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor?"

The other source of conflict is judging others. All of us are guilty of judging others!

God says, "Don't judge people!" If you do you're asking for a fight!

You're always finding fault, always stirring up strife, always spreading rumors. Don't judge!

God says selfishness and being judgmental cause conflict! God says judgmental people are immature!

A mature person is a peacemaker and not a troublemaker!

5. A Mature Person is Patient and Prayerful

There are two key words in James 5. Patient and prayer.

"Patient" is used four times and "prayer" is used seven times.

The mark of a mature person is they are patient and they are prayerful! These two go together. They express an attitude of dependence on God!

James 5:7- "Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen."

If anyone has to have patience it's a farmer. He does a lot of waiting. He plants a seed, waits, hopes, prays, expects.

THERE ARE NO OVERNIGHT CROPS!

Just like a farmer has to wait there are times we need to wait! We have to wait on God for an answer to prayer. We have to wait on God for a miracle. We have to wait on God to work in our lives.

PATIENCE IS A MARK OF MATURITY. THE ONLY WAY YOU LEARN PATIENCE IS BY WAITING.

We really need to learn the difference between no and not yet!

James 5:16-18- "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops."

If anybody was patient and prayerful it was Elijah! That's a mark of maturity!

This hasn't been an easy teaching but it's one we need.

CONCLUSION: What is going on in your heart right now. In a moment of quietness before we close with a word of prayer let's do a little self evaluation. It matters what God thinks about you. He loves you but he wants you to grow and mature!

How do you rate your maturity?

Psalm 139:23- "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts."