

SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Introduction

We use terms like "mature in the Spirit", "mature believer", "spiritually deep", and "elder" to designate someone that we believe has matured in God. But, do we really know what we are saying? Do the terms really mean what we think they mean? How does one mature in the Lord? What are the scriptural standards for maturity?

Sometimes it is easier to define something if we first define what it is not because today it seems that a lot of people define maturity by erroneous standards.

Maturity is not:

- How much money you have or how successful your lifestyle
- How long you have been saved
- How much doctrine or bible that you know or what "position" you hold
- How often you attend church services or how many activities you are involved in
- How "spiritual" you talk or how many "visions and dreams" you have

The amount of money that you have. There is an impression left by some in the faith movement that we should live like a King's kid; have the best of everything and exhibit a "successful" lifestyle that reflects this. The process of giving is seen as an investment strategy. We put a dollar into the "Kingdom" and God returns it to us with an increase of 50 or a 100 times the amount that we put in. Therefore, if you are not financially blessed, there is something wrong between you and God or you are immature and don't understand the faith principle. The scriptures plainly state that this concept is erroneous and is promoted by deceptive men.

1 Timothy 6:3-5 NKJV

If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, (4) he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, (5) useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a *means of gain*. From such withdraw yourself.

When you read the verses, it is obvious that there are those who don't teach the word of Jesus but instead teach controversial doctrine that is not rooted in the truth. They equate godliness as a way or means of gain (getting money). We, according to this scripture, are to withdraw ourselves from those who teach this!

How long you have been saved. While there is some correlation between the time you were saved and your age, it is not spiritually significant by itself. There is a natural wisdom that we gain through

experience in life by living it. However, this is not spiritual wisdom which only comes through being conformed to the image of Jesus.

1 Timothy 4:12 NKJV

Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

Paul recognized in Timothy a spiritual maturity that far exceeded his years. He wanted others to recognize this too. This verse also gives us the characteristics of a mature person: be an example in what we say, in how we conduct ourselves, in our love, in our spirit, in our unshakeable faith, in our purity and our abstaining from fleshly lusts.

How much doctrine or bible that you know or what “position” you hold. There are atheists and agnostics that can quote the Bible. Some seminary professors have tremendous knowledge about the things of God but do not have an active faith in Him.

1 Corinthians 8:1-2 NKJV

(1) Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. (2) And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.

Ephesians 3:19 NKJV

to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

These scriptures tell us that the love of Christ passes (i.e. is beyond) knowledge. By itself, knowledge breeds pride and arrogance (puffs up). We must have the love of Christ to edify (build up) others.

There are no “positions” in the Church. There are functions. Positions are for the institutional church not for the true Body of Christ. Any position in the institutional church has nothing to do with being spiritually mature or with any function in the true Body.

How often you attend church services or your involvement in activities. While there might be a benefit from attending services and the scriptures tell us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, it doesn't do us much good if we sit on the pew with our minds somewhere else and our attendance is just a routine habit that we developed. Many seem to attend church like they would go to the movie theater to see a movie. You sit and watch the show without any interaction with the presentation or with the people who are with you. This type of attitude will not produce spiritual growth.

2 Corinthians 3:18 NKJV

(18) But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

If the services that we attend are not causing us to see the requirements of the Lord and work in us a process of change that moves us toward His image, then they are not being spiritually productive!

This is also true of the activities in which we are involved. Most, if not all, of the activities of the institutional church are related to the continued function and support of the institution rather than the work and calling of the Lord. While we all have gifts that are necessary to the proper functioning of the

Body of Christ, we sometimes forget that these are *spiritual* gifts. In our desire to be of service, we sometimes substitute activity for calling. *Activity* without *calling* always produces burnout because we are operating from our own strength instead of His.

Matthew 11:30 NKJV

For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light."

Luke 10:41-42 NKJV

And Jesus answered and said to her, "**Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. (42) But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.**"

Luke tells the story of Jesus coming to Mary and Martha's house. Martha was very busy trying to be a good hostess and resented the fact that Mary wasn't helping her. Instead, she was sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to Him. When Martha appealed to Jesus to make Mary help her, Jesus told her that the activity wasn't as important as what Mary was doing. We can become so involved in church activity that we no longer sit with Jesus and learn of Him.

How “spiritual” you talk or how many “visions and dreams” you have. Some have built up the idea that encounters with spiritual beings, visions, and dreams make a person very spiritual and mature. That is far from the truth. Most angelic encounters are with fallen angels and not the angels of the Lord. Dreams and visions can come from the heart or from demonic sources. One must mature in order to know the difference. Until some level of maturity is reached we are totally dependent upon the Holy Spirit to discern spiritual reality.

Hebrews 5:13-14 NKJV

For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. (14) But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

In the broadest sense, to be mature is to be like Christ. By that measure, I don't know too many "mature" people. However, this is the goal. We are to grow up into Christ. Then, what is a good working definition of "spiritual maturity"?

There are two aspects of maturity—the individual and the corporate. Individually we become more like Jesus as we mature. We are conformed to His image; that is, we begin to look like Him, think like Him, and act like Him. This is usually what one thinks of when considering spiritual maturity. However, there is another aspect that is important. In the natural as a person matures individually he must fit into society and begin to function as a member of society.

Our society is the Kingdom of God where Jesus rules as both King and Lord. While we come to individual maturity in the Family of God there comes a time when we must “go to work” in the society of the Kingdom where we must become productive, that is, produce fruit. This teaching article uses this definition: **a spiritually mature person produces more than he consumes.** There is a growth process spiritually that corresponds in many ways with our natural growth pattern. This article will attempt to explain this process in such a way that we can understand what God is doing in our lives and cooperate with Him.

The Three Stages of Growth

John, in his epistles, give us three stages of growth as we mature in the Lord.

- little children
- young men
- fathers

1 John 2:12-14 NKJV

I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. (13) I write to you, fathers, Because you have known Him *who is* from the beginning. I write to you, young men, Because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, Because you have known the Father. (14) I have written to you, fathers, Because you have known Him *who is* from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one.

John speaks to each group twice in these verses: first, he has written to them; second, he is writing to them. In this he gives the characteristics of each group.

Little children: you have know the Father and your sins are forgiven for His name's sake.

Young men: you are strong, the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.

Fathers: you have known Him who is from the beginning.

As we mature through these three stages of growth we partake of the characteristics of each stage. It is part of the maturing process—little children are cared for, young men are trained, and fathers go to work.

As with all processes there must be a beginning point, an event that starts the process and the maturation process of the Lord is no different.

Salvation: Event and Process

Just as it does in the natural, spiritual life begins with a birth. This is a one time event that is the beginning of the growth process to produce a mature person.

John 3:5-7 NKJV

Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'"

John in chapter three tells the story of Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus. Nicodemus only looked at the natural birth when Jesus said that a man must be born again. He couldn't understand how this could be. Jesus then explained that there are two births that we all should experience.

The first birth is natural and is of the flesh. The mother's water breaks and the baby is *born of water*. The second birth is spiritual. We are *born of the Spirit* and that which is born in us is spirit. [There is also a spiritual application of the water as water baptism.]

Until we are born of the Spirit, we cannot even see the kingdom of God . Spiritual things are not seen or understood because they are spiritually discerned.

The new birth is a fulfillment of a prophecy in Ezekiel. God had promised Adam that if he sinned that he would die. When he sinned, it was his spirit that died. It was cut off from God. (This is spiritual death.) Man needs a new spirit (one that is alive) in order to fellowship with God

[Ezekiel 36:26-27 NKJV](#)

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (27) I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*.

Until we are born again we are separated from God and from spiritual things. We are dead (spiritually) in our sins. Revelation speaks of those who are not born again in this life. They are subject to the "second death". This is eternal spiritual death—never will the person be able to come to the presence of God but instead will suffer the punishment for not receiving the atoning sacrifice.

How, then, are we born again? Is through the Word of God. Jesus was the Word made flesh and it is through Him that life comes.

[1 Peter 1:23 NKJV](#)

having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,

Being born again is commonly called *being saved*. However, being saved encompasses much more than just the new birth, which is just the trigger event to start the process of salvation. Salvation extends to every area of our life as we yield to the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

The Event of Salvation

The beginning point of salvation is the new birth. This is the "event" that initiates the process. Let's look at salvation in detail. What does it really mean? We use jargon words all of the time without necessarily understanding their real meaning. Has anyone ever asked you if you were saved? Based on the traditions of your religious association, you probably thought of this as "Are you going to Heaven when you die?"

The scriptural definition of "saved" has nothing to do with "going to Heaven". We need to understand that. When the scriptures say "saved" we need to ask "Saved from what?" We see bumper stickers that say "Jesus Saves!" The question is "saves what?"

The broadest meaning of the original word that is translated as "saved" is "delivered from calamity." Using that definition, it is clear that "salvation" is a much broader experience than simply reaching Heaven.

- Jesus "saves our souls" from the calamity of eternal judgment by receiving our punishment Himself.
- Jesus "saves our life" from death by giving us new life in our spirits.
- Jesus "saves our bodies" from sickness by providing healing through His stripes.
- Jesus "saves our mental health" from darkness by providing victory over the Devil and his minions.
- Jesus "saves us" from alienation and loneliness by being our Friend and Elder Brother.
- Jesus "saves us" from uselessness by giving us purpose.

Think about it and you can add many more to this list. Salvation encompasses every area of our life. It is worked out now, in this life, and is completed in the end by the final provision of a resurrected body. (We are saved from this body of corruption by putting on an incorruptible body.)

Let's use the analogy of an old Ante-bellum home. It is in a state of disrepair, full of termites and rotteness. But, someone sees it and sees the potential beauty it has and goes to buy it with the purpose of restoring it.

This is just what Jesus did with us. The Father desired that we would be restored to Him in fellowship. Jesus came to "buy" us so that the Father could restore us to the purpose for which Adam was created.

[1 Corinthians 6:20 NKJV](#)

For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

[1 Corinthians 7:23 NKJV](#)

You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.

Jesus paid the price. He bought the house and removed the rotteness at the core by providing a new core (heart) for us. But, He doesn't stop there. He owns it with the intention of restoring it. Which brings us to the process of salvation.

The Process of Salvation

Jesus takes a good look at the purchased property. He promises us that He will do everything necessary to bring us to the fullness of our purpose. After a few words of endearment and encouragement to us, He is ready to start work.

Reconstruction begins as once. Usually, the first step is to tear down or tear out pieces of damaged material so that they can be replaced with good material.

[Jeremiah 1:10 NKJV](#)

See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, To root out and to pull down, To destroy and to throw down, To build and to plant."

Restoration begins with tearing down or tearing out the defective materials. This must be done before there can be any building, otherwise, you would be mixing the new with the old that can't take the pressure.

Mark 2:22 NKJV

And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins."

To restore something is to put it back to its original *condition* and back to its original *place*. Material can't be put into place until its condition has been prepared. Likewise, we can't be placed in the Body of Christ until our condition is suited for His purpose. Our condition is a result of the restoration work of the Holy Spirit in us. Until we are *placed* by the Holy Spirit, we are babes in the Body without real function. As babes we are consumers of the resources of the Body.

The Holy Spirit has to free us from the entanglements of the world system. This is done by the process of renewing our mind. Too many Christians experience the event of salvation but don't allow the Holy Spirit to complete His work in them. Their thinking processes are still patterned after those of the world.

Romans 12:2 NKJV

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Renewing the Mind

The best example of the necessity of renewing our mind (our thinking process) is the Children of Israel in Egypt. They were God's people, yet they were in slavery. (Definition of slavery: when your work benefits someone else more than it benefits you.) Egypt is used frequently in the scriptures as a type of the world system. In other words, Egypt epitomizes the essence of the world system's method of thinking and acting.

God delivered the Children of Israel from Egypt "by the Blood" during the Passover. That was the event that set them free just as we are set free when we believe and apply the Blood of Jesus. When the Children of Israel left Egypt, they headed immediately toward the caravan route to the land of Canaan--an anticipated journey of about two to three weeks at the most. However, this wasn't God's plan.

Exodus 13:17-18 NKJV

Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them *by* way of the land of the Philistines, although that *was* near; for God said, "Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt." (18) So God led the people around *by* way of the wilderness of the Red Sea. And the children of Israel went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt.

The New International Version of the Bible says it this way:

Exodus 13:17-18 (NIV)

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt." (18) So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle.

God understood the hearts of the people. They were armed for battle--physically ready. But, they were not mentally ready. They still had the mentality of a slave and not a warrior.

In God's purpose, they had to become true warriors before entering the Promised Land. God knew that the land was filled with Giants and that battles would be necessary. But, for them to experience war before they were ready would result in discouragement and giving up.

God took the children of Israel out of Egypt in a very short time span and then spent 40 years getting Egypt out of the children of Israel. Remember, the generation that left Egypt was born as slaves there. They grew up as slaves, talked like slaves, acted like slaves and thought like slaves. And like slaves, all they really wanted was to get out of slavery, to be free of their oppressor. Following Moses was a way to do it. *Getting out* was much more important to them than *getting into* the Promised Land!

We are the same way. We are filled with the mentality of the world. We think like the world; we act like the world. We are slaves to the world system—the Kingdom of Darkness. God delivers us from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of Light.

Colossians 1:13-14 NKJV

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, (14) in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

However, just like the children of Israel, we are more concerned with getting out than in getting into the purposes of God. The “getting out” part has become the primary focus of many ministries, especially the Faith Movement. Salvation is presented as a cure for your present problems. “Get out of debt, get out of sickness, live like a King’s kid, etc.” While all of these things may be true, they are not the end purpose of God. He is preparing warriors. Spiritual warriors. There is a battle coming before we enter the Millennial Kingdom of God (the Promised Land of the New Testament).

The Scriptures tell us that the end time martyrs will war against the Dragon and overcome him by three things (Rev. 12:11):

1. the Blood of the Lamb
2. the word of their testimony and
3. loving not their lives to death.

These are spiritual warriors that know how to use the Word to testify to the effectiveness of the Blood of Jesus even to the point of losing their lives.

Do you see the importance of being free of the world system in our thinking and actions? God is seeking those that are seeking Him. He takes them on a journey of change. This is our path to spiritual maturity.

The End of Salvation

The Institutional Church has reduced salvation to the event of the new birth and, as a result, they have neglected the process of growth and maturity. That is one of the reasons that the bulk of the

Institutional Churches are filled with babes in Christ that have remained babies and have not grown up in the Lord. They teach that once you are born again, you are eternally secure and ignore the Scriptures that seem contrary to that. They do not teach the process of salvation and the necessity that the process be allowed to come to full completion. The Scriptures make it plain that we must continue in the faith and mature. We must endure to the end.

(Matthew 10:22 NKJV)

And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.

(Hebrews 3:6 NKJV)

but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

(Acts 14:22 NKJV)

strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and *saying,* "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

(1 Timothy 4:16 NKJV)

Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

(2 Timothy 3:14 NKJV)

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them,*

(Romans 6:22 NKJV)

But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.

(1 Peter 1:9 NKJV)

receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

We are set free from sin when we are born again. We then continue with God as His servant slaves. This produces the fruit of holiness in us and the end of the holiness process is everlasting life. This means that we can't do whatever we want after being born again. We must learn holiness if we are to continue to the end. What happens if we don't?

(Romans 11:22 NKJV)

Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

This Scripture seems pretty clear that if we don't continue in His goodness we will be cut off just as the olive tree branches (the Jews) have been cut off and Gentiles grafted in. Jesus implies in the book of Revelation that one can be erased from the book of life.

(Revelation 3:5 NKJV)

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

The implication in this verse is that there is a possibility for those who don't overcome to be blotted out (erased) from the book of life. It would seem then that learning to mature and overcome is very important to our future.

We mature by our obedience to the Lord, which results in us being changed from glory to glory.

(Philippians 2:12 NKJV)

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling:

(Philippians 2:13 NKJV)

for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

What does it mean to work out our own salvation? The event of the new birth is a one time thing provided by God; but, the growing and maturing involves us. God does His part—He works in us to will and to do. We do our part of working out our own salvation by being obedient. Jesus said that professing Him as Lord is not enough. Those who enter the Kingdom of God are those who do the will of the Father.

(Matthew 7:21 NKJV)

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

James tells us that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20). We express our faith by the work of obedience. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” (Romans 8:14)

If God Permits

It is God's desire that all of His children grow up, to mature in Him. He desires to “bring many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10). There is an expectation of maturing in a normal time frame. However, this doesn't always happen timely as we can see with these verses:

Hebrews 5:12-14 NKJV

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. (13) For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. (14) But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

The people to which Hebrews was written were not maturing in a proper manner. They had neglected their foundation in the Word to the point that they needed to be re-taught the first principles (the basics) of the oracles; that is, the sayings or the prophecies, of God. Because of this, they had not become skilled in the word of righteousness but remained unskilled, which is the mark of a babe. The deeper things are for the mature who have become skilled in the word of righteousness by having their senses exercised in discernment of good and evil.

Hebrews 6:1-2 NKJV

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary *principles* of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward

God, (2) of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

The writer of Hebrews then tells them that they must move on—leave the basics or elementary principles of Christ and go on to maturity. Lay the six foundation stones and go on. Then, he adds a peculiar verse:

Hebrews 6:3 NKJV

And this we will do if God permits.

Why would God not permit us to move on from the foundational doctrines? Because, as we move deeper into spiritual things, the consequences of falling away become more extreme as shown by the next verses.

Hebrews 6:4-6 NKJV

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.

The person described here is certainly not a novice in the things of the Lord. He has

1. been enlightened (seen the Truth concerning Jesus)
2. tasted of the heavenly gift (received Jesus, been born-again)
3. partaker of the Holy Spirit (baptized with the Holy Spirit)
4. tasted the good word of God (continued in the word as a disciple)
5. tasted the powers of the age to come (moved in miracles, healing, deliverance, etc)

Verse six says that a person who has moved on in the Spirit through these five areas has matured to a place that if that one fell away, it would be impossible for that one to be renewed. However, God does not permit us to move on into the spiritual realm until a proper foundation is laid. As with any parent who is concerned about the emotional and mental development of their child, our Heavenly Father is concerned about our renewed minds—the spiritual development of our emotional and mental faculties. He does not permit babes into spiritual things that are “over their heads”. He protects us from ourselves.

Growing up

It is God's intention that we mature as His sons. Maturing is a process and takes time. It is mature sons that participate in the plans and purposes of the Father. Maturing affects our thinking process and our emotional responses. In other words, a major portion of our growing up is the process of renewing our mind.

The difference between a child and an adult is the *way* they think, how information is processed, and the *way* in which they react emotionally. The renewing the mind process changes the way we think and the way that our emotions respond.

1 Corinthians 14:20 NASB

(20) Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.

Before we know the Lord, we have a *heathen* mind, our thinking process is heathen. When we are born again, we receive a new spirit but we still have our heathen thinking process. We have a *carnal* mind because our inner mental process operates at the direction of the flesh rather than the spirit. The renewing the mind process moves us from a carnal mind toward a renewed *spiritual* mind so that we can come into the *corporate mind* of Christ. This is the essence of growing up.

There is nothing wrong with being a child when you are a child. But, it is wrong for us to remain as children. We are to mature in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 13:11 NASB

When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

A child reasons like a child; his thinking process is like that of a child; he talks like a child. All because he *is* a child. But, Paul says, when we mature we put away childish things; that is, thinking, reasoning, and talking like a child.

The bulk if not all of the Institutional Church is made up of children who are playing “dress-up”, pretending or playacting as adults. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:3-4 that while there is jealousy, strife, divisions among us, we are still carnal, fleshly; this is, we are acting like children. One says I follow this teacher, another says I follow that teacher—what do we think our denominations are but the result of this same thinking process?

The Lord has given us all that we need to mature. He sent us the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit and He provided equipping gifts to His people

Ephesians 4:11-12 NASB

And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, (12) for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

The goal is to bring us to maturity. The Holy Spirit works on us individually to renew our minds and conform us to the image of Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit is a gift of the Father; but, the Lord has given us the five fold ministry as His gifts to bring us to maturity. They work on us corporately to move us toward the expected result of maturity.

Ephesians 4:14 NASB

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

The expected result is that **we are no longer to be children**. The work is to go on until we all grow up, individually and corporately.

[Ephesians 4:13 NASB](#)

until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

We cannot become content with an arrested spiritual development. We need to have the attitude that Paul had:

[Philippians 3:12-14 NASB](#)

Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, [*complete, mature*] but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. (13) 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, (14) I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Christ has laid hold of us. He has a purpose for us. He has apportioned work for us. The work cannot be done by children, only by mature sons. We press on so that we can lay hold of that which Christ has apportioned to us.

Sons and Fathers

As our maturity progresses, there are two major phases: we are first sons and later we become fathers. So, we reach a point where we are both sons and fathers. We have to learn to be a son before we can become a father.

Under the Old Covenant, the people of God were servants. He was their God and they were His people and they were to obey and serve Him. We have a better Covenant under the New Testament—He is our Father and we are His Children.

[\(Galatians 4:6-7 NASB\)](#)

Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

Our problem is that we don't grow up as Sons to become fathers but instead remain at the level of a servant.

This idea is also reflected in Jesus' words toward His disciples.

[\(John 15:15 NASB\)](#)

"No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.

The disciples had grown up enough that they could understand the purpose of the work of the Lord. They had reached a point that they could participate in the purposes of God. Jesus revealing to them all that He had heard from the Father had achieved this. In other words, He had shown them the full expression of the Father's heart, which included His plans and purposes. They had reached a point where they could understand the paternal plan of the Father. This is the Lord's goal with us also, that we mature into an understanding of the Father's heart and are able to participate with the Lord in fulfilling the Father's purpose.

It is the Father's intention to bring many sons to glory. This is His paternal plan. We participate in the Family as a *son*. We appropriate the inheritance as an *heir*. We mature as overcomers to *reign* with Him, which is the qualification of the Father's work in the Millennium.

A son becomes an heir when he has received the father's instructions and obeyed them from his heart. In other words, he has been imbued with the father's heart. Normally, the “black sheep” of a family doesn't receive the inheritance because the father doesn't trust him to take care of it.

(Romans 8:17-18 NASB)

and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with *Him*. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

(Galatians 4:7 NASB)

Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

As children we become heirs of God and join-heirs with Christ. This is conditional on us suffering with him. We appropriate our inheritance by identifying with the suffering of Jesus so that we can be glorified with Him also.

Once we share in his heirship then we must be qualified to reign with Him. He is now on His throne in the heavens. We, as believers, are made to sit together in the heavenly places; however, we are not sitting with Him in His throne.

(Ephesians 2:6-7 NASB)

and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

However, for us to reign with Him (sit with Him in His throne) we have to qualify. Reigning with Him is something that He only grants to those who overcome. (This is not salvation that we are talking about.)

(Revelation 3:21 NASB)

'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

To overcome requires us to do some things. You cannot overcome by being passive. As Jesus said, “the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force”.

What is it then that we are to overcome? The same things that Jesus overcame, 1) the desires of the flesh; 2) the power of the world system; 3) the deception of the Enemy. We have His example in these areas; but, we have to learn how to do it through the power of the Holy Spirit.

There are some things that we receive from the Lord as gifts: His life, His spirit, and His nature. Gifts are gifts and don't involve anything that we do. However, there are other things that must be developed: His character, His mind, and His vision. Fulfilling His purpose is a product of training, overcoming, discipline, trials, hardship, and intensive spiritual qualifying.

Becoming Productive

It is in the family that we develop our character, our dependability, and our work ethic. We learn to work by working with our father and brothers. (I grew up on a farm and learning to work was very clear!) As children, we learn to be faithful in what we have been given to do. As we mature, we are given more things to do until, eventually, we can do the work without supervision and we will do it the way that our father wants it done. These same principles apply to us spiritually.

We learn to grow up in the Family of God. We learn character, loyalty, faithfulness, discipline, and an appreciation for the Father's heart. It is in the Family that we learn how to operate in the gifts and calling of God. We learn care, concern and discernment. We practice on each other. If mistakes are made, we are family; we love each other anyway.

But, there comes a time when a young man begins to learn a trade, a profession to help him fulfill his life's purpose. With his trade, he will provide for himself and his family. The same is true in the spirit.

Romans 12:4-8 NASB

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, (5) so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (6) Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *each of us is to exercise them accordingly*: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; (7) if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; (8) or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

While we may all prophesy one by one (1 Corinthians 14:3), we are not all prophets. It is a maturing process. As one begins to prophesy according to his proportion of faith, that faith grows. Then the person begins to prophesy more consistently, more frequently, and more precisely. The nature of his prophecies begin to move from the personal words of comfort, edification, and exhortation to a more corporate type of prophesy which begins to deal with revelation and insight into God's purposes. If the person's heart is also being dealt with and changed by the Word, he is well on his way to becoming a prophet, a gift of Jesus to the people of God.

This same process works for those called as teachers, or evangelists, or shepherds. The type of work that each does is different but the process of development is the same for each and it is according to each one's proportion of faith.

As we begin to function appropriately we provide a supply to the Body.

Ephesians 4:15-16 NASB

but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, (16) from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

We said at the beginning of this lesson that our definition of spiritual maturity was when you produced more than you consumed. This place is reached as we take our mature place in the Body where our joint supplies resources that nourish the Body causing growth.

Little children are consumers by nature. Young men consume much and produce a little. Fathers are the real producers, providing for the children. Let us grow up into Him; becoming fathers that receive from Him nourishment that flows into the Body.