

## "Maturity in Christ"

When we first become Christians, we have a lot of spiritual growing to do. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Well what does a spiritually mature Christian look like? Well stay tuned, and we'll find out!

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. God's way is the best way and the only right way to live. We want to please God in every respect, and the Word of God teaches us how! The Word tells us how to develop ourselves spiritually and how to treat other people. It sheds light on the truth, so human traditions and sin won't blind us. Because of the Scriptures, we can avoid the pitfalls and survive the storms. It challenges us to make us brighter and stronger. It gives goals to stretch our minds and our behaviors. We're blessed beyond measure to possess a copy of God's holy word! Thanks for spending time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

All four of our children are now grown. Jackie and I watched them mature into responsible and loving people, and we're proud of them. We raised them to be adults and to pursue lives of their own. We didn't want them to be childish. We wanted our daughters to be like Jesus, who matured as God desired. Luke 2:52 says, "And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." He grew mentally, physically, spiritually, and socially. Loving and godly parents want that for their children. We did our best to meet their needs to help them mature properly. We also felt the need to train them spiritually.

Likewise, Paul urgently wanted to help young Christians grow to spiritual maturity in Christ. He said in Colossians 1:28, "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ." We must do more than just become Christians; we must become complete in Christ, fully functioning as servants of the Lord.

If you want to study more, we offer this lesson free. If you'd like a printed copy or a CD of our study and you live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to [searchtv@searchtv.org](mailto:searchtv@searchtv.org). Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free on our website at [www.searchtv.org](http://www.searchtv.org).

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Hebrews 5:11 to 14, and we'll explore what it means to be mature in Christ.

Our reading today comes from the epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 5, verses 11 to 14. "Concerning him (that is Melchizedek) we have much to say, and it's hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary 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 not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." A worthy exhortation. Let's pray together. Father, help us to grow in our faith, and grow in our love for You and for one another. Father, help us to be the children that You would have us to be. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

No one knows for sure who wrote the inspired book of Hebrews, but the book calls itself a "word of exhortation"; it's written to spiritually weak Christians. The author describes those to whom he's writing as people drifting from the faith, neglectful, dull of hearing, immature, and sluggish. Some had begun forsaking the assembling of the church; others were in danger of unbelief. Some who should

have become teachers needed training in elementary principles. Like little children they could only digest the most basic teaching and couldn't handle a more advanced understanding of the truth.

He worried that the deceitfulness of sin had hardened their hearts and caused them to cast away their confidence in Christ. He realized that false teaching had led many astray. For these reasons he worried that they might grow bitter and come short of the grace of God. The writer warns that they might miss the eternal rest in heaven. Sadly, they could not renew some to repentance.

The book of Hebrews could easily describe many today. People own Bibles but they read them carefully. They've become sluggish and dull of hearing. Interestingly, they think they know God's will but they're easily led astray by pop psychology, and human traditions, false prophets, and their own feelings. They're vulnerable to error, because they are spiritually immature and not grounded in the truth. Millions have stopped attending church, and some have ceased to believe in Jesus Christ. Because much of Christianity is so weak, people have lost sight of what is the true faith in Christ, and what it looks like.

I want to describe the mature Christian. First, mature Christians know God and they take Him seriously. Proverbs 9 and verse 10 says, that "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Fearing the Lord means that one has a profound respect for God, knowing that we will one day face the judgment seat of Christ. Since our eternity is at stake, we take the Lord seriously. We take His commandments seriously and His promises. We respect His warnings and believe what He says is true. We know He is both compassionate to those who love and serve Him and just in condemning those who reject Him.

John 1 and verse 18 says that Jesus explains God the Father to us. We know what God is like, because we can see God the Father in the character and the behavior of Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus said in John 5 and verse 19, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it's something that He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner." We know God is holy, loving, and compassionate by looking at Jesus. We know the Father is firm and just by looking at Jesus. We know God wants us to be saved, because of Jesus on the cross; and we know God's power through Jesus being resurrected. We know God keeps His promises, because Jesus kept His. Yes, Jesus explains the Father to us.

Second, mature Christians are not naïve. Many people want to paint Christianity as naïve and gullible, but mature Christians by practice have their "senses trained to discern good and evil." Mature Christians know right from wrong, good from evil, and truth from error. They've seen the destructive nature of evil and immorality; they know God's word proves true. Some naïve Christians really don't believe what God says. Proverbs 14 and verse 15 says, that "The naïve believes everything, But the sensible man considers his steps." The naïve are presumptuous and willing to act foolishly, but mature Christians are cautious. Proverbs 22 verse 3 says, that "The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, But the naïve go on, and are punished for it." Mature Christians have taken time to think through the moral and spiritual challenges. They see reasons to say no to temptation and sin, while others walk right into trouble. Proverbs 14 verse 18 says, that "The naïve inherit foolishness, But the sensible are crowned with knowledge." The difference between being naïve and prudent matter.

Galatians 6 verses 7 to 8 warns, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." Don't deceive yourself into thinking that sin will not harm you. It always does. The naïve or simple-minded person thinks he can sin and get away with it.

Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs to his son to help him grow wise and to avoid the traps of life. In the first chapter, Solomon has wisdom crying out in the street! Proverbs 1:22 to 33 says: "How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing, And fools hate knowledge? Turn to my reproof, Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you. Because I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention; And you neglected all my counsel, And did not want my reproof; I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes, When your dread comes like a storm, And your calamity comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently but they will not find me, Because they hated knowledge And did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would not accept my counsel, They spurned all my reproof. So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way, And shall be satiated with their own devices. For the waywardness of the naive will kill them, And the complacency of fools will destroy them. But he who listens to me shall live securely, And will be at ease from the dread of evil."

How much better it would be for us to open our hearts and follow God's teaching rather than thinking that we can do as we please! Sin has consequences; and that's why God teaches us to refuse to sin. God is a loving Father who wants to protect us from evil.

Third, mature Christians fix their eyes on Jesus Christ. Hebrews 12 verses 1 to 3 says, "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." They know the source of their blessings and hope; they realize that the way is often difficult and can be hostile. And in spite of all, they serve with joy looking to the future. Just as Jesus died for sinners, so the Lord expects us to love our enemies and to do good to those who persecute us. Mature Christians follow Christ.

Fixing our eyes on Jesus means standing firm in His teaching, His commands, and His promises. It means taking Him and His word seriously. Colossians 2 verses 6 to 7 says, "Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude."

Fourth, mature Christians show patience when they face difficult days. Christians show their maturity by how they react to troubles and heartaches. Immature people get angry and rant about their problems. Immature people despise correction. Immature people blame others for their faults and fail to learn from their mistakes. They don't realize that the struggles of life may be the path to their growth and blessing.

The apostle Paul opened his life to us in 2 Corinthians 12 verses 7 to 10 and he helped us to understand a valuable lesson. Paul said, "Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! (He said) Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' (So Paul says) Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. And therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." God's grace is sufficient for us, even when we suffer and struggle. It's a great moment in

life when we realize how dependent we are on God! It's a great moment in life when we see how His grace sustains us through our weaknesses.

Mature Christians keep a check on their attitudes. They find the silver lining in the storms. They see beyond the present! James 1 verses 2 to 4 says, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." God allows us to be tested to help us grow and develop spiritually. The test of our faith produces the ability to endure, and endurance helps us to become complete. Without the testing, we wouldn't grow strong in faith.

Fifth, mature Christians obey the Lord. They obey out of love and respect for God. 1 John 2 verses 3 to 6 says, "And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says well 'I know him' but doesn't keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. And by this we know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." Many people talk about loving God, but those who genuinely love God keep his word! They live up to their claims. You see, love is perfected, matured, by obeying the will of God.

Now I've known folks who will boast of their faith and love but live like the world. You cannot find them when you need them. James said in James 2:20 to 23, "But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,' and he was called the friend of God." Abraham didn't have a dead faith. Faith that will not obey is worthless. Faith is perfected, and matured, by obeying the will of God.

Why does this matter? It matters because God expects His people to mature and to grow to be like Jesus. The Lord Jesus commands us to live holy lives, to hold fast to the truth, and to love others the way that He has loved us. How would you describe yourself? Are you a mature Christian who loves and serves the Lord with all your heart and soul? Let's pray together. Oh Father help us to love You even as You have loved us. And help us to grow spiritually and to be the kind of people You want us to be. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

We are all a work in progress! Hopefully, we're growing stronger in faith and love each day. Philippians 2:12 to 13 reminds us, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." God will help us mature; and He's at work in us both to will and to work for His good pleasure. The apostle Paul wanted to be right with God and to attain the resurrection, that is, to go to heaven and live with God eternally.

And so he said in Philippians 3 verses 11 to 15, "Not that I have already obtained it (that is the resurrection) 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. 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, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect (that is mature), have this attitude." My friend, are you pressing on to that high calling?

You can become a Christian by placing your trust in the Lord Jesus, repenting of your sins, confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and by being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Now God expects more than merely becoming a Christian! He expects you to serve Him lovingly

and faithfully for the rest of your life. He wants you to love Him with all your heart, and all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. That's the ultimate goal of every Christian!

We hope today's study has stirred you to want to mature spiritually and to imitate Christ Jesus. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to [searchtv@searchtv.org](mailto:searchtv@searchtv.org). Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. You can download these lessons or a newsletter online at our website: [www.searchtv.org](http://www.searchtv.org). You can also watch Search anytime on YouTube! Subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry." There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches in your area. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now don't worry, we're not here to get your money. We're here to help you get to heaven.

We do ask that you please get involved with a church of Christ. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. Well as always we tell people that we're going to be back next, Lord willing. So we ask that you keep searching God's Word with us and will you do us a favor. Please tell your friends about this program. Tell them about how you watch it, and how much you love it, and encourage them to watch it too. And as always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.