

CHAPTER 11

THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN MATURITY

MEASURING SPIRITUAL MATURITY BY THE PARADIGM OF THE CROSS

Having heard recently a preacher’s exhortation for us to “Grow up!”, I started meditating on the maturity that Jesus exhibited during His suffering and death and how His maturity is an important aspect of the Cross as our paradigm. It is important to note that the Greek adjective often translated “perfect”—*teleios* (*Strong’s #5046*)¹—does not mean without flaw or sin, but means “mature” or “complete”. A related verb (#5048) means to “make complete” or “bring to maturity”. In the few scriptures below, I have inserted and emphasized the meaning of “maturity” for these Greek words.

- We are commanded to be mature: “**Be mature** . . . as your heavenly Father is **mature**.” (Matt 5:48)
- Maturity of God’s love in us is a result of obeying God’s commands—especially “Love one another”: “The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly **brought to maturity** in him.” (1 John 2:4, 5)
- Love is brought to maturity by living in God and God living in us: “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is **brought to maturity among us** . . .” (1 John 4:16, 17)
- Jesus prays that we become mature by His living in us: “I in them and you in me. May they be **brought to maturity** in unity.” (John 17:23)
- The main purpose of all ministry is bringing us to maturity: “. . . he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all . . . **become mature**, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:11-13)
- Late in his ministry, Paul confesses he had not become fully mature: “Not that I have already obtained all this [being conformed to His death], or have already been **brought to maturity**, . . .” (Phil. 3:12a)
- Paul was passionate about becoming more mature: “but I **press on to take hold** of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” (Phil 3:12b)
- Paul interprets “maturity” as “becoming like him in his death”: “I want to know Christ . . . **becoming like him in his death** . . .” (Phil 3:10) (See Phil 3:12a above)

As a result of considering these scriptures, may we all ask the Holy Spirit work in us in these ways:

- (1) Reveal to us what is lacking in our zeal to become more mature.
- (2) Reveal to us the importance of focusing on Jesus’ Cross as a paradigm of our maturity.
- (3) Change us in our commitment and focus, so that we will become more and more mature, more like Jesus was in His suffering and death.

To discover God’s concept of maturity—what it means to “grow up” His way, we must

LOOK TO THE CROSS!

¹*Strong’s* numbering system is found in *Strong’s* concordance to reference the lexicon at the back of the concordance and is also used by many resource books for Hebrew and Greek.

The following statements declare aspects of Jesus' glorious maturity in His steps toward His death. All readers are urged to pause after each item and to praise and adore Him for each aspect of His nature. Remember: in His risen life today, He is still the ultimate in maturity and is worthy of all our worship and praise!

- Jesus was totally unselfish.
- Jesus poured forth perfect sacrificial love.
- Jesus forgave all His tormentors.
- Jesus did not defend Himself from accusations, ridicule, physical torture.
- Jesus showed ultimate courage to defeat all the powers of evil.
- Jesus was thoughtful and caring to His mother during His horrible agony.
- Jesus took no offense.
- Jesus perfectly obeyed the Father as a servant to the point of death.
- Jesus totally ignored man's rejection and sought only to please the Father.
- Jesus gave up any desire to look successful, important, or attractive in the eyes of men.

This list could go on and on. I am sure that readers could suggest other ways that Jesus demonstrated perfect maturity during His passion.

Consider now the wonderful truth that a purpose of Jesus' death was to make it possible for us to manifest the same maturity that He did: "because **by one sacrifice he has made mature** (#5048) forever those who are being made holy." (Heb. 10:14) When He declared "It is finished" (John 19:30), He had become fully mature and had finished all the work to bring us to the same maturity that He had just been demonstrating: "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once **brought to maturity** (#5048), he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." (Heb. 5:8, 9)

When Christ came to live in us, He came with all the qualities that make up His maturity. However, for us to express His maturity in all our attitudes, actions, and reactions, we are to "press on" in being conformed to His death. (Phil. 3:10, 12). At the end of our life-time, we will all still have a long way to go to totally express His maturity, but I do not know of any pursuit that would please God more.

How seriously have we taken the need and God's command to grow up? How passionately are we pressing on to live the maturity of Jesus Christ in all of our relationships, ministry, activities?

Similar to what I related in Chapter 2, I urge you all to make each of the statements above about Jesus' maturity a prayer (plus any others that come to your mind):

- (1) **Worship and praise** Him specifically with the words of these statements of Jesus' maturity.
- (2) **Commit** to becoming more mature as He is mature specifically in each respect.
- (3) **Repent** of any forms of immaturity as the Spirit convicts you.
- (4) **Believe** He lives in you and depend on Him to bring you to His maturity as you daily do steps 1-3.

As part of our maturity, we should be praying for others that they, too, be brought to Jesus' maturity and pray that God's love will so flow through us that we can be somehow part of that process. Such prayer is certainly in His Name (=in His *nature*), and will help accomplish the Father's purpose and command for all believers to be mature. Just think how heavenly our lives would be if everybody with whom we relate were passionate about being mature like Jesus was in His suffering and death! Until that happens, do not forget God has planned everybody to be just like he or she needs to be to help us become mature; i.e., to live out the paradigm of the Cross! (Rom. 8:28, 29—See Chapter 5)