

Jesus Calls Us To Maturity, Not Perfection

CHAPTER 1

Jesus Calls Us To Maturity, Not Perfection

"Your little girl is dead, but you'll always have a little daughter with blond curls and a beautiful smile," said the well intentioned lady trying to comfort the parents; but, the words had a hollow ring, and have echoed in my soul across the years. The hollow sound of the words struck home much when our eighteen year old son was killed in a car wreck, and again when our little handicapped daughter died. Then, I knew why the words seemed so hollow. I did not Want an eighteen year old son or a little girl the rest of my days. I wanted a mature son and a grown up daughter.

So, it is with God, our heavenly Father--He does not want us to be babies or adolescents all our days; but, mature saints growing into the likeness of Christ.

Maturity Means to Let Go, then Grow

"Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the

resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment."

Hebrews 6:1-2 (NIV)

First Principles

In the above Scripture, we have the apostle's advice to the Hebrews-- that they should grow up from a state of childhood to the fullness of the stature of the mature man in Christ. He declares he is willing to assist them in their spiritual progress; and, for their greater encouragement, he puts himself with them: "**let us press on**" Hebrews 6:2 Here observe, in order to grow, Christians must leave the first principles of the doctrine of Christ. How must they leave them? They must not lose them, they must not despise them, they must not forget them. They must lay them up in their hearts, as the foundation of all their profession and expectation; but they must not rest and stay in them, they must not be always laying the foundation, they must go on, and build upon it.

The apostle mentions several foundation-principles, which must be well laid at first, and then built upon; neither his time nor theirs must be spent in laying these foundations over and over again. These foundations are six:--

1. Repentance from dead works, that is, conversion and regeneration, repentance from a spiritually dead state and course; as if he had said, "Take care that you return not to sin again, for then you must have the foundation laid again."

2. Faith towards God, a firm belief of the existence of God, of his nature, attributes, and the whole mind and will of God as revealed in his word, particularly what relates to the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. The doctrine of baptisms, that is, of being baptized by a minister of Christ with water, in the name of the Father, and of the

Son, and of the Holy Ghost, as the initiating sign or seal of the covenant of grace. (Matthew 28:19) This ordinance of baptism is a foundation to be rightly laid, and daily remembered, but not repeated.

4. Laying on of hands, means the ordination of persons to the ministerial office, who are duly qualified for it and inclined to it; and this by fasting and prayer, with laying on of the hands of the Elders (I Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6) and this is to be done but once.

5. The resurrection of the dead, that is of the raising of the body in the resurrection (I Corinthians 15); and its reunion with our soul.

6. Eternal judgment, determining the state of both soul and body at the last day, the wicked to everlasting punishment, the righteous to life eternal. (Matthew 7:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:9)

These are the great foundation-principles which ministers should clearly and convincingly unfold, and closely apply. In these, the people should be well instructed and established, and from these they must never depart; without these, the other parts of religion have no foundation to support them.

It is this need to face the truth about maturity and deal with the enemies of maturity on the other hand, that I direct our thinking

IDEALISM vss MATURITY

"People kept telling me over and over across the years, 'You've got to be perfect, and there is no room to slide'," said Bill from his hospital bed. He continued, "So here I am an alcoholic, have killed a man which no one knows about, and there is no place to hide."

Bill's words bit deep into my heart for the church had taught me

that I must be perfect and real life soon taught me that is impossible. I found a place to hide in a subterfuge --religious idealism, which is treating truth as an abstract theory, and not facing reality.

Idealism, the dictionary asserts is the "imaginative treatment that seeks to show an author's or artists conception of perfection." While the dictionary says **realism** is "to be concerned with acts in accordance with actual facts, rather than ideals, feelings and imagined perfection."

With me *idealism* started after I received Christ, then came baptism by immersion, communion every Sunday, live a perfect life, wear the right name, have the right church government and tithe. These truths would be my *menu* for the next 25 years and as a young Christian Church preacher I preached the same to my audience. Didn't the Lord teach me anymore? Yes, but my *security blanket of idealism* made me feel very religious. My growth towards maturity was stymied by *idealism*; but, I was too busy studying the Bible in Bible College and preaching, to do whatever He told me. I was starving and church folk starved right along with me.

Michael J. Fox, youthful actor, says: **"I am careful not to confuse excellence with perfection. Excellence I can reach; perfection is God's business."** from page 13 of Reader's Digest, February, 1998.

Ideals are certainly laudable, but *idealism* is ideals gone to seed. Jesus drove the moneychangers from the Temple and his disciples said "Zeal (idealism) for your house has eaten (You) up." John 2:17 NKJ They were wrong about Jesus but that is exactly the way *idealism* works. A person becomes a proponent of an isolated truth and their advocacy of it stretches the truth out of shape.

Idealism is an ever so subtle enemy of Christianity for it comes in

like the soldiers who hid in the famed Wooden Horse of Troy in the Trojan War.

Idealism comes in philosophical shades: first there is simple *idealism* which changes our focus from Jesus to doctrine, (John 5:39-40) next, it grows into **perfectionism** which is zeal "gone to seed" causing us to concentrate on particular doctrine. This is followed by an attitude of ultra superiority towards others in relation to certain truth-- **pharisaism**.

Idealism vss realism is well illustrated in a City wide Revival in Arkansas City, Kansas. The *realism* of this revival reached 3000+ per night, while revivals by local churches promoting *idealism* reached a few dozen or at most two or three score. WHY?

I conclude the difference is contained in the words "realism" and "idealism". The churches in Arkansas City, and there were 49 of them in 1976 when we moved here, are possessed or plagued with "idealism" which the dictionary says "is the envisioning of things as they should be or wished to be rather than as they are...Capable of existing as a mental concept giving imaginative treatment to subject matter in accordance with preconceived standards of perfection as opposed to realism."

"Realism" the dictionary says is "to be concerned with acts in accordance with actual facts rather than ideals, feelings and imagined perfection.

So, while religion talks about "*idealism*," people live their lives in the valleys and often gutters of *realism* and there is a great gulf between the two.

Idealistic religion talks about "perfect people", "perfect marriages", "perfect lives," etc. when in reality these do not exist on our Planet Earth or in the Bible. Religion across America while teaching on one

hand the fallacy of "if it feels good, do it," has on the other hand been overcome with that very philosophy in their buildings and services. Just this week on the front page of the "The Daily Oklahoman" of Oklahoma City a picture and article reported a church in Edmond, Oklahoma erecting a \$400,000. cross on their front lawn. So, plush seats, thick carpet, just right soothing organ music, QUIETNESS please!, plush robed choirs, color coordination and often people discrimination, with preachers who have all the right titles and say just the right words to soothe, fulfill all the niceties of realism but souls go away as they came--hungry and thirsty. And, yet some wonder why the crowds don't show up.

So, the City wide revival here in two services per night reached thousands of people (2/3 youth and 1/3 adults) seated on hard metal chairs in the Cowley County Tiger Gymnasium who came back night after night because of the realism in the testimonies about life as it used to be, and how life is different now because of Christ. These realistic life testimonies were shared in a straightforward manner by volunteer performers who also shared feats of skate boarding, roller blading, special dances and high drama. The short pithy "sermons" hit the point from the beginning to the end and did it quickly. The message from one service which called many scores of people forward was this:

- 1. If you go with sin, it always take you farther than you ever planned to go;**
- 2. Sin always keeps you longer than you intended to stay;**
- 3. Sin always costs you more than you can ever pay', and**
- 4. Sin's harvest is always more than you have sown.**

(Galatians 6:7,8)

A realistic church concerns itself with people and their needs. Over and over again the first century church manual called "The New Testament" tells us God is like a shepherd loving and seeking His lambs wherever they are. Accepting them as they are and living with and loving them until their wounds are bound up and they can follow The Great Shepherd of the Sheep--Jesus.

Peter was a *realist*, a person concerned with real things and practical matters.

He said some great things "*Thou art the Christ*" Matthew 16:16; "*Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water.*" Matthew 14:28;

He said and did some wrong things: "*Peter took (Jesus) aside and began to rebuke him. 'Never Lord! This shall not happen to you!'*" Matthew 16:22; "*Peter said to Jesus 'Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters-- one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.'*" Matthew 17:4 and "*Peter replied, 'Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.'*" Matthew 26:33

Peter was a realist as he faced the vicissitudes of life. He often failed but was a real man in that he knew how to get back up and go on. Such as was the case when he denied Christ three times at the Judgment of Jesus; yet, the record says "*And he went outside and wept bitterly.*" Matthew 26:75 And the Record reveals he went on living and serving for the best was yet to be--John 21;15; Luke 24:9-12; I Corinthians 15:3-5; Acts 1:13,14; Acts 2:14-47.

A realist knows they are not 100% perfect even as Peter asserted: "*When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees, 'Go away from me Lord; I am a sinful man!'*" Luke 5:8 But, a *realist* faces their sins and failures, makes no attempt to cover up by subterfuges--rationalization, self-justification; he repents, learns from the mistakes

and presses on as Peter said: "*Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,*" I Peter 2:1,2 (NIV)

Perfectionism is the next enemy

A facet of *idealism* is *perfectionism* which is a very strange enemy to maturity. It hooks onto "*idealism*" and pushes us on to what seems like a noble goal. Scriptures readily springs into our minds and we are off and running. Doesn't the Word say?, "Be **perfect**, therefore, as your heavenly Father is **perfect**." Matthew 5:48 NIV The answer is, **No! the Word does not say "100% perfect."** "**Perfect**" is an inadequate word to translate the Greek word "teleois." The Greek is very clear---and it may be translated *complete, fully grown, mature*, so it reads "Be (*complete / fully grown / mature*), as your heavenly Father is (*complete / fully grown*)."

Our English understanding of the word "perfect - perfection" makes the total difference, so I made a survey of a number of Bible students as to what was the first word, or thought which comes to mind when they hear the word "perfect or perfection". 75% of those responding believed *perfection* equals "one hundred percent, flawless, sinless, without fault."

A minister of the First Methodist Church of Wichita, Kansas made a very keen observation about perfectionism.

"I need to focus on what God wants for my life. In a book, Entertaining Angels, the author says 'whether it be for riches or thinness, for fitness or knowledge or people and pleasure one by one.

This idea of *one hundred percent perfection* in this life becomes an addiction like cocaine. That my friends is what society's idea of *perfection* can do to us. It can cut us off from people and God and begin to cut us off from our true selves.' Jesus does not want us to live this kind of life." Sunday, August 13, 2000,

One of the marks of *perfectionism* is our focus on the doctrinal error of others with no attention given to our own need for correction - growth. (Luke 6:41,42) The following story illustrates this problem:

A serviceman wrote about a bit of unintended comedy during a company inspection at the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama, the U.S. Army's guided missile school.

The inspection was being conducted by a full colonel. Everything had gone smoothly, until the officer came to the man standing just next to the soldier who recalled the incident.

The colonel stopped, looked the man up and down and snapped, "Button that pocket, trooper!"

The soldier, more than a little rattled, stammered, "Right now, sir? "Of course, right now" was the reply.

Whereupon the soldier very carefully reached out and buttoned the flap on the Colonel's shirt pocket.

For some reason peculiar to our human nature, it is always easier to see the unbuttoned pockets of others than it is to see our own. Splinters in other people's eyes seem to be more obvious than planks in our own eyes. (Matthew 7:3)

Perfectionism begins to confess superiority toward others as this type of person begins to believe and teach that their way of thinking is superior to other folks. Just so, I began to believe and teach people about a *perfect church on earth, perfect marriages, perfect*

homes, a perfect life, perfect worship, perfect people, perfect qualifications for church leaders. There were plenty of proof texts and I used them profusely.

A facet of *idealism* is *perfectionism*. **Judas** was adept as are all *perfectionists* in covering up their deficiency with religion, even specific doctrine.

We see this clearly illustrated in Judas's life at least three times -- the Washing of Jesus' feet, the Last Supper and the Kiss of Betrayal.

Washing of Jesus Feet

"Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "[It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

John 12:3-8

The Scripture says Judas was a thief, and a particular kind of thief--an embezzler. (John 12:6) My study of embezzlers gives insight about the *perfectionism* of Judas. There are five general characteristics of embezzlers:

1. Embezzlers intend to replace the stolen funds.

The probable reason Judas conspired to sell Jesus for thirty pieces of

silver was to return some of the funds he had removed from the money bag so as to salve his conscience and have funds for the Passover feast.

2. Embezzlers are always fearful of being caught.

As treasurer for the disciples Judas would need extra funds to procure a lamb, unleavened bread, bitter herbs, wine and a gift to the poor. (See John 13:29)

3. Embezzlers often spend their embezzled funds on others.

Rationalization and self justification are characteristics of perfectionists-embezzlers. It is a type of Robin Hood philosophy--take from the rich and give to the poor--and the rationale is that makes it right.

4. Embezzlers are most often religious. A survey a few years ago revealed 88% of embezzlers in the U.S.A. are church members. Judas of course was one of Jesus twelve disciples,

5. Embezzlers are often suicidal. Caught and seeing there is no way out they often take their own life rather than face up to the reality of guilt and shame. So, Judas committed suicide. (Matthew 27:5) And, *perfectionist* often commit some kind of suicide --spiritual, *moral*, *physical*, etc.

THE LAST SUPPER

Perfectionists often have a twinge of conscience, especially in the interest of seeking to know if anyone has found them out.

"So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover. When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve. Now as they were eating, He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to

say to Him, "Lord, is it I?" He answered and said, "He who dipped his hand with Me in the dish will betray Me. "The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, "Rabbi, is it I?" Matt 26:19-30

At the Last Supper "Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.' Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. "What you are about to do, do quickly," Jesus told him, but no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night. John 13:26-30 (NIV)

THE KISS OF BETRAYAL

After an exhaustive study of Judas many years ago, I concluded that Judas was a *perfectionist* and *rationalized* he could *have his cake and eat it too*.

He heard Jesus preach that He would be King of Israel (John 1:49; John 12:13), and concluded that by kissing Him, Jesus would declare Himself King, wipe out the mob and arresting officers, take over Israel-- all would be well, and Judas could keep the 30 pieces of silver.

"While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked

him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" Luke 22:47,48

It has been said "the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry" and this is most often true with a perfectionist and so with Judas.

"When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself." Matthew 27:3-5 (NIV)

Please know the Bible teaches us much about the above matters, but not in the interest of "one hundred percent perfection." **The purpose of God's word and His Holy Spirit within us is to produce mature disciples, so as we follow Jesus we can lead others to know Him. (James 1:4) JESUS is the only perfect one and came into this world to save us out of and from our imperfection.**

The Mystery of Maturity

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us," Ephesians 3:20 (NIV)

To suggest spiritual maturity is attained by works and self effort is a contradiction. We do not reach spiritual maturity by striving anymore than we increase our physical stature by hanging up side down so our legs will grow longer. We increase in *spiritual*

maturity by recognizing that Jesus by His blessed Holy Spirit --"**according to his power ... is at work within us.**" Galatians 3:20

All the growth in my life which can be called *maturity* came when I gave up the subterfuges of *idealism and perfectionism*, quit striving and cast myself upon the Lord and His blessed Holy Spirit.

Here is a simple story out of the Dirty Thirties which taught and continues to underscore for me a most important lesson about life.

It started out a normal sunny Sunday in June. We milked the cows, ate breakfast and prepared chickens for dinner, then we ate at high noon which was our custom. It was about 1 o'clock when dark clouds appeared in the southwest creating an intense darkness. Mother said, "There's a storm coming and we need to do some things:

1. Get the chickens in." This proved to be a herculean task for besides the 200 baby chicks in a pen, we had six or seven hens with broods of baby chicks roaming freely. The hens and chicks usually found their way to the chicken house when darkness came on gradually as the sun set.

But, when darkness came on suddenly the hens simply squatted down where they were, called their chicks in under their body and wings and were ready to sleep. Mother said: "We can't leave them where they are for they will suffocate from the blowing dirt." So, we gathered them up in bushel peach baskets and basket by basket carried hen and chicks to the chicken house. I asked mother, "Aren't we going to church and Sunday School this afternoon?"

Mother said: "No. We must get in out of the storm.

2. Close the garage door, get in the house quickly."
3. Now, close the doors and windows,

4. and PRAY!

The raging dust storm struck suddenly with fury creating intense darkness. Our time was consumed with hanging wet towels, gunny sacks and blankets over the windows to catch some of the blowing dust and praying. The storm continued to blow and the dust made it hard to breathe, but by midnight it blew itself out and we milked the cows, ate the latest supper we had ever eaten, then, after shaking the dust out of our bed sheets and pillows we slept in peace.

The storm left an indelible lesson etched on my soul which can be stated in one sentence. "When inadequacy appears within me I am reminded to look to the Lord -- **submit and pray**, for beneath the wings of the storms, God rides." **And in a nutshell that is the *food* maturity feeds on.**

"But he gives us more grace". That is why Scripture says: 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." James 4:6-10 (NIV)

CONCLUSION

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made (*mature*) but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining

toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are *mature* should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you."
Philippians 3:10-15

"Perfect People"

If God could only use perfect people
He never could use anyone at all.
If God could only choose perfect people
No one would ever hear His call.
So don't give up! Don't look back!
Though you stumble and so quickly fall.
For if God could only use Perfect People
He never would have anyone at all.

If we could somehow be Perfect People
Jesus would never had to die
If somehow we could be Perfect People
His whole life on earth was just a lie.
Yet, He died and bore our sin
For a price His blood alone could buy.
If we could ever be perfect people
Jesus would never had to die.

All our strength we need to spend
On doing His will

Though we try and sometimes fail
We are His children still
He loves us still.

MY PRAYER FOR YOU

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you (*mature*) in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." Hebrews 13:20-21 (KJV)

Notes

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

by Chuck Thomas - Tulsa, Oklahoma

Chapter 1 - "JESUS CALLS US TO MATURITY, NOT PERFECTION"

- 1. In Hebrews 6:1-2 what is the apostle Paul's advise to the Hebrews?**
- 2. How many foundation-principles did the apostle Paul mention?**
- 3. Name the foundation-principles.**
- 4. What is the dictionary definition of idealism?**
- 5. What is the dictionary definition of realism?**
- 6. What is perfectionism?**
- 7. What is realism?**
- 8. With what does a realistic church concern itself?**
- 9. How may the Greek word "perfect" be defined?**
- 10. What is one of the marks of perfectionism?**

11. What kind of a thief does the Scripture say Judas was?

12. List the five (5) general characteristics of embezzlers.

13. What is the purpose of God's word and His Holy Spirit within us?

14. To suggest spiritual maturity is attained by works and self effort is what?

15. In Philippians 3:10-15 the apostle Paul says he wants to "know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, become like him in His death." What did Paul hope to attain?