

#191 “Pillars of Spiritual Growth”

by Brent Barnett

www.relevantbibleteaching.com

The only way to know if we are growing spiritually is to know what spiritual maturity looks like. Paul said that we are to imitate him as he imitated Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). In other words, Christ is the perfect expression of what it means to grow to maturity in the Lord. We will never be perfect in this life as He was when He walked the earth, but to set our standards any lower is to guarantee that we will not grow as we ought to.

Looking at the example of Christ, we learn that maturity involves perfect obedience to the will of the Father (Luke 22:42). 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says expressly that God’s will for us is our sanctification, namely, that we would become more Christlike in holiness and in perfect character. This life is to be a process of progressive sanctification as we learn to better imitate our Savior. We will see maturity develop as we more consistently and persistently obey. We will come to see the joy of obedience and the suffering that comes from sin. Obedience will become less of a chore, though it will still be a battle given that our flesh wants nothing to do with the truth. If we want to be mature, we must cultivate holiness as we obey God’s commands more and more. As Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). There is no growth without first taking steps of obedience.

Christian maturity also involves growing in our knowledge of the Lord. Without adequate knowledge, we can easily be led astray into deception and rebellion (Hosea 4:6). This knowledge is not to be equated with simply having a high intellect and lots of worldly wisdom. Ephesians 4:13-14 says that we should be taking in the preaching and teaching of God’s Word “until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.” Lifelong learning in the Scriptures is the call for every believer so that we can grow in unity according to the doctrines of the faith contained in the Scripture. In order to know God and be mature such that we imitate Christ as we ought to, we must grow in knowledge according to right and true doctrine. If we don’t, we will be prone to being led astray by every new and clever lie of the devil that enters the church. If sound doctrine is eliminated or compromised, we can throw any hope of maturity out the window.

Maturity also requires that we do our part in serving in the family of God. This will look different for each person depending upon the gifts that God gives and the opportunities He presents. Ephesians 4:12 says, “For the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.” As we grow in knowledge and holiness, we can effectively minister to others. There is plenty of work to do in sharing the gospel, and there are many who are hurting and in need of some practical help, care, prayer, etc. The willingness and commitment to serve from a pure heart is essential to those who wish to continue to grow to maturity in Christ.

Maturity also involves developing a real and vibrant prayer life. Prayer ought to be something that we cannot help but do because we so firmly believe in its power. It should be something that we enjoy doing because we know God hears what we have asked of Him and that He will grant us our requests if we pray in line with His will. There is no more powerful place to be when it comes to advancing the kingdom than calling out to God in prayer. The mature Christian recognizes the privilege and the potency of prayer, and he or she looks forward to calling out to God with needs and concerns.

Finally, we cannot grow if we are not humble. We must recognize that it is ultimately God Who enables our spiritual growth (Philippians 2:13), not anything in and of ourselves. It is Christ in us Who empowers us for service and Who enables us to produce true and lasting spiritual fruit (John 15:4-5). If we want to be mature and yet still struggle with pride and self-sufficiency, God will have to teach us what it means to be strong in and through weakness. Power is perfected not in natural strength and ability but in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). We must never forget this lesson when we are tempted to do God's work with human means and with man's methods.

The key to spiritual growth is not a secret, but it is given to us throughout God's Word. As we are in God's Word and as we spend time in prayer, we can grow and better come to know and love our Savior. Christian maturity is not rocket science, but it is being humble enough to believe God's Word and to do what He says. As we humbly believe, learn, and obey, by the power of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, we will grow.