

MEANT FOR MATURITY, EPH.4:21-5:17

Church Foundations #1

◆Intro: There's a certain adorable quality to a child, isn't there? Linda, who teaches first grade, tells of an interaction she had with one of her students on the first day of school. Accustomed to going home at noon in kindergarten, Ryan was getting his things ready to leave for home when he was actually supposed to be heading to lunch with the rest of the class. Linda asked him what he was doing, "I'm going home," he replied. Linda tried to explain that now that he is in the first grade, he would have a longer school day. "You'll go eat lunch now," she said, "and then you'll come back to the room and do some more work before you go home." Ryan looked up at her in disbelief hoping she was kidding. Convinced of her seriousness, Ryan then put his hands on his hips and demanded, "Who on earth signed me up for this program?"

◆Children. An unblemished capturing of humanity. And yet, if they stayed children, and never progressed to second grade, we would think something was amiss.

◆What is true of Kindergarten is true of your vegetable garden as well. You plant four tomato seedlings. Three of them shoot on up so you stake them and watch them begin to form little yellow flowers that someday will be tomatoes. But the fourth one stays about 4" tall, even though you give it the same water and fertilizer as the others. Something is wrong.

◆And so it is with the human soul.

◆**1. I was meant for maturity.**

◆Let's look at the context of our text just before where we began to read this morning: verses 13-15.

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- ◆ Verse 13 says “until we all reach unity in the faith, and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature.”
- ◆ Verse 14 says, “then we will no longer be infants...”
- ◆ Verse 15 says, “we will in all things grow up...”
- ◆ Why are you here on this planet? Sometimes we think our life is about our career, what we do, or our prosperity, what we can collect before our lungs stop breathing. Or maybe our name, what a few momentary brain waves of other creatures will think about us in the course of history. Or how many pizzas we sold, or mechanisms we engineered, which in turn become how much we can afford to run the air conditioner. None of this is why you are here. Did you know God is more interested in your character than your comfort? Alexander Solzhenitsyn said
 - ◆ *The meaning of earthly existence lies, not as we have grown used to thinking, in prospering, but in the development of the soul.*
 - ◆ How grown up is your soul?
- ◆ Today we’re beginning a series that will look at the biblical purposes of people, and also the people of God, namely, the Church. Why does God leave us here, let us live, allow our suffering, make us exist over time –if, as his story tells us, those of us who belong to him are headed for a better life?
- ◆ There are 5 basic biblical purposes/reasons we are here. Today we’re looking at this whole concept of maturity. The biblical term for maturity is “discipleship.” It refers to our becoming like Christ. A disciple is someone who follows another, learns from that person, and becomes like that

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person. Listen folks, God created us to follow him through existence and become like him!

◆ Now don't get this wrong. I'm not saying that we we're meant to become little gods. That's just crazy talk. It's also heresy. The Bible is clear: there is only one God. Discipleship is not about becoming gods, it's about becoming godly. Becoming godly is taking on God's values, God's attitudes, God's character.

◆ So what is character? Character is essentially the sum of your habits.

While visiting with a neighbor, five-year-old Andrew pulled out his kindergarten class picture and immediately began describing each classmate. "This is Robert; he hits everyone. This is Stephen. He never listens to the teacher. This is Mark. He chases us and is very noisy."

Pointing to his own picture, Andrew commented, "And this is me. I'm just sitting here minding my own business." Our habits become our character.

◆ So then, if we are talking about changing our character, we are essentially talking about changing our habits of being, and taking on God's habits of being. Did you notice all the different habits Paul referred to in our passage today? We'll talk more about those. First we need to get clear in our heads that we were meant for maturity, to grow up, to become like Christ.

◆ *"So let us stop going over the basics of Christianity again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding." Hebrews 6:1, NLT.*

◆ Paul says in his letter to the Philippians...

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◆ “Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had.”

Philippians 2:5, NLT.

◆ What was Jesus like? Compassionate. Patient. Loving. Interested in people. Giving. Self-sacrificing. Empathetic. Ok then, if we’ve known about Jesus for any length of time, are we becoming like him. And what about those of us who have known him a long long time? Say, thirty years? Sixty years? Do we look more like Christ than we did 10 years ago?

◆ If we are honest, I think we will admit that we often forget that godly maturity is one of God’s purposes for us on this earth. We are often dis-compassionate, impatient, unloving, disinterested, and selfish. We might be sacrificial though. But who we’ll sacrifice is the question! A lot of times we go on through life with absolutely no intention of changing ourselves. We just follow our fallenness wherever it leads.

◆ But listen, like the kindergartener, like the tomato plant, *if I’m not growing up in my soul even while my body might be winding down, something is wrong.* I was meant for more. We cannot pretend our spirits are healthy if we are not becoming more like God over time. Christian look like Christ. That’s how they got the name! Yes, God invites everyone of us to come to him just as we are. But he also loves us too much to leave us just as we are. So, how do I become like Christ? Theologians sometimes call this the process of sanctification; becoming holy. The Bible insists that it’s normal for followers to grow up in holiness over time. How?

◆ **2. I can become like Christ through evaluation.**

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◆ Evaluate your live in light of the truth, the standard. When Jesus prayed his high priestly praying in John 17 he said: “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” Verse 21 in our text says,

◆ “Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.” Ephesians 4:21, NIV.

◆ It takes God’s truth to transform your life. If you want to become more godly and grow up in your soul, you need to evaluate your life according to truth. This is why we focus so much on reading the Word in our worship times here. That’s why healthy Christians read out of the Bible every day of their lives; so that they know how to evaluate. Here’s where habits like reading, memorizing, meditating all come in. It’s why we have monthly memory around here. We’re trying to create the habit of getting truth inside us. (By the way, we discuss all these kind of helpful habits in the Discovering Spiritual Maturity Class. If you’re a member here and haven’t taken it, its time to come.) This learning of the truth is also the foundation of our teaching ministries around here. Today we’ll commission Children’s Worship leaders, sunday school teachers, Kids Hope mentors and their prayer partners, –all because we seen the need to implant truth in our families so we can become like Christ.

◆ *“Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.”*
James 1:21, NIV.

◆ **3. I can become like Christ through emulation.**

◆ To emulate is to take a model and imitate it. Take a look at chapter 5:1 in Ephesians: ““Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children”

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Ephesians 5:1, NIV. The greek term there translated “imitators” is “mimetes”. What English word do you hear in that?

◆A. Now, mimicking Christ is not automatic. And you will need more than motions. People fake it all the time. Still, you must make an effort because Christlikeness is produced by a combination of imitation, and inhabitation; that is, the Holy Spirit must inhabit you, live in you for your efforts to amount to anything. It’s kind of like this:

◆Imitation sets the table; the Holy Spirit dishes up the food. We need both. Imitation alone can be religious hocus pocus. Jesus said in Mat.7:22-23 that at Judgment Day people will come and say “Hey, we did all this great religious stuff, just like you! We prophesied. We cast out demons even! And God will say to them, “Sorry, who are you again? I don’t know you.” For them, it was just motion. They didn’t open their hearts up to the Spirit.

◆In our moments of obedience, God unleashes the Holy Spirit into an open heart. So don’t wait around for God to magically rid you of all your vices and flaws, people! Choose. Choose the right thing. Tell the truth. Curb your fighting spirit. Don’t avoid your family tensions by watching TV until you fall asleep. Go and deal with it.

◆Our text again: “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body. “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have

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something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” Ephesians 4:25-29, NIV.

◆ Jesus said in Matthew 7 “put my words into practice.” This is like setting the table, or holding out your plate so that the Holy Spirit can dish up soul food!

◆ As we begin to apologize for wrongs against people we’ve hurt, you will find that God dishes up the grace of actual sorrow for the wrongs.

◆ **B.** Lets hit the pause for a second, because this in another place where we can slip into errant theology. Effort has nothing to do with salvation in the sense of redemption, or paying for sin, or making up for our demerits with merits. No. Redemptive salvation is the sole work of Christ the Son of God! Reformed theology accents this clearly. We rejoice in Christ! We turn to Christ. We trust in God’s free goodness in Christ!

◆ However, many a Reformed Christian, celebrating the pure amazing grace, and electing love of a Sovereign God, makes a category leap and says something like this: “Since all salvation and goodness is up to God, it matters not what I do. All things are in his sovereign hand and plan, so the law is dead and I can do as I please.”

◆ But salvation in the sanctification sense, or the experiencing of holiness sense, or salvation in the sense of finding freedom from the entrapments of evil –this has everything to do with your efforts. We cooperate with God in our sanctification.

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◆ *“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”*

Philippians 2:12, 13, NIV.

◆ This passage is addressing salvation in the sanctification sense, just as Paul says others things like

◆ 1) since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25)

◆ 2) “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.” Eph.4:30

◆ Nothing we do contributes to our Justification in the eyes of a Holy God. Everything we do contributes to our Sanctification or lack of it in the life of discipleship.

◆ So don't sit around and wait for yourself to become godly. And don't pray, “God take away my greed for more and more” but then page through every flyer in the Sunday paper, and keep everything you earn. And don't say, “I wish the Good Lord would give my a pure mind” while continuing to watch films without placing godly boundaries on what you will allow on your big screen. Finally,

◆ **4. I can become like Christ through exposition.**

◆ Part of growing up in our souls is becoming open, or what the Scriptures call “coming into the light.” Part of maturity is exposing with God and people the hidden faults of our characters. Do you want to become more godly? Do you long for a pure heart, unburdened and weighed down by guilt and habitual acting out? Come into the light.

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◆ *Look at chapter 5:8, 13-14! “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light”... “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”” Ephesians 5:11-14, NIV.*

◆ **And here’s similar biblical injunction:**

◆ *“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” James 5:16, NIV.*

◆ **Some issues will never be changed by Bible study and prayer alone. God also uses people. Spiritual maturity is never by being a solitary disciple, but rather through solidarity with other disciples. You and I cannot grow in christlikeness in isolation. There’s a simple spiritual reason for this: no one person can be all parts of Christ’s body, the Church. Rather God has divided up the gifts of his Spirit over every disciple. We need each other for health. But more on that when we look at “fellowship” later in this series.**

◆ **In summary, the best way to keep a bad habit: keep it in the dark. Best way to kill a bad habit: bring it into the light.**

◆ **Conclusion:** So discipleship, or becoming like Christ is a process that you and I can contribute to through evaluation, emulation, and exposition; Evaluation by the truth, emulation of the truth/ Christ, and exposition of what is false in ourselves. Word of encouragement though: This is a life-

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long process. Oak trees don't grow in 3 years. Silver Maples grow quickly. But if you want the beauty and strength of oak, it takes time. Don't beat yourself or you kids if you don't become Billy Graham by next month.

Discipleship is a way of life! What God asks of you is your next step. And though we commission teachers and leaders of children here today, just because our bodies have aged doesn't mean our discipleship is over. It doesn't fit for Christian adults to send their kids off to classes and not be pursuing them themselves.

- ◆ Maybe your next step is to commit your heart to Christ.
- ◆ Maybe your next step is to commit yourself to Christ's family, the local church.
- ◆ Maybe your next step is spend 7 minutes a day in the Holy Word of God.
- ◆ Maybe it's time for you to learn more about how to pray and converse with God.
- ◆ Maybe your next step is to join a Life Group where you can create close enough godly friends that you'd be safe in sharing your struggles and find assistance and compassion.
- ◆ We're all a different places, but maturity looks to the next step.