

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: September 26, 2010

Every Person Mature In Christ

by Dan Trygg

“...that I may present every person mature/fully-grown in Christ” Colossians 1:28

As I prepared for this message, the Lord kept bringing one Greek word to my mind. The word is *telos*. This means “goal, end-point, fulfillment, completion, maturity”. The verbal form would be “to bring to fulfillment, to complete, to fulfill, to mature”. Let’s do an inductive study to attempt to gain an appreciation for the word.

In John 4:34; 5:36 and 17:4 this word describes how **Jesus was sent to accomplish the works the Father had prepared for Him to do**. This is a rather poor translation of this word, because it sounds like Jesus was just *doing* the works, but **the thrust of *telos* is that there was a design, plan or intent behind these works, and Jesus fulfilled that design**. He wasn’t just doing works. He was fulfilling a plan, completing an assignment, or accomplishing a goal, in doing them. The word, *telos*, in this context, brings to light the idea of a larger program or plan for Jesus’ to fulfill.

In Matt. 5:48, Jesus is contrasting the difference between the teaching of the Old Covenant, as interpreted by the Judaism of His day, and the radically gracious heart of God, who tells us to love our enemies, and who causes His rain to fall on the evil and the good, and expects us to be as gracious as He is. At the end of this section (vss. 43-47), Jesus concludes with, “Therefore you shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” The word translated as “perfect” is *telos*. Thus, **what Jesus was really saying is “You shall be mature as your heavenly Father is mature.”** This puts an entirely different spin on understanding this verse. “Perfection” is clearly out of reach for us on this side of eternity, but **“maturity” implies a process of growth that has an end point, a “fully-grown” character**. This word is meant to prompt us to *go after growth*. It clearly indicates that **God expects us to “grow up”** and become as mature (fully-developed) as He is. He is the Parent. As His children, we are to grow up to become like Him. *Telos* is not “perfection”, but “completion”, as in fulfilling the design. **We are to fulfill the design and potential which is built into us.**

In I Cor. 14:20, we see Paul contrasting mature understanding with immature, or childish, thinking. The idea, again, is that **mature (*telos*) understanding is more developed, more complete, ...embodying and expressing a fuller view of reality than is possible for the infant or child.**

In Phil. 3:7-15, we see that whatever things Paul had counted as gain (beneficial or profitable), he chose to set aside for the surpassing value of knowing God, and having Christ. In verse 12, when he speaks of becoming “perfect”, the word is a verbal form of *telos*. Thus, he was saying that, **although he was not fully mature, or complete, he chose to press on after God’s purpose in his life** (vs. 12). Although he admittedly wasn’t there yet, he chose to forget the past things of his life and stretch forth toward the things that God yet had for him to do and experience. **He was in hot pursuit of the envisioned-goal** of the prize of the upward calling of God (vss. 13,14). We tend to hear this as “going to heaven”, but the phrase “upward calling of God” can also refer to the job or activity which God is calling us to. Therefore Paul was “upwardly focused”, instead of “earthly focused”. In other words, **Paul was living life for the Kingdom, ...pursuing the growth, the equipping and maturity, as well as seizing the opportunities..., to be able to do the job that God had intended for him to do**. In order to do this, he had to have a mature mind, that is, an attitude and mindset to do this very thing, ...to put aside all distractions or past hurts, and go after God’s plan for his life, no matter what. This is reminiscent of Prov. 29:18, “Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained (lit., ‘undisciplined’).” Paul says that **the mature person develops a mindset of vision and purpose, and then adjusts his or her life to fulfill that purpose**. Phil. 3:15 says, “Let us, therefore, as many as are mature (*teleios*), have this attitude (lit. ‘mindset’); and if in anything you have a different attitude (mindset), God will reveal that also to you.”

In I Cor. 2:6, Paul says that there is a “wisdom for the mature”, and the author of Heb. 5:14 indicates that “solid food is for the mature”, those who are “accustomed to the word of righteousness” and who “by use (or practice) are ones having trained their faculties of discernment to differentiate between what is healthy-good and what is sick-evil”. Clearly, **the “mature” in these passages are those who have progressed in their development** to a level of “full-grown-ness” **to become capable of things which immature people are not.**

In Eph. 4:13, **the goal of church interaction is to produce mature people**. Paul says that it should be the purpose of every single church to bring about this maturity, or “full-grown-ness” of moral character and spiritual intimacy with God, in the lives of every believer in that particular Body. It happens as we live and speak the truth to one another in love, and express the leading of the Holy Spirit operating in our midst. *Everyone* has a role and

responsibility toward that end (vss. 15,16; cf. Heb. 10:24,25). In Col. 1:28,29, **Paul shares that bringing people to maturity was the primary focus of his ministry**, "...Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim Him, admonishing every person and teaching every person with all skill, so that we might present every person mature (fully-grown) in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His inworking-power, which mightily works within me." This also was the passion in prayer that Paul's co-worker, Epaphras, had for these people (4:12), "...always laboring for you in his prayers, that you may stand complete (fulfilled, mature, fully-grown) and fully assured in all the will of God."

What does maturity look like? It looks like Jesus. **In character and in the treatment of others, a mature person in Christ will act as Jesus did** (Eph. 4:13; Rom. 8:29; I Jn. 2:6). A **"fully-grown" person is also able to control both tongue and body**. James 3:2 says, "If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect (lit. 'mature, fully-grown') person, able to bridle the whole body as well." If we hear this as referring to a "perfect" person, we tend to think of this as an unattainable thing. If, however, we see that the Greek word here is *teleios*, and means "mature, fully-grown", then we see that what James is describing is not only *attainable*, but *expected*. It is the outcome of growing up spiritually. **We ought to be able to control what we say and the urges we have**. In a very real sense, this is nothing other than the continuation of the maturation process that we have been on since birth. As a baby, all we could do was eat and load our pants, and scream if we were uncomfortable. As we grew, we had to learn to control ourselves in these exact same areas. We had to learn that we could not say just any old thing, any time we wanted. Nor were natural bodily functions (or noises, or smells) appropriate for more mature people. So, we had to learn to control what we said, and to limit our bodily urges to appropriate times and places. The maturity James is describing here is simply a continuation of that process. **Instead of exterior social pressure being the standard, however, God's Spirit, the Spirit of love, will show us what is appropriate, and motivate us from within** (I Cor. 13:4-7; Phil. 2:12,13; Rom. 8:14). *One definition of freedom is "the unrestrained ability to do what we want". When we "want" the right things, we can freely express ourselves to do what is good.*

Maturity is also accompanied by confidence and an appropriate fearless boldness toward God and man. I Jn. 4:17,18 presents this in an interesting way. **This fearlessness is not only a by-product of our growth in God, but also the result of God's love maturing in us**. "By this, love (*agapē*) is fully-grown in us, so that we might have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but fully-grown love (matured, fully developed) casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not having been matured in love." In other words, **when we really understand the extent of God's love for us, we will no longer fear Him. We will be confident that He only wants our good**. Even if there is discipline which we must face, because of foolish choices, we will not fear Him, because we know His heart. Paul makes the application toward humankind in II Tim. 1:7, "For God has not given us a Spirit of timidity, but of power and love and of sound-minded discipline." He spoke from his own life, having experienced that the love of God compelled him to go forth to share Jesus with others (II Cor. 5:14-21).

Going back to I John, **another mark of maturity is that the inworking maturing love of God will produce obedience in our lives**. Consistent obedience comes when God's love has become fully grown in us (I Jn. 2:4-6). Notice that **the Bible clearly teaches that obedience is a by-product of a healthy spiritual life, not a condition to be accepted by God**. We all are sinners, ...broken, wounded, guilty, messed up. God knows that. He knows we can't become mature without His life filling and empowering us, so He offers to us *all that He is* to work inside of us. That is awesome! Once we grasp His love, once we get infected by His love, we cannot help but love Him in return. The more that we walk with Him, the more we will love Him. The more that we love Him, the more we will do what it takes to be with Him and get to know Him better. **We find ourselves putting things aside that we know are displeasing to Him, because we love Him**. We will find Him to be the most loving, faithful and precious person we could ever know. We will see that He and His ways are good and right, and we will find ourselves *wanting* to live in His ways. The more we do that, and yearn for Him, the more He will disclose Himself to us. He loves us; we love Him; and soon, we find our hearts changed by His Spirit. We find ourselves *wanting* to obey Him.

Finally, the outstanding mark of maturity is that mature disciples of Jesus will love one another. This was the mark which Jesus said would be the definitive sign that we are His (Jn. 13:34,35). **Paul said that love was the goal, the focal point, of all that he taught** (I Tim. 1:5). Love is "the more excellent way", far above knowledge (I Cor. 8:1), spiritual gifts, works of power, or even courageous acts of self-sacrifice (I Cor. 12:31-13:3). John the apostle tells us that the ability to love (*agapē*) in this way comes only from God. It is only possible for those who experientially know Him to love in this manner (I Jn. 4:7,8,19). Furthermore, **when we truly do love one another, it is evidence that God is dwelling in us, and that His love is "having been fully-grown" or "brought to completion" in us**.