

GROWING UP

INTRODUCTION

At the heart of the teaching of the New Testament lies a few fundamental, burning concerns. The chief of these is a desire for the glory of God. That means by which that is to be promoted is the evangelization of the world. But alongside these twin goals, in the hearts of the writers of the New Testament letters lay a deep-seated concern to promote both the glory of God and the church's impact on the world by the growth and development of every Christian to spiritual maturity.

If that was the concern of the first Christians; and if it is one of the burdens of the teaching of the New Testament, should it not inevitably be one of our major concerns also? Yet the bringing of men, women and young people to Christian maturity is a task left largely neglected in the contemporary church.

To too many of us, the words of Paul have a devastating appropriateness:

"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able."

I. SOME HINDRANCES TO MATURITY.

A. The kind of society we live in militates against maturity.

The consumer-centered, instant-creation, media-dominated, package-deal civilization of our times is not well suited to the long process which helps to produce character. Nor does it produce "characters" - men and women who stand out in society, who add to its dimensions simply because they are different by being themselves. It is not easy to devote oneself to those influences which will pay dividends over the long term. But if we are to mature, we must refuse to be squeezed into the mould of our world.

B. The background of many Christians militates against maturity.

Many people becoming Christians today have never been exposed to the kind of influences in life which help to mould and develop character - and sometimes we may feel as a result that it is almost impossible to recapture lost ground, or to make up for lost time. If it is true, as one poet like to think that:

"The world is too much with us,
Getting and spending we lay waste our powers."

Then the recovery of those devastated powers will not be the task of a single day.

C. The kind of Christian Influence may not promote maturity.

Two symptoms of a malaise in contemporary Christian living are often underlined as the cause of this concern.

1. There is so little seriousness.
2. There is too little teaching.
 - (a) Rom. 12:1-2: "Do not be conformed to"
 - (b) Heb. 3:12-13: "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."
 - (c) James 1:4: "But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

D. The Necessity of Maturity:

1. Jesus grew in favor with God and with man. (Luke 2:52).
2. Heb. 2:10: Jesus set the example for us:

Jesus Died For Us.

- (a) Heb. 3:14: "For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end."
3. Pressing on involves leaving the past. (Phil. 3:12-16).

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For many, the great hindrance to going on is their inability to forget, or at least put behind them, the failures of the past. That is equally damaging to spiritual progress because it involves a refusal to take at his Word the God who has promised to put confessed sin and failure behind Him. To fail here is a mark of immaturity.

4. Col. 4:12: "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in

prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

5. Col. 1:27-30: "To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily."

II. SOME SYMPTOMS OF DECAY IN OUR LIVES:

A. A lack of concentration.

1. Heb. 2:1: "Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away."

NOTE: A nautical term - "to flow by, to slip away" from Christ.

B. A lack of appetite.

1. Heb. 5:12-14: "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

C. A lack of discernment.

1. Heb. 5:14: "Those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."
2. Eph. 4:14: warns us about being "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive."

NOTE: The destiny which a young Christian carves out for himself or herself under the hand of God is almost invariably determined by the ability they gain to tell the difference between what brings momentary excitement and stimulation and the less spectacular day-after-day exercises of the Spirit which build Christian character and form us into the men and

women whose lives make lasting impressions on society and in the fellowship of the church, because we bear fruit that remains. If we would grow to mature Christian stature, we must set our hearts on long-term goals and devote ourselves privately and steadfastly to their accomplishment.

D. A lack of true worship.

1. Heb. 12:14,28: "Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: ... Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."
2. Has our worship become commonplace, a ritual, a sham? What are our motives in coming to worship? Is it a social obligation, or just to accommodate someone else?
3. Modern churches are filled by people who fail at this point.

III. WE MUST ABIDE IN CHRIST.

- A. John 15:1-11: "... If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. ... If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."

See: Ps. 80:8-16; Ezek. 19:10-14; Isa. 5:2.

- B. How many "church members" have already severed themselves from Christ though they keep up a regular church meeting schedule?

- THE WAY TO STAY YOUNG IS TO GROW UP. -