

Am I Really Mature?

By Rev. T. F. Tenney.

I want to be — really, I long to be a mature Christian. One that can allow adverse circumstances to make me better instead of bitter. One that can roll with the punches and count the times he gets up more than the times he's knocked down. From a biblical standpoint, what is Christian maturity?

The archaic language of the King James Version often uses the word, "perfect" for the word "mature." Cases in point are Ephesians 4:13, "...til we come to the perfect (mature) man." Philippians 3:15, "...Let as many as be perfect (mature)..." Colossians 4:12, "...That we may stand perfect (mature) and complete in Him." On and on I could go citing scriptural examples. The word simply means, "Brought by natural process to completeness of growth; pertaining to a condition of full development." It is simply coming to the full stature of the man in Christ Jesus. I want to reach my highest potential in Him.

Some time ago I received a birthday card from the institute of Basic Youth Conflicts. It contained several suggestions concerning learning how to measure maturity. I want to share their headlines along with my by-lines.

We learn to measure maturity by the strength of our love. Paul convinces us in I Corinthians 13 that love is a greater indicator of spiritual maturity than an exercise of spiritual gifts. He further exhorted us to henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, but speak the truth in love and grow up into Him in all things which is the head, even Christ. (Eph. 4:14-15) Speaking the truth in love. Love is not a saccharine thing. It must

grow out of truth. Some think that a straightforward confrontation in a message is always labeled "hard." This is an unfair assessment, for if you really love someone you will tell them truth. You must find the place where truth touches human life and then care enough to confront. I'm not talking about the kind of preaching that is "fireworks in a fog" — a lot of noise but you can't tell at what they're shooting. I'm talking about real, genuine Bible truth that grows out of love and concern. I learned long ago that oftentimes God gives me sermons for myself. If I can apply it to myself first, then I am fit to share it with other people. True holiness will make me harder on myself than I am on anyone else. Yes, we must have mature, Christian love, but it also must be grounded in truth. Spurgeon once said, "Christian love has its claims, and divisions are to be shunned as grievous evils, but how far are we justified in being in a confederacy with those who are departing from the truth? It now becomes a serious question," he added, "how far those who abide by the faith once delivered to the saints should fraternize with those who have turned aside to another gospel."

Another mark of maturity is patience. How long can we wait between achievement and reward? Do we comprehend Galatians 6:9, "Let us not be weary in well doing." A mark of maturity often is noted by our ability to accept a limited objective. We may not receive our reward until the end of the day. Can we continue to labor, even though unnoticed and unheralded and unappreciated? If we are truly, "sowing to the Spirit" then the One who sees us will someday see that we are rewarded. If we are sowing to the flesh then fleshly rewards and praise are probably all we will ever get. God knows why He withholds rewards from us. There are too many men who have never obtained the victory over victory. One preacher said, one of the saddest stories ever written is just the story of our mismanaged triumphs. He likes

to bless where His reputation is safe. It is no accident that our Lord said, "In patience possess ye your soul . . ." The opposite of that may be, in your impatience you could lose your soul. Let patience have her perfect work.

There is a measure of maturity for confidence. Do we have confidence in our God? The Book says He is able. Do we have confidence in His Book? It is impossible for something to change us if we do not trust it. We must trust the Bible. Do we have confidence in ourselves? I'm not talking about egocentric pride, but Bible-based confidence. One mark of proving our maturity in being confident of our position is how little we react when we are falsely accused. "...in quietness and confidence shall be your strength . . ." (Isaiah 30:15). Oftentimes the Lord allows things to happen to us just to see what our reaction will be. I can honestly say that I have learned more from those I disagreed with than from those with whom I agree. So I must continue to have confidence, even in a brother with whom I may disagree. My disagreement with him does not annul my brotherhood with him.

There is also a measure of maturity for deference. Deference is courtesy and kindness regarding the wishes of another, even if we do not understand. How much we are willing to limit our freedom so others can achieve their God-given goals is a principle taught in Romans 15:1-3. It is something else to be able to hold back and prefer our brother while God is working in his life. An old preacher told me years ago that one of the most difficult scriptures to live by is, "rejoice with those that rejoice." It is not difficult to weep with those that weep, but whenever someone gets a promotion on the job that we think we should have gotten, can we rejoice? This is a mark of maturity.