

Maturing Members In Christ

Text : **Phil. 3: 8-4:1**

INTRODUCTION :

A. By this lesson we will observe five things our text reveals about how we become maturing members of God's family.

1. Each observation will begin with :

In order to become a growing member of God's family, I must ...

2. While looking for a good illustration with which to introduce this lesson, I found nothing appropriate, so I decide to just go with the definition of terms :

a. Immature :

1. not mature or ripe; not completely grown or developed
2. not finished or perfected; incomplete
3. lacking the emotional maturity, sense of responsibility, etc. characteristic of an adult

b. Maturity :

1. Is defined as :
 - a) full-grown, as plants or animals
 - b) ripe, as fruits
 - c) fully developed, as a person, a mind, etc.
2. fully or highly developed, perfected, worked out, considered, etc.
3. of a state of full development

B. Question for each of us to ask ourselves : “*Am I maturing, growing, progressing in my relationship with God, with Christ, with His church or have I stagnated.*”

1. After many years in any relationship, the tendency is to relax and take it for granted.
2. We don't decide to neglect the relationship, we just don't think about it.
3. We accept that it is what it is and we're comfortable with it. (**Many Marriages**)

C. This is the very problem that our text addresses.

1. Many Christians become comfortable in their relationship with God, stop growing, and begin just drifting along.
2. Without making a decision to do so, we find ourselves just going through the motions.
3. God wants more from His relationship with us and our text addresses how we can grow.

The key phrase in our text is :

“Let us therefore, as many as are perfect (*mature*), have this attitude ...” Vs.- 15a

There is a specific attitude God wants for us to have toward growing closer to Him, What is it ? Let's see how our text reveals it :

In order to become a maturing member of God's family, I must ...

I. DEEPEN MY DESIRE TO INTIMATELY KNOW CHRIST.

A. READ ... Vs. 10- that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

1. Our relationship with God is a process ... **NOT** an accomplishment.
 - a. It starts with knowledge.
 - b. Our knowledge matures into faith.
 - c. Faith becomes the foundation upon which an ever-deepening relationship is built.
2. The problem occurs when Christians stop working on the relationship.
 - a. Some don't know there can -or- there should be anything more beyond initial faith.
 - b. Others just loose interest ... have their attention diverted by the world they live in.

B. The Apostle says, "I want to know Christ..."

1. Faith itself grows out of knowledge.
 - a. **Rom. 10: 17- So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.**
 - b. **Compare ... Acts 11: 14 -to- I Cor. 15: 1-5**
2. The knowledge to which the Apostle here refers is more than academic knowledge.
 - a. It's an intimate experience.
 - b. It's a life-changing experience.
 - c. It's an ongoing relationship (*a dynamic process*) not a onetime event.
3. Paul said he wanted to experience Christ :
 - a. as his savior
 - b. as a person
 - c. as his friend
 - d. **NOT** just to have faith in Him.
4. Paul didn't want to just know **about** Jesus, but to have a relationship with Him.

C. "and the power of His resurrection"

1. Incorrect translation : It should **not** be "**AND the power of His resurrection**"
Properly, it should be "**IN the power of His resurrection**"
2. The Apostle isn't saying that he wants to know about the resurrection as historical fact
 - a. He is saying that he wants to know the ever-risen Lord.
 - b. "I want to know Jesus as He is right now."

D. "...and the fellowship of His sufferings ..."

1. The Apostle Paul says we should want to be like Jesus in **every** respect.
 - a. Jesus loves us and wants for us to be saved.
 - b. There's nothing wrong with wanting to go to Heaven and to enjoy its blessings.
 - c. However, to truly be like Jesus requires that we also make sacrifices like He made.
2. The message of Jesus brought to Him pain, suffering and ultimately death.
 - a. Jesus advocated righteousness when evil was popular.
 - b. He called men to repent when they thought they had no need of repentance.
 - c. He called them to come out and be separate, but they loved their religious system.
3. If we truly have fellowship with Jesus, there will be times of suffering in our lives.
 - a. Fellowship is more than common activities; it's also to share common values.
 - b. Radio preachers scratch those **"itching ears."** **God wants you to be rich, to**
 - c. God has called us to be like Jesus and sometimes that entails suffering like Him.

E. "being conformed to His death;"

1. If I become like Jesus to the point I share in his suffering, I will become like Him in His death.
 - a. Jesus first became dead to Himself.
 - 1) By leaving Heaven, Jesus surrendered His power, privilege and position in order to be able to rescue others. (Cf.- **Phil. 2**)
 - 2) Jesus did not seek His own interest in anything, but emptied Himself.
 - b. Jesus died to His fleshly desires. (**He had hormones like everyone else.**)
 - 1) He did not yield to the sinful demands of His fleshly body.
 - 2) Jesus had every temptation that we have. (**Heb. 4: 15**)
 - c. Jesus surrendered His physical life on the cross.
 - 1) In the garden Jesus prayed, **"Not my will be done, but ..."**
 - 2) There was absolutely nothing Jesus would not do to save lost souls.
2. When we come to know Jesus as He is, we will conform to His death to ourselves.

*** Thus, in order to be a maturing member of the family of God, I must deepen my desire to have an intimate relationship with Christ. (shared values)**

In order to become a maturing member of God's family, I must ...

II. DEVOTE MYSELF TO FOCUSING ON THE FUTURE PRIZE.

- A. **READ ...** Vs. **12-** Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. **13-** Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, **14-** I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

B. The past must be kept behind us.

1. If the past gets in front, it's a barricade that prevents Christians from maturing.
2. Forgetting those things that are behind. **Keep them behind !**
 - a. Forget those things that were done **to you**.
 - 1) Forgive them ... **Col. 3: 13-** bearing with one another, and forgiving each other ..
 - 2) **Love doesn't take into account a wrong suffered. ... I Cor. 13: 5**
 - b. Forget the sins committed **by you**.
 - 1) Everyone sins ... Be open and honest with God and He'll forgive you. .. **I Jn 1: 9**
 - 2) When God forgives you, you must be willing to forgive yourself.
3. If anyone every needed forgiveness it was Paul.
 - a. He persecuted the church ... He killed people just because they were Christians.
 - b. He never could overcome his struggle against the flesh. **Rom. 7: 14f**
 - c. **"one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,"**

ILL. - Athletes must learn to forget what lies behind :

- 1) Basketball players forget the missed shots and keep shooting.
- 2) Marathon runners forget the pain of the last miles and look toward the finish line.
4. Carrying around baggage from the past will slow our maturity or prevent it altogether.

C. We must leave all our previous accomplishments in the past.

1. My faithfulness yesterday doesn't carry over into tomorrow. (**Each day begins a new ..**)
2. Paul said, **"... I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; ..."**

In previous verses Paul lays out his credentials **and** his many works and says, **"Forget them; they're but yesterdays trash."**

D. Have you ever heard anyone say something like : **"I was a _____ for more than ____ years. Now it's time for someone else to step up."**

1. This is the spiritual disease the Apostle Paul is addressing in our text.

2. While on this earth our prize always remains in the future, **never** in the past.
 - a. Yesterdays faithfulness is history and has no effect on today.
 - b. Can you imagine a runner protesting, ***“But it’s not fair for him to win, I lead the race every lap until the last one, but I got a blister and I had to slow down.”***
 - c. The Christian receives his crown only when he faithfully crosses the finish line.
 - 1) **Rev. 2: 10 b** (The only way I know if I’m faithful until death is if I’m faithful unto death.)
 - 2) **II Tim. 4: 6-8** ... *I’ve faithfully finished so ... (**old, in prison, still preaching**)*
 3. Nothing we have done in the past puts us where we need to be today.
 - a. NO ONE in the church has reached or can ever reach the point he can turn the Lord’s work over to others.
 - b. Heaven is the only rest for the Christian. **Heaven is God’s only retirement plan.**
- * Thus, in order to be a maturing member of the family of God, I must devote myself to focusing on the future prize.**

In order to become a maturing member of God’s family, I must ...

III. DEDICATE MYSELF TO BEING IN AGREEMENT WITH OUR GOAL.

- A. **READ ... Vs. 15-** Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; **16-** however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained.
- B. The Apostle explains that if we are maturing Christians (as opposed to immature) we view coming to know Christ as our primary objective in life.
 1. The very most important thing in the Christian’s entire life should be to have a close, even intimate relationship with Christ. (**No relationship just happens .. require effort**)
 2. This is the standard set by God Himself.
 - a. Paul was not writing his own personal opinions. (cf. - **I Cor. 14: 37**)
 - b. This is a clear statement, not an interpretation.
- C. Christian, if you don’t understand that this should be the goal of your life, God will make it clear to you.
 1. Remember the times you struggled to know what was God’s will and couldn’t decide.
 - a. If you prayed about it and kept meditating on it, the light suddenly came on.
 - b. God doesn’t miraculously meet us on the road, but He helps us figure it out.
 2. That’s what God does when we don’t understand what our goal must be.

D. We must make sure our focus on the future doesn't cause us to forsake the present.

1. "... , let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained."
- a. Have you ever been in a circumstance where you seemed to slide two steps backward for every three steps you took forward ?
 - b. The Lord's Apostle is here warning us not to backslide.
2. The only way we can maintain a close relationship with Christ is to keep progressing.
ILL.- The boat that looses its power drifts back down the river.
- * **Thus, in order to be a maturing member of the family of God, I must dedicate myself to being in agreement with God's goal.**

In order to become a maturing member of God's family, I must ...

IV. DUPLICATE THE ACTIONS OF THOSE WHO PRACTICE THE PATTERN.

- A. **READ ...** Vs. 17- Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.
- B. **"You Philippians join with others in following my example."**
 1. Paul just said, **"I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet."**
- Now he says, **"Follow my example."**
 2. Obviously no human is perfect, but we all have people we view as roll models.
 - a. Jesus is set forth as our roll model in suffering. ... **I Pet. 2: 21**
 - b. Paul urged all Christians to follow him ONLY as he followed Christ. **I Cor 11:1**
 3. When learning earthly skills, we follow the lead of the most skilled craftsmen.
 4. Once we've surpassed our mentors, we must lead others and seek more skilled mentor.
- C. **We follow brethren who are successful in following the N.T. pattern.**
 1. Times and circumstances change, but the principles that form God's pattern are eternal
 2. God communicated HIS will to us in the N.T. and we must follow His will, not ours.
 3. There is only one true pattern and we must follow only that one true pattern.
 - a. Religious traditions are not that one true pattern.
 - b. American culture is not that one true pattern.
 - c. Something does not becomes a pattern because the congregations likes it or does it.
 4. As we read the N.T., we must read it as seekers of that one true pattern.
 - a. **Eph. 5: 10- trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.**
 - b. Not trying to prove we are right
 - c. Always being willing to conform to the pattern when we find it.

In order to become a maturing member of God's family, I must ...

V. DIG-IN AGAINST THOSE WHO WOULD UNDERMINE THE INTEGRITY OF THE GOSPEL.

- A. **READ ...** Vs. **18-** For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are enemies of the cross of Christ*, **19-** whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.
- B. For many walk ... *they are enemies of the cross of Christ*
1. Most scholars agree that Paul is referring to members of the Church.
 2. There have always been Christians who try to alter the Gospel message by adding :
 - a. Jews and legalists ... Salvation is by grace, **plus** works of righteousness.
 - b. Greeks ... One must obey the gospel **plus** accept this or that philosophy.
- C. In the church we pride ourselves in having no creed except the bible, but there are always brethren seeking to bind unwritten creeds :
1. We have no creed other than the bible, **BUT** you can only use this translation.
 2. We have no creed other than the bible, **BUT** you can only sing out of this songbook.
 3. We have no creed other than the bible, **BUT ... etc., etc.**
- D. Stand firm in the pattern
1. "Stand firm" is a military term : No matter how heated the battle, don't abandon post.
 2. The Christian must never abandon the pattern of faith set forth in the N.T.

CONCLUSION :

- A. In our text the Lord's Apostle has instructed us :
In order to become a maturing member of God's family, I must ...
1. **DEEPEN** my desire to intimately know Christ.
 2. **DEVOTE** myself to focusing on the future prize.
 3. **DEDICATE** myself to being in agreement with our goal.
 4. **DUPLICATE** the actions of those who practice the pattern.
 5. **DIG-IN** against those who would undermine the integrity of the gospel.
- B. **QUESTION :** As a member of the body of Christ am I continuing to mature.
1. Is my relationship to Christ / to God growing closer ?
 2. Stagnation produces atrophy and eventually death.