

MATURE – TELEIOS CHRISTIANITY

Matthew 13:24-42

A prominent pastor of a large church in Southern California was asked, "Why do you think your church is seeing so many people come to Christ? What evangelistic method are you using?" The pastor's response was, "We have observed in everyday life, that children do not give birth to children. It is adults who give birth to children. Therefore our church is focusing on helping its members grow up in Christ and become mature, adult Christians, who can then help lost people come to know Christ and grow in Christ."

Mature Christians are the target group of people for whom Christ taught us to pray. Listen to what Jesus says in **Matthew 9:37-38**,

". . . The harvest is plentiful [many people need to know the Lord] but the workers are few.³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Mature Christians are the workers, the laborers who are blessing all the nations of the earth by living and sharing the gospel. There has always been a problem with Christians not wanting to mature in Christ. This is specifically addressed in **Hebrew 5:12 – 6:1**,

". . . though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary [abc] truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature [teleios], who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil [immature Christians are very vulnerable to false teachers]. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity [teleios]."

The word teleios has the idea of being fully functional, complete – grown up. In a physical sense we grow from childhood, to adolescence, and finally adulthood. We all know there are some 30, 40 and 50 year olds who are emotionally stuck in adolescence, and we tend to cut them some slack [men and their toys]. However, if a person is 10 years old and still in diapers and drinking milk out of a bottle, then we all agree that something is seriously wrong!

Someone told me about a Hallmark card that reads, "Our daughter drinks, doesn't work, doesn't take care of herself and refuses to wear a bras." You then open the card and see a picture of a one year old baby girl with the caption, "But we love her anyway."

We all understand that babies need nourishment and constant care at the beginning of their lives. They are in the receiving phase of life. But when we grow up, we are expected to enter into the working, giving stage of life. It is the same in the spiritual realm. God expects His children to grow up. The growing up process is called sanctification, or maturing in Christ. Did you notice what Hebrews 5:12 said? "By this time you ought to be teachers." Not every Christian has the gift of teaching. But all Christians are expected to grow to a level of maturity, where they can model and teach the Christian life to unbelievers and new believers.

There is no such thing as instant sanctification. Becoming a "teleios" follower of Christ takes time and effort. It must be treated as a priority. Many Christians are seeking short-cuts to maturity. I don't want to offend anyone, but for some Christians, to speak in tongues means you have arrived. For the legalist, if you can keep his list of do's and don'ts, then you are spiritually mature. Others fall into the trap of thinking that biblical and theological knowledge is

synonymous with maturity. Friends, it does take solid Biblical knowledge to get to maturity. But people can have a ton of knowledge and not be mature because they continue to be prideful, argumentative and self-absorbed. To be a mature Christian means we are Christlike. We are not perfect – but we consistently think and behave in a Christ-honoring manner.

Let's look at another passage that speaks about the importance of maturing in Christ. The Apostle Paul writes in **I Corinthians 3:1-3**,

"Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?"

What does Paul mean by mere men? He is saying that they were acting and thinking like unsaved people or infants in Christ. I am convinced that one of the reasons the Bible stresses our need to grow up in Christ, is because Satan can easily counterfeit immature, baby Christianity. But I believe it is almost impossible for Satan to counterfeit mature, "teleios" Christianity. Let me tell you why I say this. Please look with me at our main text for this morning, which is found in **Matthew 13:24-42**,

"Jesus told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads [became mature], then the tares also appeared [became apparent]. ²⁷ The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the tares come from?' ²⁸ 'An enemy did this,' he replied. The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' ²⁹ 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the tares and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn' . . .

³⁶ Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, 'Explain to us the parable of the tares in the field.' ³⁷ He answered, 'The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom [Christians]. The tares are the sons of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age [the New Covenant Age], and the harvesters are angels. ⁴⁰ As the tares are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

Tares are not weeds. They are a bastard form of wheat. That is why it is extremely difficult to tell the difference between wheat and tares until they mature and bear fruit. Wheat plants bear golden, life-giving grain. Tares produce slate gray, bitter seeds. And just as there are wheat and tares in the plant world, so too there are pretend Christians and real Christians. And it can be very difficult to distinguish them – because baby Christians are still growing and stumbling around in God's Word.

The best way for the Church to show the world what genuine Christianity looks like, is for believers to grow up in Christ. Mature Christians produce the life-giving fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Counterfeit Christians produce fleshly, self-centered, bitter fruit. Listen to what Jesus said about this issue in **Matthew 7:15-19**,

"Watch out for false prophets [these are pretend believers on steroids]. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them . . . ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit [baby Christians will produce good fruit as they grow]. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit [the sign of unbelief] is cut down and thrown into the fire."

The need to mature and produce good fruit is why the Apostles Paul wrote **Philippians 3:10-12**,

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection [Paul is the one who taught us in Romans 6 that Christians are to consider themselves as having died with Christ to sin and risen with Christ to a new way of living. Paul wanted to live 24/7, as a new creation in Christ] . . . ¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect [completely teleios], but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."

Jesus expects us to grow up and be fruitful Christians who can work in His harvest field. There are a lot of people who need to know the Lord. And so Paul's personal goal in life was to gain as much maturity in Christ as possible, so he could be as fruitful as possible. That desire shaped his philosophy of ministry – as we see in **Colossians 1:28-29**,

"We proclaim Christ, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom [why?], so that we may present everyone mature [teleios] in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me."

Paul understood that the Great Commission, which is to make disciples of all the nations, will only be fulfilled as Christians mature in Christ and then devote themselves to helping others come to know Christ and then grow in Christ. According to **Ephesians 4:10-16**, that should be the heartbeat of churches and church leaders – all over the world,

"He who descended [the Lord Jesus did this at His Incarnation], is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe [if the glory of Christ fills the whole universe, I think it is safe to say that He has all authority over this earth]. ¹¹ It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers [for the following purpose], ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature [teleios], attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."

The United States has experienced some major revivals in our past. However, one of the weaknesses of these large crowd, open air revivals is that many people who made professions of faith in Christ were not followed up and helped to mature in Christ. The hearts of these professing Christians were made tender toward the Lord through these revivals, but because they did not grow, they fell prey to false teachers of various cults. New believers need mature believers to spend time with them individually or in small groups – to help them get grounded in the faith.

Because we have spoken much about the need for people to grow up in Christ, let me share some of the characteristics of mature Christians, listed by Dr. Jay Grimstead, a retired professor at Fuller Seminary,

1. Mature Christians have made Jesus Christ LORD. It is a settled issue. They don't wake up every morning trying to decide who is the boss of their lives.
2. Mature Christians are self-feeding. They are regularly and systematically into God's Word – gaining God's perspective on life.
3. They are sound in Doctrine and Theology. No one has perfect theology, but we should always strive to speak accurately for Christ and the Bible.
4. Mature Christians have made prayer and praise an essential and natural part of their lives.
5. If married, they have Biblically-ordered family lives that display the love of Christ.
6. They demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit as they exercise their gift(s) of the Spirit.
7. They are involved in deep, New Testament quality fellowship, which takes place in small groups and involves the following ingredients:
 - a) Honest sharing of lives.
 - b) Serious commitment to one another.
 - c) Accountability to others. This means I give you the right to meddle in my life. If you see anything in my life which is contrary to God's Word - tell me.

Too many Christians are lingering in babyhood. They are not growing up and becoming workers in God's field, which is still white unto harvest. And please remember that Satan can easily counterfeit baby Christianity. It is mature, teleios Christianity that reveals the falseness of counterfeit Christianity.

I want to close this message by connecting some dots in Scripture. It is easy to read the Bible and view it as a disconnected, disjointed book. It is not. Listen to **Revelation 20:1-9**, which is an extension of Christ's parable of the wheat and tares,

"And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss [a place of darkness] and holding in his hand a great chain [this is not a physical chain because angels are spirit beings].² He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan [who is also an angel and therefore a spirit being], and bound him for a thousand years [a long, long time].³ He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations [the lost, particularly the Gentiles] anymore until the thousand years were ended [I believe this binding of Satan took place when Christ crushed Satan's head at the cross. If you don't think anything significant happened to Satan at the cross, then you need to spend time in Colossians 2:13-15 and Hebrews 2:14-15. It was after Christ's death and resurrection that the spiritual eyes of the Gentiles began to open and they started pouring into Christ's kingdom – just as verse 3 has indicated. I believe the end of the thousand years will take place when Christ comes to raise the dead and finalize eternal destinies. Let's continue reading verse 3]. After that [at the close of this New Covenant Age], he [Satan] must be set free for a short time [what is Satan going to do in that short time? Revelation 20:8-9 tells us] . . .⁸ and [he] will go out to deceive the nations [unbelievers] in the four corners of the earth – Gog and Magog [generic names for enemies of God] – to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the

seashore [there will be a lot of unbelievers. Many of them will have been pretend believers]. 9 They marched across the breadth of the earth [or land] and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves [probably referring to Jerusalem, which will be a Christ centered, Christ honoring city at that time – Hebrews 8:8-12. What is going to happen to these unbelievers who want to kill Christians?] But fire came down from heaven and devoured them."

What did Jesus teach would happen to tares at the end of this New Covenant Age? They will be gathered together by God's angels and thrown into the fire of God's judgment. Satan and his demons are rebellious angels, but they must still report to God [Job 1:6]. In years past, I wondered why God did not crush Satan like a bug after He was defeated at the cross? The reason is because Satan and his demons still have an important job to accomplish. At the end of this age, they will be released for a short time, and will agitate and convince all the tares to show their true colors as they gather themselves together to attack the people of God. And when they have all gathered together, Christ is going to send fire out of heaven to devour them.

Followers of Christ, who are living at that time, will not have to lift a finger to defend themselves. That is good – because I believe the Bible teaches that sometime during this New Covenant Age, the nations will have beaten their swords into plowshares and stopped studying war. How is that going to happen? Because the Church will have successfully carried out the Great Commission.

Let me quickly summarize: When Christ bodily returns to the earth, Satan and his demons and all unbelievers will be thrown into the lake of fire. In contrast, Jesus will give all believers glorified bodies that never get sick or die – and then He will usher in the Eternal State. And all of God's people will live in the very presence of the Triune God, in a new heaven and on a new earth, where only people who can perfectly love God and their neighbor will dwell. All of this is a part of the good news of the gospel. And because we are learning to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, we want as many people as possible to be with us. Let's pray.