

Teachings
of Various Kinds

Be Perfect! How to Grow Up

by Tricia Tillin

PART ONE: LET US GO ON TO MATURITY

"I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect." (Gen 17:1)

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect". (Matt 5:48)

WHAT PREDISPOSES US TO ACCEPT FALSE TEACHING?

These are probably the most dangerous times that we have ever known. And the dangers are subtle, not blatant or obvious.

Heresies today come so close to the truth that even those who know the Word fail to spot them.

Deceptions come across our path that are based on the Bible, with enough truth to make them seem acceptable. These heresies are almost undetectable. The strange thing is that some Christians see the errors and withdraw before they are caught, and others - (seemingly good Christians) - fail to see them. Why is this? Is it:

- God's sovereign grace - yes, in part, but why does God not rescue ALL his children from deception?
- Some people are biblically educated - not necessarily. Many knowledgeable bible students fall into error. Knowledge without discernment is not enough.
- Some have discernment - some people listen to the inward voice of the Holy spirit - and obey it! They are sensitive to the Spirit. YET - some spiritually-minded people DO accept the false teachings. STRANGE! Why?

THE GREATEST DANGER TO OUR SOULS IS NOT THE HERESY ITSELF, BUT OUR PROPENSITY FOR FOLLOWING IT.

Some Christians have a predisposition for following false teaching. Some people, although soundly saved and biblically knowledgeable, seem to stumble from one deception to another without ever learning how to avoid them. What causes that?

I believe that it is caused by IMMATURITY.

Immaturity is rampant in the Church! Immaturity is possibly the biggest blight in the church today, and it's not seen as a danger at all. In fact many leaders actively encourage their flock to remain immature - because it's far easier to lead people who are passive, dependent, gullible, unstable in their emotions, easily duped, and easily manipulated.

People who are immature make themselves a prey for all kinds of evil - including abusive authorities. To a large extent the shepherding movement would not have made such huge inroads into the Church without the passive acceptance of thousands of young and immature believers.

It is not a suggestion, but a vital task for every Christian to GROW UP to Christian maturity.

"that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ-" (Eph 4:14-15)

It is mature believers who are called to eldership and ministry roles. It is mature believers who are able to help others and give counsel to those who are in trouble. It is mature believers who perceive dangers and warn others of them. Furthermore, maturity bestows many spiritual benefits on us as Christians - yet few have heeded the command to seek maturity. Most people do not even consider the process as an option and many have never even heard of it! IMMATURITY OPENS THE DOOR TO DECEPTION:

"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things". (Cor 13:11)

My ministry is that of a watchman. If you look at that calling from a biblical standpoint you will discover that it is a "prophetic" calling. I have spent many years pointing out dangers, often before they occurred, so that Christians could be warned. I have done so in an attempt to encourage Christians to educate themselves about scriptural doctrine and deception.

Some people think a ministry like this is all about presenting a never-ending stream of deceptions and error, hitting out at leader after leader, exposing ministry after ministry in some kind of witchhunt.

That would just be voyeuristic, and counterproductive. The aim is not to give the deceptions more publicity but to use them as textbook examples, so that believers can school themselves in the subject and hone their discernment skills on them.

Some believe my only motive is to accuse and judge everybody. Nothing could be further from the truth. No true minister of God has the motive of pulling down and destroying just for the sake of it. Even the boldest of the Old Testament prophets, with the most extreme prophecies of doom, did not speak from hatred of those who offended God. They spoke out to warn, to persuade,

to reason with any who would listen, and to call the people back to God's laws. But my intent goes further even than that. The idea is to put myself out of a job! I would love the day to arrive that Christians become so practised at spotting the foundational errors, and knowing what God says about them, that they no longer need a watchman.

Whenever examples have been given or errors exposed it was with the intention of making them educational tools for spotting deception. The principle is, that people should be encouraged to seek God and his Word for themselves, to grasp the principles involved, and so go on to maturity.

BUT THAT ISN'T HAPPENING - not to the extent that it should. I'm disappointed that we are not growing up as a Body. I'm disappointed that so many believers are still at the baby stage of growth. I'm deeply worried that so many Christians have "itching ears" for the latest rumour or scandal, instead of growing up into a more mature attitude.

What I intended for the best has often been used for the worst. When sites like this are simply seen as gossip-columns for obtaining the latest titbit of information on the revival, then the main purpose for which they exist is obscured and lost. The whole Body is robbed as a result.

Should I therefore lay down my pen and deny God's call on my life? Should I stop doing what I'm doing and take this site off the Net? Possibly, if God shows me that is the best way to respond to the problem.

BUT, I believe God raised up these Watchman Ministries for a reason - to lead us as a Body towards discernment, understanding, and strength against the coming apostasy. But Watchman Ministries that should have been stimulating a desire for biblical truth, have ended up, in certain circumstances, creating a market for controversy.

EXAMPLES OF IMMATURITY

Most of the e-mail I receive shows a certain level of understanding, a zeal for the truth - but a tremendous amount of immaturity.

That manifests itself, most often, in people seeking for somebody to lead them by the nose, to do all the work for them, to spoon-feed them.

Too many Christians want me, or somebody in authority, to do all the work for them. They don't want to think it through for themselves.

I refuse to play Holy Spirit in your life! How can I know which church you should attend, or what leaders you should follow, or whether you should reject the teaching that you heard last Sunday? You shouldn't even be asking me to do that. You should be praying and asking GOD to show you!

What do I know about your life, your faith, your circumstances? What power do I have to make you a better and more effective Christian? And how come you trust me to be right? I could be horribly wrong and lead you up the garden path.

You know, it troubles me deeply when people hand me that sort of authority over their lives. It would be SO EASY to mislead them, if I were that way inclined. Just thank the Lord that I'm not.

Every truly born-again believer has the Holy Spirit, prayer and the word of God. Every member of the Body has an equal opportunity to learn about God and to know his will. The Body of Christ is not a dictatorship (however hard the leaders try and turn it into one.)

As a humble peasant of a communist state, you are expected to submit to the leader's every command. You are expected to toe the line and be fearful of punishment if you do not. You are dependent. No independent thought or action is allowed. You are simply there to OBEY.

But in the Body of Christ, each and every member has the right and RESPONSIBILITY to stand on his or her own feet and be independent. You have the right to object to false teaching and abuses! You have the responsibility of ensuring that you are following the word of God correctly, even if nobody else does.

Just a few examples of dependence on others. Somebody writes:

"I have read all of the works of Agnes Sanford and I think they are unbiblical and heretical. But my pastor is going to introduce her teaching into our church. Please send me an article that I can give to the pastor that will change his mind."

This person knows infinitely more about Agnes Sanford than I do, and is uniquely qualified to speak to her Pastor about the Sanford teachings. But instead of that, she comes to me, asking me for an article. Why? Why doesn't she have the confidence to write an article of her own? Or why could she not simply voice her own concerns to her pastor? Yet you know, if I reply and suggest this, it's likely she will be deeply offended. Or:

"I need to have your opinion of a man called Terry Virgo. I have attended his church and sat under his teaching for ten years and I think he is doctrinally wrong. But what do you think?"

These are based on real mails I have received. This man has attended Terry Virgo's church for ten years and he still wants me to tell him what to think about the man. Doesn't that strike you as wrong somehow? Why can't he trust what God has been showing him all those years? Why doesn't he trust his OWN discernment?

I have had mail saying: - "It's so confusing to know who I can safely follow. Please send me a list of every ministry that is OK, in the UK and overseas, so I will know who to support."

I kid you not. I do get mail like this. Imagine if I did come up with such a list. There's one unforeseen problem with it. What if I'm not OK - or my judgement is faulty? What if I don't have the correct information? Or I'm biased? Or my information is out of date?

What does MY opinion matter anyway? I would be scared to trust somebody as much as some Christians trust me!!

Wouldn't it be wonderful if some infallible authority were able to send us a list of everybody sound in the world, so we need never worry again about being deceived. But we all know it can never be that way. We must learn to think and act for ourselves, not depend on others.

SOME MINISTERS ENSLAVE YOU TO THEIR OPINIONS.

They have a vested interest in making you idle and passive. They actually encourage you to be dependent on them. You can't move until you have their latest tape. You can't make a decision until you know what your minister believes about it.

Unlike a lot of popular ministers, I don't encourage that - I don't like to be followed! I go out of my way to discourage people from following me or depending upon me, and for that (oddly) I get a lot of anger and criticism.

But you know, it's a sign of immaturity to seek out somebody to turn into your personal "guru". It is children who need mothers and fathers to look after them, not adults.

Instead of responding to your perceived needs, as so many others do, and making you more dependent as a result, I will always tell you to grow up and think for yourself. You may hate me for it, but I believe it's in your best interests.

Have you ever seen that bumper sticker - "Don't follow me; I'm lost". Well, I'm not lost, but I might not be going your way!

If you follow me, you'll end up where I'm going - not where God is leading you.

Some friends of ours were going to a family wedding. They knew the name of the church, but not exactly where it was. They had been told it was opposite the Nabisco Biscuit Factory. After some time driving around not being able to find it, they saw a Nabisco lorry. So they thought, I know, we'll follow the lorry to the factory. About half an hour went by and they were getting deeper and deeper into the city, into housing estates. And finally this lorry parked outside a house and the driver got out and went in. It turned out he was going home for his lunch.

The moral of this story is: IF YOU FOLLOW SOMEBODY ELSE YOU WILL END UP WHERE THEY ARE GOING, not the place you need to go!

JESUS DIDN'T ENCOURAGE HANGERS ON (John chapter Six)

Remember that Jesus did the same - he actively discouraged people from following him around. He made it hard for people to follow him! That's because he knew they would follow him for the wrong reasons.

We can trace the attitude and actions of Jesus as see how he dealt with this situation by looking at John 6:4-68. In verses 4-13 we have the story of the feeding of the five thousand, when Jesus miraculously fed the crowds out of nothing more than five loaves and two fishes. This impressed them to the point that they were ready to accept Jesus as Messiah:

"Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world."

Now at this point, at the peak of his popularity, with 5,000 awe-struck listeners, you'd expect any minister today to play to the crowd and make the most of the opportunity to preach his particular message. Is that what Jesus did - NO! Read on.

Verse 15: "When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone."

Just think of it! He walked away from that golden opportunity, just when he had the people eating out of his hand (no pun intended.) Now see what happens. Jesus had departed and gone over the lake, and the disciples had followed him:

"When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus. And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither? Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed". (verses 24-27)

Jesus then sets about preaching the REAL message that he wanted them to hear:

"And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.."

This was not the message the people wanted to hear. Jesus seemed to be going out of his way to give them something HARD to chew on! He knew they had come to him looking for miracles, but he refused to supply them. That would have been "easy-believism". No He preached an uncompromising message that angered and upset the people:

us his flesh to eat?"

But instead of sensing that he was losing them and offending them, Jesus presses right on, making the message so hard and direct that nobody but a determined disciple could ever accept it. Jesus does NOT want a popular following and names on his mailing list; he wants converts and disciples who will stand by him for ever, no matter what. And this message meant that even some of his disciples turned away!

"From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."

Jesus didn't come to feed the poor, much as the liberals would have you believe that. When he himself was tempted to create food miraculously to satisfy his own hunger, he refused.

The miracle of the loaves and fishes was a sign of his divinity, and also a parable about Jesus being the LIVING bread that came down from heaven. However, the majority of those who witnessed the miracle of the loaves and fishes didn't want spiritual food. They turned away from Jesus when he said "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." (John 6:53)

SPOON-FEEDING CREATES IMMATURE BELIEVERS

Jesus discouraged the crowds from following him around. But many ministers today encourage you to be dependent. It's easier to cultivate a following with those who never question, never think, just unquestioningly accept whatever you say. Such leaders make sure you are never able to stand by yourself. They will NEVER teach you to mature.

It's a bad shepherd who will hand-feed the flock personally - why? Because if one day he's not around, the sheep will starve! What if he's ill one day? His sheep have been made dependent - they can't find pasture for themselves.

It's a bad parent who panders to his children's every whim, and does everything for them. A father should train up his children to be proficient in many fields - encourage them to take risks, do things under supervision, achieve something for themselves, embark on a journey of learning and doing that will prepare them for life. Not wrap them in cotton wool and let them vegetate.

And it's a bad minister who encourages and trains the people in his charge to be dependent on his thoughts, opinions, beliefs and teachings. Ministers can be "helpers of your joy" and lead you to pasture, but they must not make you dependent upon their every thought and idea.

The REASON why so many people are immature in the Body is just this: **MINISTERS HAVE ENCOURAGED IT!**

The Church system is designed to create passive, pew-sitting people who do nothing but "repeat after me".

Look at 1 Samuel 3:1-18. This is the story of Samuel in the Temple. Samuel hears the voice of God calling him in the night. He goes to his Mentor, Eli the Priest, to have it interpreted. But did Eli say "OK, I am the priest, only I should hear from God. I am your covering - you shouldn't be listening to this voice on your own. I will come with you and if it happens again I will tell you what it means."

That in fact is what a modern-day shepherd or elder might do.

However, (see verse 9) Eli trusts the young untrained Samuel to go back to bed and hear and obey the voice of God FOR HIMSELF!

Samuel didn't need to run to an elder to hear the word of God, or to know how to obey God. God shows us here that he does not need to speak through a Priest, or "your covering" - he will speak directly to YOU!

Some people will hardly move a muscle before they have the OK of their elders. They are scared to think or act without approval from the authorities to which they have submitted themselves. But just try getting away with that in your place of work - go into work, sit there and wait for somebody to tell you exactly what to say and do. And every time something comes up, go to the Boss and say, "what do you think I should do? Tell me how to write this letter. Tell me how to answer this query - give me the information" and so on and so forth.

Pretty quickly you'll be told - if you are not self-motivated, you're out!

The Boss hasn't got the time or inclination to run around you all the time! The Boss wants to train you up so YOU can make the decisions, YOU do the research - that's what you are there for. You do your job and let him do his - or hers! CONTRIBUTE to the profession, not be a drain on resources.

Many Christians act like capable intelligent human beings, fully functioning and self-reliant all the week, and on Sunday they somehow revert to childhood! They sit down and expect the elders to do it all. THE MINISTERS have to interpret the scriptures to you, to tell you what's sound and what isn't. THEY have to get the information for you. You become a baby!

IT'S NEVER GOING TO WORK THIS WAY!

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO GROW UP?

These days, we are just not going to survive if we are not developing survival skills.

If you can't or won't think for yourself - develop discernment, pray it through, know how to hear God's voice for yourself without asking your favourite minister - then sooner or later you WILL be taken in! Other people are not a reliable source of information -

have you learned that.? I have!

You ask them - is Mr Smith, or Mr Jones OK? Can I follow them? He says - yes, he's on my recommended list. So you follow Smith or Jones - but what you don't realise is that Smith and Jones went over to Toronto last week and now they are into heresy in a big way.

Situations and people change! Things don't remain static!

How do you really know? Not by asking around - but listening, thinking, going to God, going to the Bible - praying, seeking God, as well as examining all the evidence.

The Holy Spirit is your guide, that's the only way you will really avoid error. And that is a function of a mature believer - to sort out the good from the bad.

God is desperately trying, it seems to me, to produce maturity in the Body.

Since people will not choose that for themselves, he's had to set up an environment in which maturity is developed faster than normal - how? - ISOLATION.

In the isolation tank, in solitary confinement, that's when you find out if you really have the ability to stay the course or not.

Yes, you can easily stand when all your friends are around you. Yes, you know a lot when your elders tell you about the bible every week (if they do) but what happens when you are on your own? Can you still maintain your spiritual life? Can you still hear from God, know good from evil, and stay true to God on your own?

The wilderness experience has always been a test-bed for faithfulness, in Jesus as well as others. We are in a wilderness for the same reason - to develop the hard skin that we need to survive.

THINGS ARE GOING TO GET WORSE FOR US BEFORE THE END!

What happens if leaders, pastors, elders and ministers are taken from us? What if all those we depend upon to know the truth and lead us, all those we hero-worship, are gone? Without self-reliance, self-motivation and MATURITY - many will falter and fail.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT MATURITY?

Firstly, let's look at what being mature really means. The bible uses the word "perfection" in this context, but it means something that has matured, like a fruit, to the fullest extent of its growth.

You CAN eat a fruit that isn't mature, but it's better to wait until it reaches perfection.

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till WE ALL come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ" (Eph 4:11-15)

Notice how many are expected to become mature in the Body of Christ. ALL. How many is ALL? Is it one or two specially anointed pastors and teachers? A few intelligent ones who can master the bible and theology? Half of us? Most?

Obviously, ALL means EVERYBODY. We all have the capability and responsibility to grow up, because the Bible says we can and should! Ministries are given, as God wills, not to make certain people special - but for the equipping of ALL in the Body, so that we all grow up "in all things". Ministries are there to do themselves out of a job, to make YOU into ministers too.

A MINISTER IS A SERVANT

In the Bible, the word "MINISTRY" simply means SERVICE, service to the Body. Are you of service to others - or are you a drag on others, still begging to be led? Growing up means you become a helper rather than one who needs help. And you can do it! What does the scripture above say is the result of staying a spiritual baby? It says that we become a prey to false doctrine, and the trickery of men, to the cunning craftiness of deceitfulness - in a word, we are vulnerable to deception!

In these days, I don't want anyone to be vulnerable to deception - so what is the Bible's remedy? GROW UP!!

No, not MORE AND MORE INFORMATION, MORE AND MORE NEWSLETTERS, MORE AND MORE ARTICLES. Your home can be stocked full of every book and newsletter known to man, and you may have a thousand discernment websites in your favourites folder, but you will still fall into deception if you are immature and refuse to grow up. Notice how the bible contrasts the mature spiritual man with a child:

"Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature". (1 Cor 14:20)

"And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing". (1 Cor 2:4-6)

God is able to impart wisdom to the mature believer. That is something to be coveted and aimed for. Only mature men and women

can really deeply understand the things of God. These things are not given to the babes - babies lack the facility for understanding these things:

"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. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 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". (Heb 5:12-14)

It's fine to be a baby when you are first saved:

"as new-born babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Pet 2:2)

BUT the Bible never envisages you staying that way. It may be comfortable. It may be easy, but it's not biblical: Indeed, Paul criticises the Corinthians for being babies, carnal, not spiritual:

"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?" (1 Cor 3:1-3)

WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTARY THINGS OF THE FAITH? What does Paul see as the elementary things, teachings for elementary school, for primary children?

"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, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgement. And this we will do if God permits". (Heb 6:1-3)

These things -

- **Repentance**

- **Faith**

- **Baptism in water and in the Spirit**

- **Laying on of hands (gifts)**

- **Resurrection from the dead (endtimes, Rapture and heaven)**

. Judgement

These are just the bottom rung of the spiritual ladder according to Paul - yet many Christians and churches have hardly grasped these fundamentals, never mind going beyond them! The foundation on which the edifice is built.

We see the foundations in many churches - but no building.

They never get beyond the concrete floor and the damp-proof course! How would you like to live in a house like that? It's a start, but you can't live in it and it won't protect you from the cold and damp.

OUR FIRST HOUSE:

When my husband and I were buying our very first house, we were so excited. We used to go out to the building site every weekend just to gaze at the foundations. This was our house! It was just a couple of rows of brick, a concrete base and a lot of mud, but to us it was wonderful!

But what if the builders said, well we had so much fun building the foundations last week, we're going to do them again this week. And again, and again - don't you think we would have got tired of that house?

Some churches are like that. Every Sunday they lay the foundation all over again. Even for the church members, not the unsaved.

I've been to churches like that. Every meeting the same ten people, and every meeting the same address - a salvation message! And once a month you might get lucky and have a different face telling you how to get saved. But after you have been saved - what then?

Everybody who attends the church has been saved for something like 50 years already but they are still laying the foundations in every meeting. How can the Body grow like this?

Some churches never even GET to this stage! And Paul says this is the kiddie stuff, the elementary things.

There's so much more in the Bible than getting saved, and going to heaven. God wants to be able to lead you into a deeper walk with Him, to touch upon deeper aspects of the spiritual life, to share his wisdom with you as He does amongst the mature. You will never move off the soft food and the milk if you don't co-operate with God in growing up.

CHILDREN VERSUS ADULTS:

Notice how the bible contrasts the mature spiritual man with a child: The same word is used in the Bible for "mature", "perfect/complete, entire" and of full-age = ADULT.

"Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature". (1 Cor 14:20)

But notice also that this same contrast is made in the book of proverbs between the foolish and the wise. For example:

"The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness". (Prov 15:14)

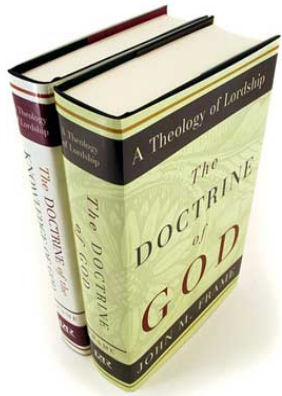
"A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards". (Prov 29:11) - (I have that one pinned up by the telephone!)

So, children are foolish and undiscerning, whereas mature adults in the faith are wise and able to discern.

In Part Two, therefore, we are going to look at the behaviour and traits of babies and toddlers and contrast them with the behaviour that the Bible expects of mature Christians.



CONTINUE TO **PART TWOa**: How mature am I?



Teachings
of Various Kinds

Be Perfect! How Mature am I? (2a)

by Tricia Tillin

Characteristics of the Immature - Babies versus Adults

The Bible often compares and contrasts children and adults when talking about spiritual maturity. Immature believers are seen as babies and young infants, and believers who have progressed beyond the foundational aspects of their faith are seen as adults.

Therefore, this section takes a look at the behaviour and traits of babies and toddlers and contrast them with the behaviour that the Bible expects of mature Christians. We can find out whether we are acting like spiritual infants, or grow-up mature Christians by considering these characteristics or traits.

Please notice that the traits we discuss as belonging to babies are not "bad" behaviour - just "normal" for babies. However, what is normal for a baby is NOT normal behaviour for an adult! In this section we are not talking about sin, but human nature.

The areas we are going to consider are:

- **FEEDING**
- **CLEANLINESS**
- **ABILITIES**
- **PROTECTION**
- **BEHAVIOUR (see next section)**

. **RELATIONSHIPS** (see next section)

1. **FOOD AND FEEDING**

a) Spoon-Feeding is for Babies

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Heb 5:12-14)

| CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | SCRIPTURES |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Spoon-fed. Food prepared by OTHERS. Others make food choices for him (e.g. bible studies, tapes, books.) Somebody else does the hard work of food cultivation and preparation. Eats only the MANNA - easily digested but does not keep; is not long-lasting food. | Feeds himself (by hard labour). Will dig for himself, follow up references, make notes, educate himself. Takes responsibility for his own health and well-being, and nutrition. CORN OF THE PROMISED LAND - which needs to be planted, sown, reaped, ground, cooked etc - but which has substance and is long-lasting. | Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. (2 Tim 2:15-16) |

We all know that babies cannot feed themselves. They need to be bottle-fed or spoon-fed. Adults have to find, prepare and feed nutrition to a baby.

In the same way, spiritual babies have to have soft food prepared for them by others. They have to be spoon-fed. Other people choose the food of the spiritual babe - there's no real labour involved - babies expect their food to be served up ready prepared. Somebody else does all the hard work, and they reap the benefits.

While we are young Christians, we depend on commentaries, bible study notes, tapes and videos; as we grow we begin to seek

the Holy Spirit's guidance and illumination on what we read and depend less on other people's help. To remain totally dependent on others for our spiritual food is a sign of immaturity.

A spiritual babe will just demand instant answers, and be annoyed when he doesn't get them. Doesn't that remind you of what happens when a baby is hungry and needy? Everybody knows what the sound of a crying baby is like - but the spiritual baby also cries and pouts if his meal is not instantly available. He doesn't like to wait, nor to have to do any work for himself.

One of the biggest problems today is that Christians want to be spoon-fed. I have had many e-mails that demand instant answers and ready-prepared statements that people can just print off and give to their elders, without their having to think about the issues for themselves. And I try gently to suggest to these people that they would do better to research the subject for themselves, or read the articles on the website, but I know full well before I even open my mouth what their reaction will be - annoyance, irritation anger and even downright abuse! "How dare you suggest that I do some research work for myself. How unloving of you to suggest that I pray and seek God about this! You are

Websites like this exist to provide the educational tools that Christians need to detect and avoid error for themselves. They are not instant-answer machines. If a child scrapes his knee, he'll run to Daddy or Mummy saying "make it better!" (and have absolute faith in an adult to perform the required miracle because we all know Mummies and Daddies can do anything.) But an adult faced with the same problem will wash his own wound, seek out the disinfectant and plasters and minister to his own needs. There is not the same level of comfort, but we all have to grow up and act for ourselves eventually.

So it is with dealing with spiritual deception. Many come to the website and immediately decide it all looks like a lot of hard work. The answers are there, but it would mean having to read the articles and understanding the issues for themselves. They get impatient, annoyed and even offended that they have to do something to dig out the information they need.

People who are facing deception in their churches really need to think it through for themselves, to find the scriptures, to pray about it, to seek the Lord for themselves, to seek his leading and to educate themselves by reading all they can about the various topics. Why? For the simple reason that we are ALL vulnerable to deception of some kind and relying on other people's discernment or experiences is not going to save us from falling into deception! It's only our OWN knowledge, faith and experience that counts.

If you want to know about a minister or ministry - do the homework! YOU go buy the magazine, read it, and think about it. What do YOU think! YOU go down the library, or the bookshop. YOU read the scriptures, and find out for yourself!!

b) No Strong Meat

| CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | SCRIPTURES |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Has to have soft, bland food Cannot stomach strong meat I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. (1 Cor 3:2) | Can chew, eats tough foods Goes beyond the basics of belief | Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? (John 6:63) As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. (2 Pet 3:16) |

It is a sure sign of immaturity when a Christian cannot take on board anything challenging or new in theology - he can stomach no strong meat. A spiritual babe wants bland food, easily digestible -nothing strong or tough

The Christian who hasn't grown in his faith keeps reading the same old favourites over and over, the same nice scriptures, the same books and tapes from his favourite preacher. He will generally have one or two men that he admires and listens only to them, feeling unsure and uncomfortable outside that zone. He follows his favourite leader on all points, to the point of hero-worship. Furthermore, he accepts everything his favourite leaders says, and never think to challenge him - he won't hear of anybody else challenging him either!

The immature believers needs the comfort of black-and-white beliefs, with no areas of uncertainty. He cannot cope with grey areas but has to see everything in terms of right/wrong, good/bad and sound/heretical. (This is why religious bigots are usually insecure personalities.)

One bible study I attended focussed on one minister's teaching tapes to the exclusion of everything else. (Let's call him Johnny Preacher) The leaders of the bible group had several hundred of these tapes and every week we had to listen to what the Great Man had to say.

Now, the teaching was interesting and sound, but it certainly wasn't infallible, and on many occasions I felt like raising objections to Johnny Preacher's handling of the scriptures but this was not permitted. And, whenever a spiritual question was asked in the group, the stock answer was "What does Johnny Preacher say" - NO! What does the Word of God say?

Babies have to eat bland, soft food. They have no teeth and cannot chew. Adults, on the other hand, can chew; they can eat tough foods, foods with shells or bones, or hot foods like curry. Mature believers can rise to the challenge of something difficult, something they haven't encountered before, something strong.

They are not afraid to tackle new thoughts, or to have their precious beliefs shaken, if necessary. They will think and pray it through, search out the truth without being defensive. They are not afraid of being wrong, or having to modify their stance on something. They will accept that there are some things they do not know! Immature believers will never do this - they get angry and defensive if you challenge their beliefs.

c) Sugar-Coated Teaching

| CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | SCRIPTURES |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Will not accept something that is sour or bitter, or evil tasting, even if it's good for them.</p> <p>Medicine has to be made palatable</p> <p>Everything sugar-coated - made attractive, exciting.</p> <p>Cannot accept rebuke or discipline.</p> | <p>Can choose something unpleasant if necessary.</p> <p>Will take bitter medicine</p> <p>Can face correction, rebuke or discipline.</p> <p>Can swallow hard things in the Word, without choking.</p> | <p>For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but . you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions..(2 Tim 4:3-5)</p> <p>If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. (Heb 12:7-8)</p> |

Immature people have to stay with the tried and tested, the familiar "foods" that they like and can swallow easily. They focus on their favourite nice scriptures, and skip over or ignore the unpleasant or difficult ones.

And they won't take on anything unpalatable to their souls - anything difficult, or costly, or calling for self-abasement.

If there's something unpleasant to face up to, or some sin the Bible convicts them of; what do spiritual babies do? They avoid the truth; they stick their heads in the sand, or run away instead of facing it like an adult. They'll even get angry, sulk, blame others, complain of feeling rejected or unloved, all because they cannot deal with hard truths.

Mature believers, however, can face up to the truth without flinching. They can be corrected. Mature believers can swallow something hard in the Word, without choking. They can choose to accept something unpleasant if necessary. They will take bitter medicine if it's necessary for their good. If they come across something problematic, they don't run away, they deal with it head on.

d) Harmful Substances - Keep Them Away From Children!

| CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | SCRIPTURES |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Will put unsuitable things into his mouth or swallow harmful things, if they are attractive and enjoyable.</p> <p>Is not trained in discernment; cannot distinguish good and bad, right and wrong.</p> <p>Gullible, swallows whatever he's told, does not discriminate.</p> | <p>Will test and try things beforehand; not fooled by the outward appearance.</p> <p>Has developed discrimination; is wary of things that may harm him.</p> <p>Exercises discernment; does not trust people over-much.</p> | <p>But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Heb 5:14)</p> <p>These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. (Acts 17:11)</p> |

A child can swallow harmful things by accident if he thinks they are good - pills, bleach in a lemonade bottle, small toys and so on.

That is because a baby is driven by a desire for quick and easy gratification of his senses. And he doesn't know how to distinguish between good and bad. Because he's always been fed by others, and never chosen his own food, he hasn't learned to discriminate between good and bad. If it looks bright and edible - in it goes. If it feels good in the mouth - he'll swallow.

Immature believers are also a push-over for exciting new revelations, ear-tickling things, gossip, the latest controversy, scandal - anything lovely and tasty. And they don't discriminate, it all goes down the same way - if it's dressed up to look interesting and palatable, the immature believer will swallow it.

False teachers depend on this level of immaturity because without it they would never be able to lead so many Christians astray. These deceivers say, "here - take this dose of Toronto, it's fine. It's in the Bible, believe me". And spiritual babies swallow what they are given with hardly a thought.

They have allowed themselves to stay at the spoon-fed stage of development so whatever an "adult" feeds them must be good.

They don't stop to examine what they are taking in. This may be fatal to their spiritual development!

False teachers and cultists have learned this. They prey on the immature, because immature believers are so GULLIBLE.

Adults discriminate carefully, finding out if something is good or bad for them. They use refined senses - smell, taste, touch etc to avoid danger. A mature believer has developed discernment - he's trained his senses to distinguish what is good and bad. He no longer trusts to the outward appearance, but will question whether a thing is truly good.

Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?

The speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing. Then God said to him: "Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. (1King 3:7-12)

e) Beware, POISON!

| CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | SCRIPTURES |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Cannot survive poisonous food.</p> <p>No defences against disease or food poisoning - vulnerable to false teaching.</p> <p>Weak constitution.</p> <p>Has not grown in strength - the word of God produces strength to resist evil.</p> | <p>Has developed a strong stomach, which will survive indigestion or even bad food.</p> <p>Can survive false teaching without being totally overthrown.</p> <p>Has developed resistance to evil.</p> | <p>The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down. (Ps 37:23-24)</p> <p>Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me.. (Micah 7:8-9)</p> |

Too much, or the wrong sort of food will easily upset or kill a child. But a grown man can survive indigestion, or even a bad attack of salmonella poisoning that would kill a child.

What can we learn from this? Immature believers have the worst combination of attributes. They are gullible, therefore can easily be coaxed to eat something poisonous - and at the same time, they are spiritually weak, as weak as a baby, so their faith can easily be overturned and shipwrecked. What a dangerous position to be in. How much we need to develop maturity these days!

Spiritual babies have few defences, because they don't know the Word sufficiently to perceive the dangers. The word of God transforms our natural minds; this is the equivalent of developing immunity from diseases. As we encounter and throw off more and more diseases in the world, exercising biblical knowledge, we develop antibodies against further attacks. But a baby lacks these defences and has to be protected from harm all the while. Everything has to be sterilised for a baby.

Without somebody to protect them, immature believers can easily be poisoned by false teaching or pick up spiritual diseases. Because they are afraid and unwilling to progress spiritually, they protect themselves from hard things and difficult theories. So whenever they come into contact with diseased teaching they fall immediately. They have never come across them before, so they possess no immunity against them.

A mature believer, however, can survive the storm. He might fall temporarily, but he will recover, and go on. He won't be totally shipwrecked by false teaching, or the downfall of his favourite teacher. When we grow up spiritually, we can stomach a certain amount of wrong teaching, we can learn to pick the meat off the bones and even glean something from false teachers. But no baby Christian could survive this! A mature believer can survive in a church that's in error, whereas you can't let a babe in Christ go anywhere near false teaching.

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.(2 Cor 4:8-11)

2. KEEPING CLEAN

| <p>CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i></p> | <p>ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i></p> | <p>SCRIPTURES</p> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Has no control over bodily functions.</p> <p>Has no awareness of being unclean.</p> <p>No desire for cleanliness.</p> <p>Needs to be kept clean by others.</p> | <p>Has developed control, and keeps self clean.</p> <p>Does not need to be reminded to take action when dirty.</p> <p>Actively seeks to be clean.</p> <p>Disciplines himself</p> | <p>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Gal 5:22-24)</p> <p>But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection. (1 Cor 9:24-27)</p> <p>Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Cor 7:1)</p> |

Immaturity means you lack control over your self-life. You are at the mercy of your needs, your flesh. When you sin, you are barely aware of it - somebody else has to tell you. And somebody else has to come along and deal with you, rebuke you, apply the discipline. Somebody has to clean you up, and clean up after you. You won't discipline yourself.

Mature believers on the other hand have grown in the Lord to the point that they genuinely desire to manifest the holiness of God. They have an awareness of sin in their lives. They have tender consciences. They actively avoid sin, and don't need to be constantly warned by others. They apply the warnings to themselves, instead of waiting for others to do it. They discipline themselves.

A telltale sign of Christians living in immaturity is that they will look for ways of doing as much as they can to please themselves without actually crossing the border into sin. They will keep their lives on the borderline, just this side of sin. They will constantly be asking themselves, "how far can I go before I get punished?" There is only a desire to do the bare minimum to keep out of trouble - no genuine heartfelt desire to be holy, just a desire, imposed by others, to keep to the rules - like a child.

It is man's natural inclination to be rebellious. But only the immature believer lives in the realm of natural desires and inclinations. Spiritual believers see the need to die to self, and they allow the nature of the Lord to take over. They actively SEEK holiness. They do not have to be constantly pulled into line. This is because they are no longer in rebellion against the commands of God.

3. ABILITIES

| CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | SCRIPTURES |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Totally dependent. Looks for somebody to help him in everything. Has to be dressed, carried - cannot walk unaided. | Self-motivated. Self-reliant. | But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load. (Gal 6:4-5) But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:25-26) |

Immature Christians look for other people to do everything for them. They constantly need help, or look for help. They do not, or will not, believe that they can do anything without help - therefore they never bother to try.

Clothing - in the bible means righteousness, and baby Christians have to be clothed by others; other people have to help keep them on the straight and narrow. This is fine for young believers but as we grow we should be capable of living in righteousness by ourselves.

Walking - this is the Christian walk. Maturity means you are self-motivated and undertake things by yourself. Babies won't attempt the Christian walk if there's nobody there to carry them. They rely on pastors, elders, friends, tapes, videos, meetings. Without that, they just fall down. Spiritual babies are like cars without petrol - you have to push, push, push to get them anywhere. And when you stop pushing they just come to a standstill. Mature believers have fuel for their journey and they progress by themselves.

However, while it's good to be self-reliant, we also need to be open to advice and guidance from others? The mature walk is neither TOO dependent nor TOO self-reliant. A mature believer can know his own mind, but also appreciate help and input from others.

4. DEFENSE & PROTECTION

a) Babies Need Protection

| CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | SCRIPTURES |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cannot be left alone. Cannot protect himself. Doesn't perceive danger. Vulnerable to abuse. | Doesn't need others to watch over him continually. Avoids danger and harm by himself. Detects and resists evil. | Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. (Matt 16:2-3) At my first defence no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me. And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. (2 Tim 4:16-18) |

There are laws that prevent adults leaving babies and infants on their own. Why? Because babies are vulnerable to all kinds of dangers; they are dependent on others to protect them from harm. A baby needs others to protect him because he cannot resist evil unaided. Indeed, he has little awareness of danger.

I once watched a public information advert in which a baby was shown playing with a sharp kitchen knife. I can tell you, my heart was in my mouth and I was twitching in my seat, dying to rush over and snatch that knife away to save the baby from harm. (It was a fake knife, but it looked real enough.) The truth is, a baby probably WOULD play with a knife if you gave him one. Babies have little understanding of what might harm them and that's why they need others around to protect them.

Adults know for themselves what is harmful, and if they come across something dangerous, they take precautions to avoid it. They also proactively rescue others from danger.

Spiritual immaturity means you don't perceive danger, or if you do, you look to others to protect you from harm. You haven't developed the personal awareness of dangers, nor the resources that would cause you to know evil, to resist evil, and to stay away from evil. You also endanger others without a thought, because you don't perceive the harm in what you do.

I think every minister will agree that more of their ministry problems arise through the thoughtless actions of immature believers than from the secular world. Immature believers are naïve; unaware of the presence of evil, heedless of its powers, thoughtless about endangering others because they have no sense of danger for themselves.

But mature believers, even if completely on their own, still have the inward strength to withstand evil and error. They don't need to be TOLD. They know by discernment what is good for them, and what is harmful. They know when to speak and when to keep silent; they know how to protect themselves and their fellow-believers; they are able to sense danger.

b) Children are easily abused.

| CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | SCRIPTURES |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Helpless; vulnerable. Gullible, easily duped. Trusting; too eager to allow others to lead them. | Has strengths and resources that protect him. Wary. Watches for danger. Is not too trustful of others, not easily led. | A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished. (Prov 27:12) Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Cor 10:12) |

Immature believers are sitting ducks! They almost advertise themselves with a placard saying "come and deceive me!" They are GULLIBLE. It's so easy to con them, to persuade them to accept false doctrine - they just don't seem to know any better. They are so eager to have somebody lead them, so eager for attention, that they fall for any line.

These are the ones who lurch from one false doctrine to another - anything ear-tickling, anything new and exciting - the more obscure the better! "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim 3:7)

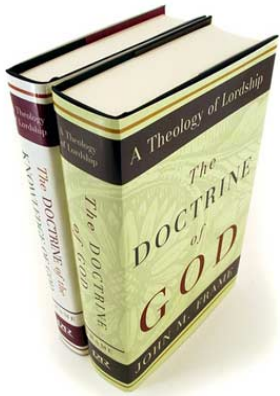
This isn't true (or should not be true) of adults. As we grow, we become more wary of people's intentions. An adult has learned that there are dangers in the world, and he's on the lookout for them. He doesn't trust everyone regardless. He's learned to be a bit cynical, not over-trusting.

A mature believer has the right attitude to other people and the world. He recognises there is evil and false doctrine and dangers to his soul. He's not in a constant state of paranoia, but at the same time, he's wary. He keeps a proper balance between being open to people, and being guarded. He doesn't fall for any old story or testimony - but checks out what he's told.



CONTINUE TO [PART TWO](#)b: How Mature Am I (2)?

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Teachings
of Various Kinds

Be Perfect! How Mature am I? (2b)

by Tricia Tillin

Characteristics of the Immature - Babies versus Adults

5. BEHAVIOUR

a) Selfishness is Childish

| CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | SCRIPTURES |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Focussed on SELF. | Thinks of others. | We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, leading to edification. (Rom 15:1-2) |
| Seeking to satisfy his needs and desires. | Can deny himself. | |
| Does not register the presence or importance of others. | Notices the needs of others and seeks to supply them. | |
| Uses people to get what he needs. | Respects others, will not use them. | |
| | Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another; (Rom 12:10) | Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Phil 2:3-4) |

The paramount thing in a child's mind is to get something to satisfy his needs or wants. And he thinks nothing of working on people till he gets it. He is self-centred, self-obsessed and self-absorbed. We tolerate this in young children but clearly any adult who acted in the same way would be a major pain in the posterior for us. Adults are expected to grow out of selfishness.

Probably the best indication of immaturity is somebody who is consistently self-centred.

Have you met the person whose whole focus in life is himself? He doesn't seem to notice you! He's full of all that he has to suffer, he's acutely aware of his emotions, pains, fears, worries and so forth. But you are insignificant and unimportant to him. You are only important in so far as you might be able to supply his needs.

This is childish behaviour at its most irritating. The only remedy for such a person is to GROW UP! Maturity brings respect of others. Maturity means we begin to look outwards from ourselves to other folks. We seek to please others, not just ourselves. We put ourselves last, and exalt each other, help each other. We are not afraid of denying ourselves.

b) Look at ME!

| <p>CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i></p> | <p>ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i></p> | <p>SCRIPTURES</p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Perception of life is that he's the centre of the universe; others revolve around him.</p> <p>Expects at all times to be centre of attention.</p> <p>Longs for attention, approval and acceptance; showing off. Sulking when ignored.</p> <p>"Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. (Luke 16:15)</p> | <p>Self-sustaining.</p> <p>Does not need approval to function.</p> <p>Defers to other people.</p> <p>Seeks God's will rather than man's approval.</p> <p>Humble, not self-exalting.</p> <p>"How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" (John 5:44)</p> | <p>For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. (Gal 1:10)</p> <p>".. even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: Nor of men sought we glory." (1Thes 2:4-6)</p> <p>"Not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men." (Eph 6:6-7)</p> |

A child spends a lot of time looking for attention. "Look what I did, Daddy" is his cry. If a child senses the attention is going

Immature believers act the same way. They believe they should be the centre of attention - they seek attention, crave it. They also need approval all the time, in order to function.

This leads them to some bizarre behaviour - showing-off, pretending to have spiritual gifts, or presenting you with a series of emotional problems. Whether it's with a spectacular ministry or a spectacular problem, either way, they have to be SPECIAL.

Look at some leaders on stage, or standing at the front of their churches, making a show of themselves - it's all a performance because they have to be centre-stage, have to have the applause and approval of others.

Ministers who are like this cannot say anything critical of others in case they lose their support-base. They are frequently in the ministry for the POWER and PRESTIGE, and the kudos it brings them. Man's approval, to them, is all, but "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets". (Luke 6:26)

Attention-seeking is a sure sign of immaturity.

A mature Christian can function in God's will, get on and do the job, whether he receives approval or not. Think of the old Reformers - they continued to function, in the teeth of persecution and reviling. They were not prepared to be threatened or flattered into submission. It was God's will, not man's approval that they sought - and so it is with every mature believer.

c) Flesh Rules!

| <p>CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i></p> | <p>ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i></p> | <p>SCRIPTURES</p> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Lives on emotional energy; is emotion-driven</p> <p>Ruled by the flesh.</p> <p>Decides according to what he feels and thinks and needs.</p> <p>Cannot endure hardship.</p> | <p>Ruled by God's will and nature.</p> <p>Puts his own needs to one side.</p> <p>Willing to go without for the sake of God, and for others.</p> <p>And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.(Gal 5:24)</p> | <p>For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.</p> <p>(Rom 8:5)</p> <p>Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? (James 4:1)</p> |

Immaturity, as we have seen, is all to do with staying childish. And the main characteristic of a child is his selfish inability to see beyond his own needs and desires. So, immature behaviour is all about the SELF (which should be "crucified with Christ" and put under the blood.) Too many Christians are ruled by the self-life, instead of the will of God.

There are many adults who are selfish and self-centred - most unbelievers are. But Christians should know better. They have the new nature of Christ within them, and should be allowing that nature to shine out. Christians should progressively learn how to forsake the flesh

You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. (James 4:3)

A carnal Christian is ruled by physical desires, and emotional needs. He doesn't know how to say no to his desires - to him, being satisfied in the flesh is the most important thing.

Unfortunately, this makes him vulnerable to anyone who knows how to manipulate emotions. Because of the great significance he gives to his emotions, the immature Christian is a target for leaders who induce feelings of guilt or inadequacy,

I pity Christians who exaggerate their faults and sins in their own minds because they focus on their own emotions. They also allow false teachers to place heavy burdens of guilt on their shoulders and give in to suggestions that they are not loving enough, not spiritual enough, not active or effective - in effect, failed Christians! They are not failing at all in God's eyes, but none the less they continually torment themselves with thoughts of having committed the unforgivable sin, of having failed to reach the required level of faith.

While all this may appear to be a quest for holiness, it is in reality self-obsession. I'd like to say to them "get over yourself!". But I know that if I did so, I'd be misunderstood. I respond graciously and gently to such Christians, but the fact is they spend so much time thinking about what they feel and think, they have little time for anybody else. Navel-gazers like this cannot see other people around them and never respond to the needs of others. They are babes in faith!

In order to function as a working member of the Body of Christ, extending a helping hand to others, enduring the often abusive and critical attitudes of other Christians, and facing up to the need to put others before self, maturity is VITAL. No immature Christian is going to last long in an environment where self-denial is called for.

d) Dealing With Criticism

| CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | SCRIPTURES |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Easily offended. Easily harmed by criticism. Have to be careful to give praise, build them up. | Can be corrected, and even be thankful for it. Doesn't take every word as a rejection. Can function without praise. | Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you. (Prov 9:8) Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now. (1 Cor 4:12-13) |

Every ten minutes, a child is squealing or crying or sulking about something. His toy has been taken away, or he's been put to bed when he wants to keep playing, or another child is getting the attention. Imagine if adults were like this too (but many are!).

There are just too many knocks and setbacks for childlike sensitivity. In order to function as adults, we have to grow out of being a drama queen, and learn how to deal with criticism and rebuke.

There is nothing more certain in life and especially in the Church but that you will receive criticism, accusation and rebukes for what you do and believe. Some of this is just and some unjust, but it all feels the same - painful! The Lord promises that you WILL be chastened and rebuked, so you shouldn't be too surprised when it happens: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent .(Rev 3:19). The way you handle it is a measure of your growth to maturity.

Immature believers can't deal with criticism - they can't be corrected. They go into depression, or cry, or have a tantrum. They turn to hate, retaliation, bitterness and all kinds of unhealthy reactions instead of taking it to the Lord in prayer. This is because they are still living in the emotional realm, and their feelings are so precious to them that they feel the slightest indication of rejection.

We all know people who have decided that you dislike them even before you are through the door. Before you open your mouth they have seen three things about you that accuse them of wrongdoing. There's no way you can make friends with this person because his or her rejection antennae are so finely tuned that everything you say and do is translated into rejection in their eyes.

Even if you make a good first impression, you sense that without walking on eggs you are not going to last very long in their good books; and sure enough the first time you disagree with them or say something out of turn, it's all over! You are now their

enemy for life! There's really no good way to handle this level of immaturity - you just have to pray for grace!

Such people also cannot function without praise and approval. They have to have praise lavished on them all the time or they can't continue. Put them into an environment where no praise is forthcoming and they will wind down and stop like a clockwork toy.

Maturity brings with it the ability accept rebuke. When rebuke is correct, godly and necessary, the right response is to take it to God, be honest, and repent. How many can do this? How many will react to ANY rebuke by defending themselves hotly and indignantly?

When it comes to unjust criticism and rebuke, however, the differences between the immature and the spiritual Christian becomes even more marked.

A mature Christian will sense he's being unjustly dealt with, and of course he'll be hurt and tempted to retaliate, but his finer feelings will prevail eventually and he will not make a war out of it. He will meekly allow others to accuse him, receiving false accusations graciously in the name of love and good order in the Body. He will entrust himself to God who knows all and repays all.

Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; (1 Pet 2:21-23)

Just as Jesus allowed himself to be maltreated, misunderstood and unjustly accused, so Christians should develop the same spirit of love and tolerance although it's the hardest thing we are asked to do. The flesh wants to have revenge and justify itself, but a mature Christian will strive to restrain his flesh and do the better thing. (I am not saying it is wrong to defend yourself against somebody's slander or false accusation - I am talking about the heart's attitude.)

e) Having to Endure

| CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | SCRIPTURES |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
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| | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Has to be kept amused.</p> <p>Needs stimulation and entertainment.</p> <p>Needs innovation - the "new thing".</p> <p>No staying power or endurance.</p> <p>Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. (Heb 12:1)</p> <p>For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: (Heb 10:36)</p> <p>You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. (2 Tim 2:3)</p> | <p>Works long and hard for no immediate reward.</p> <p>Patient, long-suffering.</p> <p>Can persevere, endure hardship.</p> <p>I know your works, your labor, your patience, and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. (Rev 2:2-3)</p> | <p>My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. (James 5:10)</p> <p>But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience. (Mark 4:15)</p> <p>that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Heb 6:12)</p> |
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Because the flesh of an immature believer dominates, and the flesh needs to be amused, placated, and entertained, immature believers are butterflies that flit from person to person and task to task chasing after what is novel, exciting and new. They rarely stick at a task long and have no powers of endurance, especially where self-denial is called for.

For example, some Christians have a hard time dealing with a task that involves long hours of hard, boring work. I discovered this the hard way, as a few years ago I was involved in intensive and demanding work creating my newsletter and tapes and sending them out to thousands of supporters. Coming to the end of my own resources, I asked for people to help me; some offered, but when they discovered that they would be expected to lick stamps and seal envelopes for hours at a time they suddenly had "important engagements" that kept them away!

You see, people imagine that "ministry" is all fun, excitement and glory. They think that I am hob-nobbing with "Big Names" and leading meetings all the time, and they want a slice of the action. That is why some offer to "help" me in the ministry, really because they are seeking glory and excitement. But when they realise that nine tenths of the work is boring and hard graft they lose interest.

But a mature believer is not like this. He or she makes decisions based on God's will, not his or her own feelings or needs. God's will is the deciding factor.

"My judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." (John 5:30.)

"Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done". (Luke 22:42.)

It takes patience to achieve anything worthwhile in the Christian life. You have to have stickability - only maturity brings that. No child will give attention to a task that is long, tedious, boring, and with no immediate reward.

Mature believers like a good time just as much as anyone, but when the need arises they are prepared to forego their own pleasures, and stick at it. Things like patience, long-suffering, endurance - these are signs of mature character. Mature believers can persevere. They can accept hardship and self-sacrifice. These are the ones who will offer to do the work, put themselves out to help you, and not give a thought to the personal rewards

Only mature believers are fit for the work of Ministry! This is why it is so VITAL for Christians to grow up. A world with all babies and no mothers and fathers could never function, since babies don't reproduce, they don't work, they don't contribute anything.

The bible envisaged a Church where every single member had a part to play. The babes in Christ would be nurtured and matured, and would grow into a new generation of servers and leaders. However, as things stand, in the Church there are just a few who labour on, doing all the work, with everybody else hanging on their coat tails. As the world, so in the Church, all babies and no adults is not a system that can work.

6. RELATIONSHIPS

a) Being Aware of Others

| CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | SCRIPTURES |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Looks inward, knows only self. | Looks outward; aware of others. | Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.(Rom 12:15) |
| Not aware of others, only in relation to self. | Can connect with others, relate to them. | To the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.(1 Cor 9:22) |
| No empathy for others. | Good listeners. | And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member |
| Cannot feel for others or enter into their predicament. | Genuinely aware of others' feelings or sufferings. | |

No awareness of the consequences of their actions.

is honored, all the members rejoice with it.(1Cor 12:26)

Spiritual adults are those who empathise with you. They feel your needs, enter into your predicament. The mature believer is the one with whom you feel you are making a connection. There's a feeling that he or she has understood your soul. Such people pay attention to what YOU are saying and feeling and are not constantly thinking of themselves.

Somebody who has hardly any awareness of other people, and no comprehension of the consequences of his actions on others, is immature. We often think of such people as selfish - this may also be true, but an inability to focus on others is a sign that the person is insecure and childish in his attitudes. It is a trait of childhood as we saw previously.

Some people seem to be on another track, unaware of you. You start to speak about a subject, and they don't acknowledge it but immediate head off on another track of their own. You don't seem to be connecting with them. Sometimes it seems as if you're invisible - I have often felt so when talking to people.

While being acutely aware of their own feelings, they blind to yours. They are always watchful lest they be rejected, indeed, thoughts of rebuff and rejection rule their thinking, but when it comes to YOUR feelings they regularly violate them and stamp all over them without noticing.

Mature Christians, however, are a joy to be with - but sadly we meet se few! These are the ones who will put their lives on hold, just to listen to your woes on the phone. They know how to put themselves on one side, forgetting self, and attend to you. They make you feel special.

While talking to the immature you sense the conversation has a hidden agenda designed to milk you of your praise and approval. You are being mentally manipulated to be what that person wants you to be. However, the more mature person will have "no side" - as they say. That means, he or she is all front on, with no manipulation. They do not have to think about themselves, and to consider their own feelings in everything.

b) Let me Check with my Elder first.

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| CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | SCRIPTURES |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

| | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Exaggerated view of others; sees others as all-knowing, totally able, godlike.</p> <p>Submits to the rule of men.</p> <p>Hero-worship of leaders.</p> <p>Cannot believe his mentor is fallible or wrong.</p> | <p>Balanced view of others.</p> <p>Knows that others are as fallible as he.</p> <p>Can cope if people fall, make mistakes, do wrong</p> <p>Does not require others to be perfect.</p> <p>Does not put people on pedestal.</p> | <p>Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. (Gal 6:2-3)</p> <p>For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.(James 3:2)</p> <p>Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him .(Luke 17:3)</p> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

We have already established that babies and young children think they are the centre of the universe. From this viewpoint, adults are seen as remote, godlike beings. A child's well-being and destiny depends on these beings, so he tries his hardest to do what they want.

Although that is perfectly natural and correct for a child, it has its drawbacks. Children can be led astray and taught all kinds of evils simply because they place too much trust in the adults who are in charge of them. A helpless trusting little child is very vulnerable to abuse. This is true in the natural and spiritual world.

Hero-worship is a sign of immaturity. Immature believers see leaders and ministries as godlike, beyond the normal realm, certainly above their level of faith.. In their minds, they invest leaders with godlike powers, seeing them as all-knowing beings who can do no wrong. In fact, they are worried and offended if their leaders don't know something.

Much more so, they are shaken and overthrown if their chosen leader is exposed as less than perfect, or having fallen into sin. In such cases they will frequently defend their hero blindly, stubbornly refusing to believe anything about their leaders that tends to highlight their failings or mistakes.

But an adult sees with adult eyes. He is no longer a tiny dot in the centre of the world, dependent on adults, but one of the community, just another grown up. An adult recognises that other people are just like him; therefore he can forgive them for being fallible and fallen.

Nor does he depend on elders, shepherds and ministers for his beliefs. He does not see himself as dependent on leaders, but

thinks and acts for himself.

We are all one Body. God calls and gifts each one of us. We are all limbs, and we all need each other. God values each one uniquely and equally, and each of us has a role in the Body. Therefore we should not elevate one man or woman to a special spiritual realm 'above us' and place them on a pedestal out of reach of correction.

Often today, the exposure of false doctrine or abuses is met with the knee-jerk reaction "Don't touch the Lord's anointed". In the first place, nobody is "more anointed" than anybody else in the Body; secondly this puts leaders beyond examination and correction which is a place none of us can claim! The demand that we see leaders today as a cut above the rest of us is part and parcel of the drive to keep believers immature.

Maturity brings a respect for others, and makes us see that we are all prone to fail and to make mistakes. As grown-ups we learn to value one another, and to value our leaders but not to worship them. Thus we avoid being spiritually abused and misled by unscrupulous teachers.

c) Manipulation

| CHILD <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | ADULT <i>(Natural & Spiritual)</i> | SCRIPTURES |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Seeks to control people. Adept at manipulation. Uses guile, trickery or cunning to force people to do his bidding. These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage. (Jude 1:16) | Will walk in his own counsel, and allow others to make their own choices also. Refuses to bend people to his wil.l Not afraid of an alternative viewpoint. Will respect people's decision to be wrong or to do the wrong thing. | Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly; (1 Pet 5:2) Did I take advantage of you by any of those whom I sent to you? I urged Titus, and sent our brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did we not walk in the same steps? (2 Cor 12:17-18) |

I think every parent knows that children are little manipulators! They want everything and they know how to get it! Thank the Lord

that children don't possess the sophisticated brains of an adult, or else they would be powerful deceivers.

However, there ARE grown-up manipulators who have learned to bend others to their will. These are the ones who never grew out of childish ways. In the same way that a child will demand its own way and show its displeasure at being thwarted by throwing a tantrum, screaming, sulking or sobbing - so the immature person will employ emotional blackmail of various kinds to get his or her own way in life.

Immature people are very wilful and demanding. However, they sense that a direct attempt to manipulate somebody would not be acceptable in society and would actually earn them disapproval instead of praise, so they couch their demands in subtle ways.

Their keynote in their behaviour is CONTROL. They are controlling people but often it takes a while for you to realise that you are being steered in a certain direction. The hints and suggestions and casual remarks are so subtle that you end up doing what they want without realising it - especially if you are an accommodating and kind person.

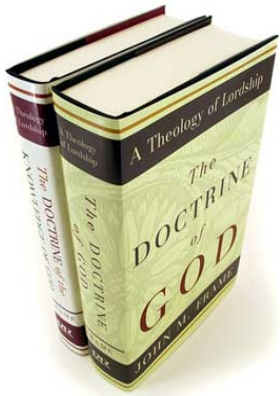
Controlling behaviour always stems from insecurity and emotional immaturity. A mature person will allow you to make your own decisions, and respect your right to an independent choice (even if it's detrimental to his own position.) Even though he may try to reason and persuade, he will not manipulate you to do his will. That is because he accepts that not everybody will like or agree with him, and he's not afraid of that.

One reason for us to grow up into maturity today is so that "we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting". (Eph 4:14)

Having established the need for maturity as Christians, let's go on to discuss HOW we can "be perfect".



CONTINUE TO [PART THREE](#): How can I Become Mature?



Teachings
of Various Kinds

Be Perfect! Practical Application (3)

by Tricia Tillin

How Do We Grow Up?

I have highlighted the problems and dangers of immaturity. But that's not enough. Telling you the problem is only half of it. You and I need to look at HOW to grow up!

As we have seen previously, it is a BIBLICAL COMMAND TO BE PERFECT! It is not an optional extra for a Christian.

"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect."

And Jesus repeated this command to be perfect to his disciples:

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. Matt 5:48

God is not telling Abram to be sinless, nor does Jesus command us to attain sinless perfection. As some teach today; but the bible's word for "perfect" as we have already speaks of maturity, growing up, becoming adult, of full age, ripe like a fruit.

We can substitute "grown-up" in the Bible, for "perfect". In Hebrew, the word translated perfect is as follows:

TAMIYM (taw-meem'); entire (literally, figuratively or morally); also (as noun) integrity, truth.

TAMAM (taw-mam'); a primitive root; to complete, in a good or a bad sense, come to the full, be whole. (etc)

So the word of God COMMANDS that we be perfect!! We are commanded to grow up - but HOW? Think about that a second.

HOW DID YOUR CHILDREN GROW UP - in their bodies and minds? Was it ---

- A course of education?
- Discipline?

- Threats?
- Will-power?
- Medical assistance?
- Pills?
- By your help and encouragement?

NO, it was a natural process, wasn't it? If you left them all alone, they'd grow up anyway. You can't stop that process - anyone who's had to buy children's clothes knows that!

In the same way, growing up is a natural process for a Christian. This should give us all encouragement. The only thing we have to worry about is avoiding all that HINDERS this process. We'll look at what hinders later in the article.

FRUIT GROWING ON THE TREE

We are designed as Christians to go on to perfection. Fruit grows on the branch, using the sap of the parent tree, until it is fully ripe. It comes to perfection, and then serves a purpose - it provides life for a new generation. The seed of new life is within it, and it changes form, and becomes a new life.

We can see this as a parable of the way a Christian grows. The bible talks about us as fruit-bearing branches on the Vine of Life. We are joined to the Tree of Life, who is Jesus. We grow up in Him, nurtured by his life. And we are supposed to ripen, to come to full age, to perfection. Then we can perform a service to others. We can generate new life.

Mark 4:14-20:

"The sower sows the word. And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.

"These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble.

"Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

"But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."

We can and should bear fruit - according to our abilities. And God expects that of us, as we've seen. God does not desire a church of babies, but fully grown adults, able to be of use to him and to others, and able to withstand the storms.

THE BARREN TREE

Jesus came looking for fruit on the Tree of Israel, and it wasn't ready. (Matt 21:19) It wasn't ripe. Green figs are no good for eating. Are we as a Church in the same condition? God is looking for ripe fruit, sweet to eat, useful, something that will build strength into others, and give new life to others. But when he looks at the Tree of the Church, will he see only leaves?

"These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots." (Jude 1:12)

These people referred to as fruitless trees are not pagans, nor unbelievers. No, they are believers who have fallen away. They are dead branches - Jesus says they were once IN HIM. Look at: John 15:1

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch IN ME that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

Dead branches without fruit are no use to the Lord. The very fact that there is no fruit on a branch tells the gardener that there is no life flowing, no sap, that this is an unhealthy, diseased or dead branch. Jesus expects and commands that we do bear fruit:

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. (John 15:16)

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: Gal 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

The fruit of the Spirit is the fruit of maturity, the personality characteristics that we looked at in Part Two. You can only produce these qualities in abundance as you come to maturity, not as a spiritual babe.

So, God desires and commands that we bring forth fruit. That is the purpose of his life in us. But now the question arises of the wrong kind of fruit. It is possible to use the sap of the life of Jesus simply to service our own needs, rather than to produce healthy growth.

MISTLETOE IS SELF-CENTRED FRUIT

As we have already seen, FRUIT grows as a result of the life of the TREE. As long as the branch is attached to the Tree, the sap produced life, which is turned into fruit. In the next passage, Jesus pictures Himself as the Vine providing the essential nutrients for growth, health and fruit.

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples (John 15:2-8)

So, Jesus says, if you continually abide in ME, you will bear fruit - naturally. But now let's consider a type of fruit that is a counterfeit. This counterfeit is present in many churches today.

Mistletoe grows on the branches of a tree, rather like real fruit, but it's a parasite. It sticks on - it's the supreme "hanger-on" - it sticks onto the branch and then saps the life out of the tree, without adding anything useful.

The fruit of the mistletoe, therefore, is not life-giving, but poisonous. Mistletoe berries produce a hypnotic effect - they act like a drug. (That's why they were so prized by the pagans, and the druids.)

At Christmas people remember the immorality of the pagan midwinter feasts, because they still kiss under the mistletoe.

That's because the mistletoe berry was used in pagan times to produce a drunken state in which the natural senses are aroused. Using this as a spiritual parable, is this kind of counterfeit fruit-bearing what we see all around us in churches? I believe so.

We now have mistletoe growth, instead of fruit growth!! Many Christians are like parasites hanging onto the church, sucking the life out of it, USING Jesus for their own erotic ends. They are arousing their senses and satisfying their needs, instead of producing life for others.

HOW DO WE GROW?

WE ARE DESIGNED TO GROW. Growth is natural and almost inevitable, both in the physical and spiritual worlds. Fruit will be borne on a fruit tree as long as sap reaches the branch. Similarly, spiritual growth will take place and fruit will be borne by a Christians so long as he or she is attached to the Vine, abiding in Christ.

We are not supposed to remain babes in Christ for ever; we should be moving on. If we are walking in God's will as we should be - feeding on the Living Bread, drinking at the Fountain Head - we WILL be growing up and maturing.

However, if we feed on something else, the growth process falters, slows down or even stops. It's important to remember that the growth we want as Christians occurs because of the new life of Jesus Christ within us. It does not come from our own souls, nor the world around us. Indeed, if we DO draw our life from those areas, we will end up both hindering our spiritual life and producing unwanted worldly growth!

There are two sources of energy we can draw from - our own natural energy, or God's life. OUR life, or GODS life.

- . God's life produces fruit, and maturity.
- . Our own natural life produces nothing worth having - vanity and emptiness.

So the secret of how to grow up and become mature and bear fruit, is to feed on the life provided for us in Jesus Christ, and forsake our own natural life. When the bible says: "Dying to self" it doesn't mean giving up smoking and not watching blue movies (although that's a good thing!) - dying to self actually means putting aside the natural inclinations, thoughts, opinions, emotions and drives that conflict with God's new life within us.

We will grow, unless we HINDER growth. If we co-operate with the growth process, we WILL mature as God intended. So the question is not, how do we achieve maturity, but HOW ARE WE HINDERING something that is taking place by God's grace.

TO SUMMARISE - Growth occurs if:

1. we forsake the things that hinder growth, and
2. we submit to the things that encourage growth

Therefore, to conclude this article, I am going to look at the development of a fruitful and mature Christian life in each of the sections of Part Two, together with the hindrances that halt growth in those areas.

- . **FEEDING**

We feed on the Word in order to grow. This involves reading, studying and meditating on scripture, which transforms our minds as we soak ourselves in its wisdom.

- . **CLEANLINESS**

we draw near to God, resist the devil, and develop a hatred of sin; plus we understand the need for self-discipline

- . **ABILITIES**

We stop depending on others, or our own efforts, and lean on the Lord

. **PROTECTION**

We develop spiritual discernment

. **BEHAVIOUR**

We deny ourselves (the self-life) and encourage the nature of God within

. **RELATIONSHIPS**

We practise putting others first

(1) THE WORD OF GOD FEEDS US, CAUSES US TO GROW UP

Babies are given food, firstly milk, then soft food, and only later on food that needs to be chewed. So we saw earlier that as babes in Christ, we drink the milk - of what? THE WORD:

"As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." (1 Pet 2:2)

Also in the bible, the deeper wisdom of God is compared to "strong meat" reinforcing this idea that the Word of God is the primary way of feeding our Christian lives.

Thus, if you are not feeding regularly on the Word, you will grow very slowly. The inmates of the concentration camps found that the growth of children was slowed without food. Children looked like toddlers when they were nine and ten years old.

(2) AWARENESS OF SIN COMES WITH CLOSENESS TO GOD

We saw previously that babies and toddlers need to be cleansed by others. Immature Christians need to be reminded to keep themselves clean. They have little awareness of sin.

On the other hand, those who are most aware of their failings, are the ones who are closest to God. The nearer we draw to God, and to spiritual things, the more we become aware of what offends God.

"I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:5-6)

Job's faith was a theoretical thing before he had a personal revelation of God's character. Job could argue back and forth about intellectual concepts of sin and purity, but when he met God face to face in a personal encounter, he was moved to heartfelt repentance. It's a genuine personal relationship with God that makes us understand who God is - Almighty and HOLY.

When we draw near to Him, we hate our sin.

If we are living in the world, we adopt the world's standards and lose sight of God's holiness. But for those who live close to God, things that seem acceptable to the world, feel wrong!! Even seemingly harmless pastimes and activities sometimes prick the conscience of a truly spiritual Christians, because he or she is close enough to God to feel that the Holy Spirit is grieved. Those who live close to God cannot sin with a clear conscience.

Also, the more we allow the Holy Spirit to guide our living, the more the holy nature of God will take over, and convict us of wrongdoing. All progress in the Christian life and faith is accomplished by allowing the holy and pure and powerful life of God overtake our flesh and transform us unto the likeness of Christ. Remember:

- . IT'S NOT BY WORKS, BUT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD.
- . IT'S SPIRITUAL GROWTH, NOT LEGALISTIC DO'S AND DONT'S.

"For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God." (Heb 7:19)

It's not by doing, but by being, that we grow - being attached to the only good thing available to this world, the new life of Jesus Christ, the Vine of the Father! As we fellowship deeper and deeper with God by the Holy Spirit, we begin to grow. We don't grow by practising religious rituals:

"Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" (Gal 3:3)

It's not by works of the flesh, but by forsaking the flesh that we become "perfect". We make room for God's life, and that life is a life of maturity, because God is fully mature.

(3) ABILITIES - GROWING STRONG BY BEING WEAK!

Mature people have an inner strength - they are not weak like babies. But how do we become strong?

"And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect (brought to fulness) in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, (WEAKNESSES) that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (2 Cor 12:9)

This is one of the mysteries of the Christian life. We seek to be strong, but we only grow and become strong in God as we allow our own natural strength to wither. We have to become weaker in ourselves to become stronger in God!

Let's see this in the life of Jesus. Jesus was the perfect Man. He's our model of what maturity is really like - we follow His lead. For the word says:

"The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master." (Luke 6:40)

So we need to see how Jesus acted, and what brought HIM to maturity. Yes, even he underwent a natural process of maturity. Jesus was brought to perfection - he was always sinless, so this is not sinless perfection we are talking about.

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." (Heb 2:9-10)

"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." (Heb 5:8-9)

TESTING AND TRIALS BRING US CLOSER TO JESUS AS THE SOURCE OF LIFE

Babies run away from trials, not realising that they are the very things that cause us to GROW. In trial and suffering and testing, we find out the truth about ourselves - that we are weak and incapable without God.

- Depending on yourself or other people is a sign of immaturity.
- Depending on God is a sign of growing up to maturity.

We come to depend on God through afflictions, tribulations, trials, that test the metal of our faith, as metal is tested in the furnace.

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." (James 1:2-5)

FORSAKING OUR OWN WAY - ALLOWING GOD TO HAVE HIS WAY

What more can we learn from the attitude of Jesus? He didn't let his OWN human life interfere with God's will. Even though he was divine, the Son of God on earth, He said: I DO NOTHING OF MYSELF. Jesus submitted himself to God the Father; he humbled himself; he depended on the power of the Holy Spirit. That is why he was mature!

Jesus forsook the energy of the self-life EVEN THOUGH FOR HIM IT WAS PERFECTLY SINLESS. Despite the fact that he was the spotless Son of God, perfect in holiness, Jesus Christ still forsook his own will and nature and thoughts and emotions, in order to obey the Father's will at all times.

"For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." (John 6:38)

"Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." (Luke 22:42)

(4) PROTECTION

If we remain immature, we open ourselves to error. We are gullible and undiscerning. We become a prey to false teachers, who utilise our desire to be spoon-fed.

The more we look to GOD alone for support and guidance, the more we can withstand error. So the answer to immaturity is - get rid of the babysitter! Start looking out for yourself! Don't expect others to protect you, or warn you, or tell you what you should believe.

We are not told that we will always be (like children) protected from error or danger or trials. On the contrary, some trials and suffering is to be expected in the normal Christian life, but we are commanded to endure suffering, knowing that it works strength into our souls:

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." (1 Pet 5:8-10)

(5) BEHAVIOUR

As we saw above, the most basic element of the Christian life and walk is to "deny self", that is, to deny self-life, and encourage the nature of God within. If we have PUT ON Christ and we are attached to the Vine (the bible calls it "abiding in the Vine") of Jesus we will grow if we do not hinder the sap of his life.

But this requires that we - for our part - actively PUT OFF the old ways of living, the life the depends on our worldly understanding and reactions to things around us. We have to begin looking UP and walking in a spiritual realm, understanding the things of God.

"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things." (1 Cor 13:11)

The nature of a child is to be self-centred. That is the basic nature of mankind, also. Almost everything that goes wrong on this planet is due to a selfish, self-seeking nature - people want things and they are prepared to do almost anything to get them.

Robbery, murder, adultery, anger and threats, addictions and every other sin is a result of man's self-centred and demanding human nature.

That is also what the Bible says:

"Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures." (James 4:1-3)

On the other hand, the whole ethos of the Bible message is denial of self! As we have seen, Jesus denied himself to the absolute.

He laid down his life for others.

The way to growth is, as we have seen, TWOFOLD

1. - submit to the growth-giving life of God, and...
2. - forsake the self-life of the natural man, which HINDERS growth.

The two activities go hand-in-hand. You can't please yourself AND please God. No man can serve two masters. If the FLESH is in charge, then GOD will NOT be in charge, and growth is hindered. On the other hand, if you make the quality decision to allow God to take charge, and to obey his will in all things, then your flesh will recede and no longer be such a factor in governing your life.

The bible makes a promise that the flesh will NOT rule if we are walking in the Spirit:

"I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. [promise] For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." (Gal 5:16-25)

Notice that Paul above recognises that we are already IN the Spirit (saved, Christian) but even so we need to make a decision to WALK in the Spirit daily. This is where you have a choice to make - are you going to submit to the pleasure of having your own way, doing your own thing, or are you going to forsake self, and allow God to guide you into HIS way? On that decision rests your growth to maturity.

SEEKING GOD'S WILL DAILY IS THE KEY

What it comes down to in practise. is SEEKING GOD'S WILL on a daily. hourly basis. We have to continually check with God in

prayer: what do you want, Lord? Is this right for me, Lord? What should I do, Lord? What do YOU want? Should I go to that meeting? Should I have fellowship with that person? Show me Father if this is my will or your will.

We develop a lifestyle that is not depending on human emotions, thoughts or opinions, but that looks beyond those natural things to the things of the Spirit. We develop an ear that is tuned into God all the while, waiting and watching for the prompts that tell us "something is wrong" or "do this, do that!"

A bonus is that those whose attitude is to do God's will, are those who will have discernment - they will know if the teaching is from God.

"Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." (John 7:16-17)

When trying to identify whether you are hearing the voice of God or not, I suggest a few simple guidelines: generally, the first thing thought that comes to mind is from YOUR OWN mind and will. It is STRONGER than the voice of God. If you obey the first thought that comes into your head you could be misled. You have to learn to STOP, think TWICE. Think once for self, twice for God.

Often, after rejecting your first impulse and seeking God, a third suggestion comes to mind - this may be the subtle whisper of the devil, tempting you by offering you another alternative. The way it goes is like this:

The preacher is delivering a strong message about reaching out to save the lost. You feel moved in your emotions, but does God want YOU to be an evangelist?

1. The first thought you have is fearful and worrying - this would be a difficult life, exposing you to ridicule. That is your own mind at work and your natural selfish emotions.
2. Therefore, you put those thoughts to one side and seek for the quiet peaceful voice of the Spirit. He says either yes, or no - there is no sense of being pressured or driven; nor does He make you feel obligated or guilty about refusing.
3. But then, if you will not listen to God (because the voice of the Spirit is not what you wanted to hear, or you are still unwilling to obey God) another thought comes to mind: if you respond in the meeting you will become a great man of God, and save thousands; your name will be mentioned in 'Charisma' magazine and you will have the joy of entering heaven knowing that you have pleased God. This ministers to your arrogance, self-confidence and pride, a sure sign that it's the voice of the devil. It could only come in because you refused to listen to God in stage two.

I won't guarantee that it is ALWAYS like this, so please do not make these infallible rules. However, I believe these are

useful guidelines.

Don't decide or do anything rashly or in haste. Often the devil tricks us into doing his bidding because we give no time to seek God's will about it.

If you write a hasty letter reacting angrily to somebody who hurt you, don't be tempted to send it straight away. Sleep on it; pray, seek God, submit to His leading and often you will calm down and think better of it. Don't be pushed into making decisions on the basis of an exciting meeting or video presentation - go away and ask God what is His will for your life.

MISTRUST YOUR OWN THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS! You are not the Holy Spirit. You are not infallible. We all make many mistakes - even the Apostle John knew that truth! (James 3:2) Your mind and heart is still part of this fallible fallen world. That means you have to put your own desires to one side, forsake them, just as the bible says.

Remember, we PUT AWAY the childish things - the self-centred things.

(6) RELATIONSHIPS

This section is closely allied to the previous one. Again here the key is forsaking self and putting others first.

As we grow in God, we become more aware of others, less self-centred. BUT - we don't have to wait for that day to dawn. We can start the ball rolling by deliberately forsaking our need to be first and foremost.

If we just act without any check to ourselves, we will invariably end up being self-absorbed and failing to notice other's needs and feelings. But it's possible to PUT A CHECK on our emotional and thought life, the life that demands we be important and noticed; we pass it through a mental filter, before paying heed to it. We position a guard at the door:

"I said, 'I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, while the wicked are before me.'" (Ps 39:1)

"Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips." (Ps 141:3)

This fits the category of putting away. We are just making sure things of the flesh don't hinder the flow of the life of God, which is God-centred and thinks of others.

We can make it a rule to give precedence to others. TAKE A BACK SEAT, literally and metaphorically. This involves making a conscious choice not to be exalted in your flesh. If you are put into a situation where there's an opportunity to take a leading role or an important place, fall back, and let another take that place. If it was genuinely intended by God for you, let HIM promote you.

Don't seek glory for yourSELF.

If you go into the Bible study and there is an easy chair, a hard kitchen chair and a stool - which will you take? Your natural inclination is to head for the easy chair by the fire. So deny yourself, and sit on the worst chair in the room.

"Do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king, and do not stand in the place of the great; For it is better that he say to you, 'Come up here,' than that you should be put lower in the presence of the prince." (Prov 25:6-7)

"When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honourable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. 'For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'" (Luke 14:8-11)

Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6)

DO YOU WANT GOD TO RESIST YOU?

"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." (1 Pet 5:6)

Humbling yourself is something you can do; you don't need to wait for a prompt from the Spirit.

When the biscuits come round at the end of the meeting, and of course they are all plain crackers and water biscuits and ONE nice chocolate one left, this is an opportunity. Your flesh says "take the chocolate one"! So you say to your flesh - "shut up. I'm in control here!". Then you deliberately take the plain biscuit.

You won't overthrow the power of the flesh this way - it's just an exercise in self-denial. It's self-discipline. As Paul said, "I keep my flesh under". I give it a good talking-to and say - "get under, flesh!!!"

DEAL WITH ANY PRIDE WITHOUT MERCY - BE HARD ON YOURSELF!

If you see any form of PRIDE in yourself, ruthlessly put a stop to it. Go out of your way to stamp out pride, because that's our besetting sin - we want to be known, approved of, praised. If you sense in yourself the inclination to boast or seek praise, put a stop to it.

LISTEN, AND BE INVOLVED IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS

On the telephone, or in conversation, make a positive effort to listen to what OTHERS want to say. If necessary, put your hand over your mouth and just shut up and listen.

We all know that our natural inclination is to talk about ourselves. Therefore, make up your mind when you go into a room that you are going to ask about OTHERS, and listen to their reply!!!

It's irritating, isn't it, when people only want to tell you the story of their lives - they are SO self-important. They ignore your needs and feelings; you might almost not be there. You could be curling up in agony or suffering a bereavement, but they will never notice or enquire. If you do try to start up a conversation with them, their eyes are wandering - they are already thinking about the next thing about themselves they are going to say.

People always gravitate towards "good listeners" - all they are doing, is giving attention to YOU, not themselves!!

WHAT WE FORSAKE TO MAKE ROOM FOR GROWTH (PRUNING!!)

In John 15, the Father is the vinedresser. If he sees a good fruitful branch - he PRUNES it. That is, he cuts it back so that it might become more fruitful. Any dead wood or unproductive parts, or diseased parts are pruned off.

God will be doing this with any fruitful life, and we must allow Him to challenge us, and mould us, and prune us back. We must allow Him to take things that are wrong and unproductive for us.

Anything contrary to God's will for our lives will hinder the flow of God's life, and slow our growth in Him. So if we want maturity, we have to allow Him to prune off the things that hinder growth. Such as resentment, grudge-bearing, and unforgiveness.

"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matt 6:14-15)

Immature people are very prone to bearing a grudge. It's almost a key feature of the life of an immature person. This is simply because at the baby stage of development we all seek approval, and if we do not receive it we cannot function properly. We get vicious and angry and resentful.

As we have already learnt, childish behaviour is insecure behaviour, where our flesh feels it's not being praised and accepted by others. We conclude, in our pit of self-misery, that "nobody loves me!". The world's remedy for this universal condition is to work on your levels of self-esteem and think more of yourself. "Love Yourself" is the world's answer.

God's answer is the exact opposite! We already think TOO MUCH of ourselves, if we still expect to be the centre of attention, or

have everyone like us. Grow up! In the adult world there are thousands of people who will never like us and we'll just have to live with it.

NOBODY LOVES ME!

The only way to deal with this insecurity problem is to see yourself in the light of the Bible. You are loved by God, BUT you are still a sinner saved by grace. You don't "deserve" to be loved, as the world says! (Don't you just hate that advert that ends "Because I'm worth it" or "I deserve it" - YUK. How self-important these people are!)

You don't have a 'right' to anything on earth, except DEATH and JUDGEMENT! You don't even "deserve" to be saved - you can never earn it.

Your sins mount up to heaven and offend God, and it's only by the grace and mercy of God that you are still here. You deserve to DIE. God loved you enough to provide a way of escape - but not because you are "special". It's to do with God's mercy, not your nature at all.

You are a servant. The servant is not above his master - and Jesus humbled himself, even unto death, a criminal's death on a cross. If you think you are something, forget it.

I have had my fair share of people whining "nobody loves me" and my reaction (even though I may not say it out loud) is - "why should they?". Nobody in this world has to love you! Not even your parents, although I pray they do, and will. But there's no rule or law that states even your parents HAVE to love you! Stop punishing the world for being fallen. You are fallen yourself, remember?

If people don't like you, maybe it's not their fault, maybe it's YOUR fault! But who cares, anyway, what YOU are like? Or if anybody likes you? God loves you and that is enough! Now forget yourself and get on with being his servant, and doing his will. Start looking outwards to others and see how you can help them, and soon you'll forget yourself.

And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. ... We love Him because He first loved us. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also. (1 Jn 4:16-21)

DILIGENCE IS NEEDED

"But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, (mature, grown-up)

be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. (Phil 3:13-14)

There is a life-long process here. We may feel that we never fully attain, but we "press towards the mark". This illustration refers to the "finishing line" of our spiritual race. All runners are straining to reach that one goal, the finishing line. Paul sees the process going on until the day of his death - or rapture. He expected the Rapture - the upward call - to interrupt his work. Meanwhile he's running so as to win the race - diligently!

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you." (Rev 3:1-3)

This final passage brings us back to the real reason for growing up today. We are coming near to the coming of the Lord. He commands us to be watchful, prepared and ready.

We cannot and will not be ready for the Lord's return if we don't grow out of immaturity. Therefore I commend the search for "perfection" to you all.

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