***The Nature of Man

Techniques of the Christian Life

TL01-02***

In our first segment on the series of the techniques of the Christian life, we looked at the nature of God. We will now, in this second segment, look at the nature of man. You will remember that we pointed out that the series on the techniques of the Christian life is intended to bring us to spiritual stability and to divine good production. This is important because your eternal reward is going to be based upon your spiritual stability and the divine good that you produce.

The techniques are going to enable us to live in a way which is compatible with God's nature and with God's essence. Human viewpoint and human good is opposed to the nature of God, and it is rejected by God. We indicated that in our society today, human viewpoint and human good are summed up in the philosophy of humanism. This is the viewpoint which permeates our society, and this is what leads to multiplied human good production. Humanism is actually the enemy of personal liberty; it is the enemy of the dignity of man; and, it is actually a good expression of Satan's philosophy of a life without God.

Christians, therefore, who are going to be tempted to look to our society for your thinking, for your opinions, and for the things that guide your actions, are going to find that you are running contrary to God's ways and to God's thinking.

So we began with the nature of God in order to try to impress you with how important these techniques are to you now as well as eternity.

**The Essence of Man**

So let's look at the essence of man. We find, as we look in the Word of God, that God makes a universal declaration concerning mankind. In Jeremiah 17:9, we read, "The heart is deceitful (here, the heart is in reference to the old sin nature) above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" That is, everyone in the world today is born with an evil nature--the thing we call the old sin nature. Then in Romans, we have again the apostle Paul making this similar declaration concerning the nature of mankind. Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

**The Old Sin Nature (The Flesh)**

In other words, from the old sin nature flow personal acts of sin. That is, any time that you act in a way that is not as good as God, it is an act of sin. Everybody has sin, and everybody does sin. Some people are guilty of very grotesque, dirty, mean sins; while, other people are only guilty of nice sins--they're not so revolting to us. But, in either case, you are guilty of acting contrary to that which is reflected by the essence of God. Because of the presence of the old sin nature in the Christian, the Christian also is confronted with this problem of sin. Some people sin in a gross way; others sin less; but, all do sin. We again have this pointed out to us in Isaiah 64:6: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." We are an unclean thing because we have an old sin nature. Unsaved people perform good deeds. They are unselfish. They are thoughtful. They are kind. They are considerate. They are sacrificial. But all of this stems from a nature that is tainted with sin. Consequently, all of our thoughtfulness and all of our considerateness, as unbelievers, are rejected by God. These are what we mean by works of human good. They come from the old sin nature, and God says they're filthy, by divine viewpoint.

**The Unsaved Man**

So let's take a look, first of all, at the unsaved man. The unsaved man comes in three basic varieties. If we're going to draw a picture of the essence of man, we start with the statement that all have sinned. This constitutes the character quality of man. All have sinned. But there are several kinds of unbelievers.

**The Immoral Man**

First of all, let's look at the man we'll call the immoral man. Historically, the immoral man is represented by the antichrist who is yet to come upon the scene of history. The immoral man is openly and grossly sinful in character. He abandons himself to sinning. If you read the first chapter of the book of Romans, you will have a very clear declaration and picture presented, concerning this immoral man. He is immoral on every front in the most extreme ways. He eagerly boasts of his sins, he doesn't care who knows it, and the immoral man is the frame of reference for people who are not that bad. They compare themselves to the immoral man, and it helps their own egos--the image of themselves--that they're not really so bad.

**The Self-Righteous Man**

Then there is another kind of unbeliever who also has sin. He's the self-righteous man. This, in Scripture, can be represented by the rich young ruler. Now this is a sinner who's got some class. He's got some refinement. He confidently worships some god of his own, such as the god of nature. He's the good citizen type; he's personable; and, he is enjoyed by the world. Now the self-righteous man comes about this, for one thing, because he looks over here at the immoral man, and he sees how much better he is than that character, and yet he does not realize that his own nature is a nature of sin. He feels that he's as good as any church member, but he rarely, if ever, attends church. To him, church is just a crutch. He is self-righteous. He is very smug and confident about facing God. He's not really afraid of it, because, by his estimates, in comparing himself to the immoral man, his sins are not all that bad, and God, in his view, will certainly be very sympathetic and tolerant toward him.

**The Religious Man**

There is another kind of unsaved person, and that is the religious man. This one perhaps, in some respects, is the worst kind. The religious man is active in church. He is all for God. He is enthusiastic about religion, and he's full of self-sacrifice. He will perform rituals of prayer. He will follow the rituals of giving money, of attending church, of helping orphans, and of petting stray dogs. He has a heart full of do-goodism, and it expresses itself in a variety of fantastic ways. Now, because of this, he is viewed by other people as being a very commendable type, if not an ideal.

**Lent**

The religious man is very, very impressive. He practices, for example, self-denial. Six weeks before Easter, there comes a period in the religious world called Lent. This is a time when unsaved people become very religious. This is a time when the religious man is extremely stimulated in his ego to approach God and to appeal to God. He gives up something that he really enjoys, and when he does, he feels very spiritual about it. He feels closer to God, and he thinks that God is very pleased with him. In the back of his mind, he has the idea that because he has pleased God by giving up something he really likes at Lent, it's going to bring him a lot of good luck. It's the religious man who will meet you and say, "Well, good luck." That's kind of sad when a fellow believer comes up to you and wishes you good luck. He shows a little bit of doctrinal lack, because, as believers, we do not operate on such a blind force as luck. But the religious man functions on this idea. He does not operate on the fact that God is sovereign and just, and these factors in the essence of God (like his love), which are the source of God's dealing with us--not luck. This man does not mind reminding people of what he has done for God. He is represented in Scripture by the Pharisees, and one of the outstanding Pharisees representing this was Nicodemus. The Pharisees did not mind telling people how sweet they were.

Now all of this can be represented by this diagram where the human essence is unsaved. The essence of man is that he is a sinner. That covers various types--immoral, righteous, and religious--but they are all sinners. None of these are born again, and they're all equally separated from God. The Christian can act in all three of these categories, because, while a Christian is born again, he still retains the old sin nature. Because he has the nature that creates these men in the first place, it is possible for Christians to revert into these same conditions. The Christian can become a very immoral person. The Christian can become very self-righteous. We have a lot more of those. We have a whole flock of them when it comes to being religious. There is nobody that can be more legalistic than a Christian. There is nobody that can play the smug self-righteous like some Christians can. They are an offense to God as much as they are to you and me when we meet them.

**Spirituality vs. Spiritual Growth**

The Word of God indicates to us the fact of spiritual growth. The Bible has a concept of spirituality that I think all of us are acquainted with, and that is simply a matter of being related to God the Holy Spirit in the right way. Our relationship to Him is established where he is free to use us and direct us on the basis of having our known sins confessed. But there are degrees of growth in the Christian life, and that is something entirely different. So we have two different factors. We have this matter of spirituality, and we also have the matter of spiritual growth. They are not one in the same thing. Spiritual maturity comes by a growth process. But spirituality is secured in a moment of time. So, a new convert can be spiritual, but he cannot be mature.

**Grieving or Quenching the Holy Spirit**

A Christian can be spiritual or not spiritual, and as a matter of fact, he can be mature or not mature. One Christian cannot be more spiritual than another Christian. So, get over the habit, if you have fallen into that, of talking about some significant exemplary Christian as being a very spiritual man. There are no degrees of spirituality. You cannot talk about a person being very spiritual. A person is either spiritual or he is not spiritual. The reason for this is because spirituality is a matter of the Holy Spirit being either grieved or quenched in the life of a Christian. Grieving the Holy Spirit means that there is a sin that the Christian is willfully pursuing. Quenching the Holy Spirit means that instead of permitting Him to function with divine good through your life, you are functioning, and squelching Him with your human good out of your old sin nature production. Now if the Holy Spirit is either grieved or quenched, then you are not on good terms with Him. If you are not on good terms with Him, you are not spiritual.

So, a Christian is spiritual if the Holy Spirit controls his soul, and this is necessary for spiritual growth. You must be spiritual to progress in the Christian life, but at any stage of maturity, you can be spiritual or not spiritual. Spirituality, then, is secured by confession of sin to the Father, and you are either in temporal fellowship (which is what we mean by spiritual), or you are out of it. A Christian is either walking in the light (which is God's divine viewpoint), or he is walking in darkness (which is Satan's human viewpoint). A Christian is either walking by means of the Holy Spirit (which is what the Bible calls upon us to do), or else he is walking by means of the old sin nature. You cannot be controlled by God the Holy Spirit and by your old sin nature at the same time. Nor can you be controlled partly by God the Holy Spirit and partly by your old sin nature. The moment any factor of the old sin comes into control of your life, whether it's in the form of sins from the weak side or good human works from the strong side, you are out of it. You are at that moment no longer a spiritual Christian. You are out of the inner circle.

**The Stages of Spiritual Development**

So, a Christian, at any stage of spiritual maturity, has to use 1 John 1:9, the principle of confession, to get back into temporal fellowship. So, while a status of spirituality is necessary for spiritual growth, the two are entirely different. They're not the same thing. Now, the growth in the Christian life is never stationary. You are always, from the point of your salvation, either progressing or retrogressing. It is the great objective of the Christian life to see you come from the point where you are a baby in Christ and progress to where you are a grown-up spiritual mature Christian. A believer is told in the Word of God, in so many words, to grow. In 1 Peter 2:2, Peter says, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word, that ye may grow by it." That is, sound Bible doctrine; and particularly, for a newborn Christian, the basics. In 2 Peter 3:18, Peter says, "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever."

Spiritual growth requires a Christian to function on the grace system of perception so that he is learning doctrine. Many Christians are stuffed with knowledge of doctrine--that's true. But they are resistors. They are indifferent. Just to be neutral toward what you have learned of doctrine is to cause you to fall out of fellowship. If you are neutral, you're out of fellowship. You cannot be neutral toward the Word of God. To be neutral is, in effect, to be negative. So, we have many Christians who are stuffed with the knowledge of the Word, but it is a resistant knowledge, and they are not growing spiritually. The rate of your spiritual growth depends upon the amount of time you spend in learning the Word.

Now, the techniques of the Christian life, which we are studying, have to do directly with how to take you from this point where you enter the Christian life and where you are a baby believer, right on up to where you are an adult in Christian life and where you are no longer immature. That's the whole name of the game of the Christian life--the whole point--while you are walking on earth. Now when this is accomplished, many wonderful things flow from it for you personally; for the unbelievers to whom you witness; and, for the salt effect which you have as a believer upon our society. Here at the baby stage, you are just about nothing, when it comes to influencing or to be a preservative within our society. Whereas, here at the adult stage, you are something very significant toward exercising a preserving influence upon our society.

So, let's take a look at the stages of spiritual growth. Turn to the classic passage of 1 John 2. There are three stages of spiritual growth. 1 John 2:12-14 says there are three stages of spiritual development:

**The Baby Believer**

1) The baby stage - He uses the Greek word "paidion." "Paidion" means little children. This word is in what we call the diminutive form, and a diminutive form expresses affection. If somebody's name is Jim, you may call him Jimmy, as an affectionate term. If somebody's name is Sue, you may call her Suzie. That's our diminutive, affectionate, tender way of using a name, and that's what this word is in the Greek language. It's a word that refers to an infant who is just born, or to a very small child. Everybody begins the Christian life as a "paidion." You enter as a newborn infant. This word simply connotes immaturity. You had at least enough faith to accept Christ as Savior, and you got into the Christian life. You entered the family of God, and you're a baby. Immediately at salvation, what should you do with a baby? The same thing that you do with a baby that you have at the hospital. The first thing you want the baby to do is to start developing and maturing, and you want to start seeing that infant put on weight. There comes a point very shortly after his birth where he has to start to be fed in order to start developing physically. So (it is) with a Christian. It is necessary to immediately start feeding that newborn convert with doctrine in order that he may start moving up the scale toward maturity. Now, in the natural realm, if you don't feed a baby with food, he dies. In the spiritual realm, he experiences a temporal death that the Bible calls carnality. He is outside the plan and the will of God, and he experiences a stunted existence as a believer if he lacks the feeding of doctrine.

Now, the person who is an infant in the faith is a person who basically acts upon the promises of the Word. There's not much in the Bible that an infant in the faith can deal with. He'll read a verse like Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose," and he understands that. He says, "Now there's a promise. God says that everything is going to work together for good in my life." So, he grabs hold of that promise. He can understand that. Or, he turns to 1 Peter 5:7 and he reads another promise, "Casting all your care upon Him for He careth for you." Now there's a promise in the Word. A newborn Christian says, "All the things that burden me--all of my cares--I can put them upon the Lord, and say, 'Lord, I'm going to depend upon you to work this out for me.'" He claims that promise. He looks in 1 Samuel 17:47, and he learns that the battle is the Lord's. Therefore, he gets the first inkling of living the Christian life without all that combat and struggling and trying on his part. He looks in Romans 8:31, and he says, "What shall we say then to these things? If God be for us, then who can be against us?" Now, there's a great promise. He says, "That I can understand. God is on my side. So who's going to give me any real trouble?" That's how a newborn Christian operates. He operates mostly by promises made to him, which is very child-like. If there's anything your children like, it's for you to make promises to them. Would to God that we were more like our children, because if you make a promise to your kid, one of the things that you can be quite certain of is that he's going to remember it and remind you of it. God wants you to remember His promises, and He delights in your reminding Him of what he promised to do for you. He wants you to walk right into His presence and say, "Now, Lord, you promised that you're going to do this, and I have to claim it. I need it." You lean on those promises. That's child-like walk with the Lord.

Now even at the more mature stages of your Christian life you will use promises. But the difference is that you add other features, as we shall see in a moment.

So, you enter the Christian life with the maximum amount of human viewpoint--very little divine viewpoint. The spiritual judgment of a "paidion" is strictly bad. He has very little spiritual discernment. He can be easily conned. It is very important that somebody who is going to give him the right scoop takes hold of him. He can be led far astray at this point because he just does not know. He can look at spiritual leaders of all colors, of all slants, and of all brands, and he doesn't know up from down. He doesn't know that this person is straight, or if this person is an operator who is conning him. So it is important that he be placed into a proper nursery for the caring of his soul.

Now, he can produce some divine good--very little. He produces it because he can be filled with the spirit by confessing his sins. As of that point, he can produce divine good. He can't produce much good from the Word, because he doesn't know the Word. He can't produce any good from spiritual maturity, where divine good also comes from, because he doesn't have maturity. He's very immature. So, the basic way he can produce divine good for his own rewards in Heaven is simply that he remains filled with the spirit. He has no frame of reference, so he's not a very intelligent communicator of the Word. He actually will communicate many misconceptions which often lead to discrediting the faith. Paul spoke of a group like that in Romans 10:2 when he said, "For I bear them witness, that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth."

Here were a group of people who were very zealous, but ignorant of the Word and ignorant of what real righteousness was, as God sees it, so they were pursuing a false righteousness in giving a lot of people a lot of misconceptions. Do you see why we say that a person who is recently born again should not be put up for public display? I don't care if he is a famous football player from the Dallas Cowboys who always picks up the fumble. Just because he has been born again, and because he's good on the football field, does not qualify him for you to hold a great meeting and say, "Friends, come out next Sunday night. We're going to have Sam Blow here who's going to tell us all about the wonderful game of life called football--and his testimony for the Lord." So he'll get up and say, "Well folks, I want to tell you about a very wonderful time I've learned to trust the Lord here, and it's a great game of life, and I've been fighting out on the football field, and I'm going to fight in a another world here for the Lord. I want all of you folks to join me out there. You know, huh?"

Maybe it goes better than that, hopefully, but it's just about as profitless and empty as that. This is a travesty because those people get the wrong idea. Do you know what a new convert does? He walks into church and the first thing he does is he puts his hands behind his back and he starts looking around and says, "Now what do they do around here?" And, pretty soon he notices some churches where everybody smiles, so he starts getting face cramps from smiling. He says, "That's what they do around here. They smile all the time. Even when they talk, they smile." All of the gimmicks and devices that churches put on, and the Christians put on with one another because they all play these little front games with each other--that's what he picks up. He has no discernment. He is at the bottom of the pile. He doesn't know up from down. All he can grasp are a few promises, but he can produce very little divine good. Nobody should deceive him into thinking that he's got something to say at that point of his Christian experience. Most of what he says is very distorted and very harmful.

This person, as a newborn babe, can take very little solid instruction. As a matter of fact, he comes to church and the main thing he wants is to be entertained. He wants you to amuse him, and he certainly wants you to pay attention to him, and to greet him at the door and bid him farewell, and ask him to come back. As a matter of fact, he has a terrible time of sitting in church and listening. His mouth has to constantly flap during the service. This is one of the sure signs of spiritual immaturity. He has not been able to come to the point where he has developed a capacity spiritually to listen and concentrate on the Word of God. He wants to have a good time because he is a kid in the faith. Hebrews 5:13, for this reason, says, "For everyone that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness for he is a babe." That is juvenile stuff to want to come to church to be entertained.

This person is very unstable in all of his ways. He can easily drift off into a status quo of pernicious carnality. He mostly functions on his emotions, and therefore he can be easily swayed. The lust patterns of his old sin nature plague him continuously. Until he learns how to deal with the old sin nature, which he should be taught immediately, he is plagued by these lusts from his old sin nature. He wants attention. He wants power. He wants to apply pressure. He wants material things. Sometimes they break out in sensual expressions, and so on.

Well, this is the "paidion," the baby Christian. No we could go on and on. His characteristics are infinite. I think that you can go from here yourself and say, "Now, as I think back upon a brand new Christian, I can see this and this and this being true of him." He is spiritually untrustworthy. He has a hard time learning the Word. Here's his problem: If he's going to go up the scale of maturity, the one thing he has to do is learn the Word of God, and this is the one thing he can hardly do. He just can hardly sit in church. If he can sit there and pay attention for ten minutes, that's about it--and that's a marvel. He just cannot learn the Word of God. He can't even find himself moved to come to church. It just as easy for him to wake up in the morning and say, "I'm going to stay in bed." It's just as easy for him to stay home from church as it is to go. It doesn't matter--one side or the other. It's just like flipping a coin. There is no deep-seated conviction and drive from within his being. Why? Because he's a baby.

Now lest you want to compliment yourself and sit back and breathe a sigh of relief because you happen to have been born in a Christian home; because you happen to have gone to Church for many years; or, because you happen to have been around this Christian viewpoint for a long time, I want to caution you who were born again ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty years ago, that I could be describing you. Now don't pass this off too quickly. If you've heard some signals here that seem to reflect you, at least you better admit to yourself that there are some phases of your experience that reflect babyhood stage--some places where you have not yet grown up.

**The Adolescent Believer**

The second stage of spiritual growth is the adolescent believer. The scriptures call him "the young man" here in John. That's the "neaniskos." This is a diminutive form of affection. It is used here of Christians who have now moved up this scale to some degree of maturity. They're adolescents. They're not adults but they're not little baby Christians anymore. The "neaniskos" have developed to a certain stage of life. The babies use promises. This stage is now able to incorporate what we're learning now--the techniques of the Christian life. It is very difficult for a baby Christian to operate on the techniques. Part of his problem, again, is that he's not sure he should be interested in them. This stage of development adds to promises, the techniques. From learning of doctrine, he has begun to develop a frame of reference. He has a level of divine viewpoint that is considerably expanded. He's better able to communicate the Word because his human spirit is filled with doctrine. He knows basic doctrine. That's what brought him to the adolescent stage. He has learned basic doctrine. He got the tapes on basic Bible doctrine, and he pounded his way through them, and he has absorbed them, and he has learned them, and he has moved from that baby stage to where he is a teenager in the faith. He has maintained, in other words, regular study of the Word of God. He knows when he's out of fellowship, and he takes action. It is hard for the baby Christian to know when he's out of fellowship and when he isn't. That compounds his problem. But when you get to be a teenager, you know pretty clearly you're sinning--you're fighting God, or you're not sinning. You're neutral or you're not.

Now the Christian at this stage can produce considerable good. He produces it through the filling of the Holy Spirit, and also through the doctrine that he has now learned and is able to use. However, he tends to be erratic in his service. The adolescent Christian will come up to you and say, "Hey, yes, I'll do that. That job needs to be done. I will do it. Count on me." Two weeks later, you never see him again. The job filters off, and it's gone. One of the sure signs of adolescent Christians is incapacity to stay with it, because children flit--here and there, back and forth. This is what the adolescent Christian does. He tends, like most teenagers, to think that he knows more than he does, and so he is tempted to get pushy in his zeal. He wants to get everybody and everything right. One of the things about an adult Christian is that he is never pushy. An adult man or woman in the faith is never pushy. He never gets rough-handed. He never starts shoving his shoulder into you. He never starts pushing around. A baby Christian doesn't do that because he's too scared to do that. But an adolescent Christian thinks that he's on the ball. He thinks he knows something, and he doesn't mind being very zealous in starting to tear in to get things straightened out. But he doesn't continue though. He goes; and he forgets it; and he gets another toy; and, he forgets it. In other words, when he's hot he's hot, and when he's not he's not.

**The Adult Christian**

Now there's a third stage--the adult Christian. These are called fathers. John says, "pater." The word "pater" signifies the nourisher, the protector, or the upholder. It refers to the highest level of spiritual maturity. This is the mature Christian who is fully functioning on promises, on techniques, and on doctrine. He is functioning on doctrine in such a way that he's able to developer principles out of the doctrine that he has learned. From his advanced doctrine, he has built a spiritual maturity structure in his soul. This is one of the key characteristics of a mature Christian--he has developed the facets of spiritual maturity. These serve as his defense, and as his attack in the angelic conflict in which he is engaged. He has a maximum storage of knowledge of doctrine in his human spirit. He now produces divine good from the filling of the spirit, from his use of doctrine, and also from his spiritual maturity structure.

Most of the time, he's in fellowship. He is very sensitive to when he is out of fellowship, and because he's mature, he immediately deals with it. Most of the time, his soul is free of any callouses and hardening toward the Lord. Consequently, he's able to produce maximum divine good in his service.

**Christian Principles in Doubtful Things**

Most importantly, he's able to take doctrine and to convert it into principles which express guidelines for his living. The baby Christian and the adolescent Christian operate, for example, on taboos or legalisms when they want to do right--mostly the baby Christian. He operates on legalisms and taboos in order to live the Christian life. But the principles of conduct for an adult Christian (for example, in some doubtful things) are handled in a different way. Here's what the adult Christian will do: He won't just come up with a bunch of taboos. He will take doctrine and he will say, "Now, from doctrine I may establish a principle to give me direction in this thing that is doubtful. It's not a morally wrong thing, but I'm not sure that I ought to do this as a Christian." It's just a doubtful thing. Now the Word of God gives us certain principles:

**The Principle of Liberty**

1) We have the principle of liberty. In 1 Corinthians 6:12, this principle is stated: "But all things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any of them." This is the principle of liberty. A Christian is free in the Lord to do the things that are not morally wrong. Galatians 5:1 says, "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty in which Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Verse 13 says, "For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty. Only use no liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." The principle here is that a Christian is free to do what is not wrong. This principle has to do with self. A Christian forms this principle in reference to himself. In other words, he says, "I have the right to live as unto the Lord in my life and my service. I'm free to operate outside of the demands and controls of my old sin nature and to walk in fellowship with the Lord." This, however, is not the liberty to sin. In Romans 6:1, Paul says, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may about? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer in it?" Verse 15 says, "What then, shall we sin since we're not under the law but under grace? God forbid." The principle of liberty: you are free as a Christian to do anything that the Bible does not forbid or condemn.

**The Principle of Love**

2) But there is another principle, and that is the principle of love. This principle is directed toward believers. In Galatians 5:13, we read again, "For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty, only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." This principle means I have the right to do certain doubtful things, but I won't do them, not because they're wrong, but out of a mental attitude of love for the weaker brother who is often legalistic. I will not do this because I am interested in helping other people come into a relationship of happiness with the Lord, not in hindering them. Now that's a sign of great maturity. There are some Christians who simply cannot develop this kind of principle toward unbelievers. Do you know why? Because they are adolescents or less. A mature Christian has no problem with this whatsoever. To keep from upsetting or to causing another Christian to stumble is the point that a mature Christian is concerned about. A mature Christian is a builder--not a destroyer.

1 Corinthians 8:10 says, "For if any man see thee who has knowledge sitting at the table in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; and through thy knowledge, shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against a brethren and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if food make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat, while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." Now did you notice what the apostle said? The apostle said that if you violate the law of love, you are sinning. If you do something to make another Christian stumble, even if it's perfectly alright for you to do, that's a sin. An adolescent and an immature baby Christian are always sinning like this. But the mature Christian is able to handle this principle of love.

**The Principle of Expediency**

3) There's another one, and that is the principle of expediency that a mature Christian will work out. This expediency principle is in reference to the unbeliever. Now, what does expediency mean? This is because there are certain things that unbelievers consider right and wrong. They may not be right and wrong, but by their standards, they do consider it right or wrong. They don't like to see Christians smoke. They don't like to see Christians drinking. They don't like to see Christians gambling. They don't like to hear Christians using foul language. Now, whether it's right or wrong to do those things is beside the point (here). Unbelievers have standards relative to Christians. Now, that's what this expediency principle has to deal with.

In 1 Corinthians 6:12, Paul says, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient." So, he says, relative to the unbelievers, there are certain things that I should not do. It's just not wise for me to do, because if I do that, it dissuades them from the issue, which is that Christ died for our sins. Instead, they're hung up because they see me smoking. They shouldn't be hung up over that. That's my business as unto the Lord, but it's a bug to them and it keeps them from getting their eyes on the issue. So, I don't it in their presence. Some things a mature Christian just does not do because, relative to unbelievers, it is not wise.

**The Principle of Supreme Sacrifice**

4) Then, number four, the mature Christian will work out the principle of supreme sacrifice. We have this supreme sacrifice in 1 Corinthians 9:4-6, where Paul says, "Have we no right to eat and to drink? Have we no right to lead about a sister as a wife, as well as other apostles, and as brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have we no right to forebear working?" Paul says, "I have certain rights. They're very definitively my rights." This is a principle in reference to God, because these are things that neither believers nor unbelievers object to, but a mature Christian will set them aside because of personal service for the Lord. A mature believer will say, "There are certain things that I won't do for the supreme sacrifice of service to the Lord."

For example, a young believer may say, "There is a certain stage in my life where I will not get married until a later point. Up to a certain stage, I will not marry in order that I may follow the road of celibacy in order to give maximum attention to service for the Lord." Paul, very definitely, commends that kind of consideration.

The baby Christian and the adolescent Christian want to do all the normal pleasant things that they're entitled to do, no matter what. There are many things that are required of mature Christians which are not required of babies and adolescents. There are many things that mature Christians are going to have to give up, and set aside, and sacrifice, and carry a burden for, that the younger ones are not capable of.

So, in one local church, you can have them all the way--from babies on up to the fully adult mature believers. The goal of it all is to become self-sustaining. Now that's where the techniques of the Christian life come in. The techniques will take you from that fumbling incompetent babyhood to that mature competent Christian. That's where you want to go. You can spot yourself, if you've been (paying attention here), and you can identify where you are and where you need to go. This does not come automatically. This does not come because of your background and heritage. This does not come because of your length of time as a Christian. Hebrews 5:11 summarizes it very nicely. Here is stunted spiritual growth. May this not be true of us. Hebrews 5:11-14: "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers (these people have been Christians a long time), ye have need that one teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of solid food. For every one that useth milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But solid food 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."

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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