***Characteristics of Spiritual Maturity

Colossians, 1:25-29

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2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is inspired by God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

Philippians 2:15-16: "That you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent children of God, above reproach, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the Word of Life, so that in the day of Christ, I may have cause to glory, because I did not run in vain, nor toil in vain."

We are studying "The Mystery of the Church," segment number 48, in Colossians 1:25-29.

After salvation, we find from the Word of God, that it is vitally important that a Christian become spiritually mature. This is comparable to the need in the human realm of being able to grow up physically, from infancy. It is not a good thing for a person to be stunted in this physical growth. Stunted physical growth on a human level denies a person the full enjoyment and privilege of what it is to be an adult. The spiritual food that provides for the Christian's growth and his spiritual maturity is the Word of God – the doctrines of the Word that God has recorded for us.

Now, outside of the Bible, there is no food for the spiritual life of the convert. And that is what is the great tragedy, when religious organizations substitute programs for doctrine. This is done all the time. As a matter of fact, when people walk into a congregation like this, they are very uncomfortable to hear the Word of God explained in a verse-by-verse, detailed fashion, so that, suddenly, you walk out of here and say, "I know what God thinks about this matter. I've just listened to what He had to say."

People think that that's odd; that's weird; and, that's abnormal. That is not what churches do. And they're right about that. And the result is that we have congregations full of spiritual babies. Well, the churches have all kinds of programs, all kinds of activities, and they're all geared to give you an emotional kick. But there is no spiritual development.

One of the analogies used in the Bible of the Christian life is that of being a soldier in spiritual combat. As is true on the physical level, so, also, it is true in the spiritual realm. Immature children are not used as soldiers in warfare. You don't send kids into combat situations. This is for mature, capable people. God has a spiritual combat mission for the life of every believer. But you and I cannot fulfill that destiny if we are kids – spiritually, and if we are immature as believers. There is no way that you can fulfill the purpose for which you were born. Immature Christians simply cannot stand up to Satan. They cannot meet the demonic hosts of the world, so they are cut off from being able to serve God in spiritual combat.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Satan does everything that he can to prevent a Christian from being fed the spiritual nutrition of the Word of God, by his right pastor-teacher, so that the believer grows spiritually, for the battle to which God has called him. And that is why we have this deficiency of understanding of the mission of the local church. It is overridden by all kinds of human traditions, and viewpoints, and activities, because it appeals to people. And the things of God are neglected, because you have negligent pastor-teachers. They are pastors, but they are not teachers, because to be able to stand up, and explain the Word of God, is an intense developmental preparation procedure. It is really tough-going. And the deeper you are, into the Word of God, and, the more mature the audience before you, the harder it is to be able to get ready to tell the people of God what the Word of God has to say.

So, it is a lot more fun entertaining people. It is a lot more fun running programs, and having a staff that has all kinds of church activities going on. And then, on Sunday, there is a little religious activity, and we call that "church," but it is not feeding the soul of the believer. The great curse upon Christianity today is that churches are largely filled by these baby Christians, and they are easy prey for Satan. They're easy prey for their old sin nature. They're easy prey for the world system and its way of life, because they live by feelings. They do not live by faith in doctrine.

**Spiritual Maturity**

Now, spiritual maturity, as we have pointed out, is a gradual process, which can also be stunted and reversed. And sometimes, when you don't develop physically in the right way, even when you've come to be an adult. You've seen some of these people that have physical debilitation. And, pretty soon, they're not as tall as they used to be. They're crouched over. They're incapable of standing up straight. They're shuffling along. And physical retrogression takes place.

Now, in the spiritual life, it can be very dramatic. A very mature Christian can suddenly reverse course, because, all of a sudden, the supply of spiritual nourishment is cut off in his life, for one reason or another. He's gotten caught up in the world system. He's got ambitions that he wants to fulfill. And suddenly, the things of God have to take second place. He finds secret sin so attractive, that he's willing to pursue it. And deterioration of the spirit sets in. He listens to the Word of God, and, all of a sudden, the pastor-teacher (that he couldn't say enough nice things about), is suddenly saying things that are going to interfere with the ambitions he has in life, making him uncomfortable about his lifestyle, about things he wants to do.

Well, pretty soon, they're negative volition comes in. And his spiritual growth goes into reverse. That's why James 1:22 says, "Don't be hearers of the Word only, but be doers of the Word, as well."

And in heaven's name, how can you be a doer of the Word if you sit in church, and you never hear the word explained? It's not possible. And most people are never exposed to the nutrition that's in the Word of God. So, they never grow up spiritually. This Christian is not filled by the Holy Spirit. He proceeds to become spiritually sick. He reverses to childish ways, spiritually. And he becomes emotionally dominated. And emotional domination of the soul is the kiss of death. And that is the great hazard of the Christian life. I go from what I know, from the Word of God to guide me in my life, and I fall back on how I feel about things. And I act upon my feelings. And my feelings are governed by the world about me; by the devil; and, by the sin nature. They are not governed by the principles of the Word of God. So, pretty soon, I'm far adrift from the mind of God.

**Holiness**

The primary characteristic of a spiritually mature believer, as Paul has been describing in Colossians 1:28 is His personal holiness. "Holiness" means "separation" unto the Word of God and away from the world system. "Holiness" means "the will of God as your will." The objective of the Christian life is simply that one walk with God, as did Enoch and Noah; that one be a friend of God, as was Abraham; and, that one be a person after God's own heart, as was David. That's all that life is about. If you can get hold of that, you're going to amount to something in life. You're finally going to find some significance in life. And the younger you are, that that is your objective – to be a person who walks with God. And you can't walk with somebody unless you're agreed with him. But you can't agree with him unless you know what he thinks.

So, you're a person who is well-versed in Scripture, and you don't say "No" to him. You walk his way, and you treat him as your friend, so that God looks upon you and says, "This is a loyal man; this a loyal woman; and, this is my friend." And you are a person that, when God looks upon you, his heart wells up with joy, and appreciation, and admiration – a person after God's own heart. A spiritually immature Christian does not have his life focus on the things above, with the Lord Jesus Christ, but on the things below, of this earthly life.

**Characteristics of Spiritual Maturity**

So, this morning, I'd like to direct your attention to characteristics of spiritual maturity. This is such an area in which people lie to themselves. Christians bear false witness all the time to themselves, about how spiritually mature they are, and how their spiritual integrity is maximized. And it's not true. But the Bible is very explicit on what it is to be spiritually mature.

1. **Who Gets your First Loyalty?**

First of all, we can summarize it as the question of who gets your first loyalty: Christ; or, Satan. The spiritually mature Christian is always loyal to the Lord Jesus first. He is never been loyal to Satan, and to Satan's world system. So, how does this express itself? Well, first of all, to be loyal to Christ means that you give your life over to storing treasures in heaven. That's kind of odd. You give your life over to a great personal, eternal benefit.

In Matthew 6:19-25, Jesus says, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroy, and where thieves do not break in or steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

So, who gets my loyalty when it comes to what I value? If to get material treasures upon this earth requires me to put aside something of my duty and my service to God, then the world has your first loyalty. That's where your treasure is. Your treasure is here, on what you possess in this world, whether it's in people; things; or, positions. But if your loyalty is first to the Lord Jesus Christ, then you'll be concerned to do those things for which He will reward you in heaven. And that's where your treasures will lie.

I remind you, again, of Peter's verse. Everything that's been made, and every institution you create, and every operation you're in, is all going to be burned to a crisp. What will last? Only the treasures that we have sent up to heaven, because we have performed divine good works under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

So, the mature Christian is very sensitive to where his values lie. The things that he has up in heaven, waiting for him, are far more important to him than the things that he has here on this earth. And, once in a while, somebody will come to me and say, "Here, I want to give you this sum of money for this need at Berean Church, which you just alerted us to. I'm glad to do it. I'd like to add a little more to my treasures in heaven."

One man, who recently gave a very generous gift, said, "Here, let this take care of the need that you mentioned. I'd like to add a golf course to my mansion in heaven." He's on-track. Yes, he gave us the money. Yes, it got invested in a segment of the Berean ministry, but he didn't lose it. The record in heaven clicked off treasure for him.

Now, when you're a mature Christian, you have the good sense to know that that's where it's at, and, therefore, that's where your heart is. What we have here is nothing.

1. **Reject of Yourself and Your Self-Interest**

Secondly, the mature Christian will reject himself and his self-interest, in exchange for God's interests. Matthew 16:23-27: "But Jesus said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan. You are a stumbling block to me, for you not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." Jesus said, "I'm going to die, and in the process of My death, I will pay for the moral guilt of all mankind." Peter, in verse 22, says, "No, you're not going to do that, Lord. We'll fight for you. They're not going to take you." And Peter is trying to talk Jesus out of His life mission. Jesus says, "Get behind Me, Satan". Peter was talking devil-talk." Jesus is saying, "You're a stumbling block to Me. You're tempting Me to put My loyalty with My interests, instead of God's interests." And was it the interests of Jesus not to have to die?

That's what he said in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Lord, Father, if there is some other way that this moral guilt can be taken, besides my bearing the sewage and the filth of the world of mankind (in death), I'd like it to be done." But the human Jesus was speaking there. But He says "Your will, not mine." The Lord told Peter: "You're not setting your mind on God's interests, but on man's."

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross (his mission – not some suffering), and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it. But whoever loses his life, for My sake, shall find it. For what will a man be profited if he gain the whole world (and this Christian man) forfeits his life? Or what will he give in exchange for his life? For the son of man is going to come in the glory of His Father, with his angels, and will then recompense every man according to his deeds."

So, it is in your self-interest, for each of us to say: "God's interests come first in my life. Doggone it, I'm not going to put my interests first. And I'm not going to pretend that when I serve myself, I'm serving the Lord. I'm doing some mission that he's called me upon. Just be sure that that's really true, and that you're not bearing false witness to yourself.

1. **Holiness**

A third characteristic of the mature Christian is that he purifies himself, so that he reflects the holiness of God. And boy, is that hard to do in the society in which we live today, where moral integrity is a big joke. In 1 John 3:1-3, John says, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God, and such, we are. For this reason, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that when He appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself as He is pure."

Someday, when my eyes see the Lord Jesus Christ, and when your eyes see the Lord Jesus Christ, you will instantly be transformed into His perfection. We shall be like Him. We will have absolute righteousness, and absolute magnificent perfection. John says, "If that's our goal, if that's our destiny, why do we want to live like pigs now? Why do we want to compromise our integrity now? Why should we not always ask ourselves: what would Jesus do in this situation? "I have this temptation. I had this opportunity. I have this appealed to me. I'm not going to stand here and think this through on my smarts. On the basis of Scripture and on the basis of what I know about the Lord, what would he do? Would he enter this immorality? Would He violate this moral code? Would He be guilty of this deceit? Would He have this kind of selfishness? Would he be this insensitive, unkind, and unloving? The Christian who is mature knows that there is no other way to go, except to reflect the holiness of God. That means "separation" from Satan's system. But there not many people in the human race that understand this, and are able to rise to it.

Enoch did. Noah did. And it was said of them that they walked with God. Abraham did. And God says, "He's my friend. King David did, in contrast to King Saul. King David was a man after God's own heart. What could be greater than to say you're after my own heart? Think of all the people that you admire. Whatever age they come, we see them. And our hearts rise in admiration because of the kind of people they are. And we say, "There's a person after my own heart, but to be said to be after God's own heart, that means pursuing the holiness that reflects the character of God.

1. **You Fulfill your Divine Mission**

Number 4: who get your first loyalty: Christ; or Satan? If it is Christ, then you will live to serve God and to fulfill your divine mission. Nothing is more important at the end of life. You will wake up one day, and it will never occur to you: "This is my last day." You will start the morning, and you'll go through the little routines of life. And it will never occur to you that there is not going to be another sunrise in your experience. At that point, it's all over, relative to your mission.

Ephesians 2:10, therefore, says, "For we Christians are His workmanship (God's workmanship), created in Christ Jesus." That means that we are born again, people, filled with the Holy Spirit, capable of exercising divine power, with the Word of God and the knowledge of doctrine: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, for good works – not human good works. That's the old sin nature stuff. But we are created for but divine good works, that the Holy Spirit lays upon your heart; that He burdens you to perform; and, enables you to do. These are good works which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

That's the Judgment Seat of Christ review. That's report card time, because it's all up there in heaven. Sam Jones, bring him up on the screen. This was why he was born. This was his mission: to do this, this, this, this, and this. Here are his the divine gifts I gave him. Here is that what I surrounded him with to enable him to execute his mission? And they'll make a star after each item performed. These are divine works prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Now, I guarantee you, the immature Christian doesn't give a Fig Newton about what divine works God has for him to walk in. He doesn't give any thought to that. But the mature Christian, in the back of his mind, there's always: "What is the course that I am to stay? What is the course that I will pursue? What is the battle that I am to enter? What is my calling? Ad he shifts position in bed at night? And he might think about tomorrow – this is my calling. He wakes up in the morning and he says, "This day God has given me. And what shall I do? Well, I'll get up. I'll roam around the house. I'll do this old thing, and I'll get that little thing done, and I'll get that thing taken care of at the bank, and I'll get this thing fixed, and I'll get so-and-so done, and I'll call so-and-so, and, I'll do some socializing. But the mission of God? Oh, I didn't think of that."

Well, if you're a mature Christian, you will give a great deal of thought to that, and you will sit down, and you will not fritter away your life, because I'll tell you that if you fritter away to a certain point, then a merciful Father says, "Well, come on up to heaven. You're ready to come in. There's no further work that you're able to do here." And he takes you home to be with himself.

However, that means a great deal of divine mission is unfulfilled. The mature Christian is very sensitive to that serving of God. And here's the problem for parents: to teach that to their young people; and, to teach that there's a mission that God has for them. We're hearing all the ignoramuses on public debate now, about why young people have done some of the terrible things that we're hearing about in the news. But none of them have had the good sense, practically, to say, "It is because we have had a society that has abandon the Word of God as the authority of the voice of God. And we have squelch access to the Word of God. And we have exalted sin and unrighteousness and self-centeredness, and doing our own thing."

It all began in the 1960s, and now we have it, through all the governmental agencies of our republic, and we're bearing. And nobody is very proud of it, and nobody is very proud of it, and they're rubbing their empty heads, trying to figure out how to stop this. It's not going to be stopped. And when you take the control of God out of a life, when a youngster is permitted to grow up and do all the things that are bad judgment; that are against the Word of God; and, that violate the judgment of spiritual maturity, that's a problem. I have a great deal of respect for these people who, in the early part of the human race, lived for hundreds of years.

One of the things I've learned is: do I ever know a lot more now, at my age, than I knew some years ago? What a lot of perspective. I'm amazed at how I can discern how something is going to turn out. And sometimes I have no control over it, but I know where it's going to end – where you're the discernment of experience of years where you're applying the principles of God. And if you don't have that restraining element around young people, what guidance do they have? God has a plan. You fulfill it or you don't.

1. **Obey God**

Number five, Christian, who is mature spiritually, obeys the principles of the Word of God, to love God as his great personal friend (John 15:14). Jesus said, "You are My friends if you do what I command you." I obey doctrine to express my love for God. I obey doctrine. I show my love to Him. And thus, I show Him that I am His friend." On the human level, we esteem highly someone that we can say, "This is my friend; this person loves me; this person would do me no ill; and this person would not harm me. And the more mature he is, the more mature she is, the greater is my opportunity to benefit by associating with this person.

Some of the worst influences upon young people are their own parents. They are not the friends of God, because they are not living lives where obedience to God comes first. And the commandments of God are of no interest to them. But for the mature Christian, He's going to love God above everything else. But isn't that what the Scripture says? What's the greatest commandment? "You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your mind; and, with all your soul. And the second greatest commandment is like unto that: you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

So, this is characteristic of a mature Christian. And if you associate with somebody that you think is your friend, but you know that this person is not well-versed in scriptural principles, he cannot love you. He has he has a camaraderie with you for the moment. He has an emotional attachment at the moment, and that'll snap just like that, at the appropriate time, when you irritate him. This love is the love of a friend. And with that kind of love, we stand by the people we love, when they're up and when they're down, and when they deserve it and when they don't. The mature Christian is capable of doing that. The immature – don't ever trust yourself to them.

1. **The Mature Christian does not Choose to be Part of the World System**

Number six: the mature Christian does not choose to be part of the world system, because that system is the enemy of God. James 4:4 is that very sobering verse, again: "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." To be a friend of the world; to be a friend of the world system; to be in the world system; to be helping along these people who are struggling to establish Satan's empire; you are operating on Satan's principles; and, you're in there as part of the world system.

This does not mean that you are not a good citizen. This does not mean that you do not sound off what is being done by the political forces of our nation. And there are men of God who are taking the positions on a national basis, sending out letters, and calling our government to task for the fact that they are not enforcing even the laws of the United States. Congress has passed a law. I forget exactly what the title of it is, but it is instructed that the President of the United States is not to permitted, economic favors and other advantages from the United States, to any nation which persecutes Christians. And every day, hundreds of Christians are murdered in Muslim pagan countries – countries that are antagonistic to Christianity, and who get great material, and other benefits, from the United States. And it is a law of this country that when that is discovered as we know it so well, those people are told" Back off from persecution of Christians, or all of your assistance from this country stops as of right now.

Why is that not done? We would think that that should be done. After all, we are a Christian country in our background and our heritage. The reason it's not done is because Satan's world system is based on money. And economic reasons would be hurt if suddenly we tell a nation like China, "That's it. You people are not going to get our trade. You're not going to get our benefit. We are cutting you off because of what you are doing to Chinese Christians." And the corporations would howl and squeal. When a nation has lost its perspective of God, then the things below become more important than the things above. And I'm glad to see this is a great movement being organized in this country to call this government to task, for the fact that it permits our benefits, to come from our taxpayers to people who, in turn, despise us as Christians, the same people who can come over to this country and exercise their religious beliefs freely, even though they're the beliefs of Satan.

1. **Do not Learn Evil by Experiences**

Number seven: in the characteristic of the spiritually mature Christian, he gives his loyalty first to Christ, not to Satan. And that is that he does not engage in learning the evil of the world about, by experience. Romans 16:19: here's a book that the apostle Paul wrote for the explicit purpose of making it clear on how a person becomes right with God, as a sinner, so that he can go to heaven. It is how he may be justified, not by something he does but by something that God has done in his behalf. This whole book is written to explain the doctrine of salvation. Having completed that, he comes to the end of the book, and in Romans 16:19, he makes kind of a surprising statement. After all is said and done, your salvation is there, provided by God. It's secure. Now that you're a Christian, remember this: "For the report of your obedience has reach to all. He tells the Christians in Rome, "I'm very pleased to hear that you're obedient to principles of doctrine. Your positive volition has been an inspiration to all of us who have heard of it. Therefore, since you have accepted the Word of God in terms of salvation, and you have accepted the principles of doctrine I'm rejoicing over you. That makes me very happy. But I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil."

Paul says, "Don't watch Oprah Winfrey. Don't watch Geraldo. Don't watch all these ignoramuses (ignorant intellectuals), money and power. Don't listen to the interviews of the entertainment stars, the people who are prominent on television. Do you not know that all these people are going to spend eternity in the lake of fire and you're listening to them, to their lifestyle, and to the justification of how they live, and how they treat people, what their ambitions are? Paul says, "Do not contaminate the mind of Christ, which you now have as a Christian. Do not contaminated it with this kind of sinfulness – this which will corrupt your own thinking, and your own understanding of the Word of God. I want you to learn what is good (what is divine good principle) by your experience. But don't learn it by experience."

How many young people have decided that something that the world does is not all that bad? They don't think that that's some relationship; some custom; or, some practices that bad, so they try it out and God says, "Don't do that." If you do, Satan will get a hook in you, and it will bring you down spiritually. "Do not learn what is evil."

Well, the holy Christian does not follow the ways of the unsaved in his life. He is loyal, first and foremost, to the Lord Jesus Christ, not to Satan and his world system. The apostle Paul summarizes, this principle of the holy Christian following the ways of God, and rejecting the ways of the unsaved. In Ephesians 3:15-17. Therefore, Paul says, here's the bottom line. "Be careful how you walk. Not as unwise, but as wise. Not as immature people, but as grown up Christians, making the most of your time." Making the most of your time to do what? Well, to fulfill my life ambitions. To do this, to accumulate things. Is that making the most of your time. Or have you become mature enough to know that it is only in God's service that you make the most of your time, because that goes with you? Why do I have to be careful about what I think is the way I should spend my time when I wake up in the morning? Because the days are evil. And everything around you wants to encourage you to spend your day in the wrong way. All of our society, more now than ever before, is to cover up the personal life of the believer.

Verse 17: So, then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." That's it. Those three beautiful verses put it all together. It is the will of God. That is what the mature Christian wants. And we don't know that will entirely in the long-distance scope. I know how old I am now. I know what my physical condition and capacities are now. I know what my financial material position is now. I know what my family relationships are now. I know what my opportunities are now. I know what my spiritual gifts are. I know what I can do at this point in time. Where I may ultimately go, I'm not sure. But when I walk circumspectly, I only have to worry about the next step. That is the next step, and that's the one I have to be worried about.

If I take it one step at a time and walk, as Scripture says, circumspectly; that is, within the confines of the mind of God, I'm going to get to the destiny of the Judgment Seat of Christ. And like Paul says, "I'm not going to stand there ashamed. If I have to shed any tears there, because of I blew my life at some point, it's not going to be because I was stupid, foolish, and paid no attention to it. I just missed the boat. When, most of the time, my life is going to be in stride." And he could say with most Christians couldn't say when he knew that His death was imminent. He said, "I have fought a good fight. I have run the race. I have finished my course.

That's what it is to be a mature Christian man or woman. Christ gets my loyalty first. Satan is never even in consideration. But if you're not careful, Satan's world will get to you, and all of a sudden, it's got first place in what you do with your time; with your talents; and, with your treasures.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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