

The attributes of a Disciple - 3- Christian Maturity.

Introduction

Read Colossians 1: 28 - 29

Today we continue in our series on the “Attributes of a Disciple”.

Previously we have learned from the scriptures that a Christian is:

- **A Disciple of Jesus.**
- **A follower of Jesus.**
- **A Learner of Jesus**
- **A disciple of Jesus is someone who obeys Jesus teaching**
- **Someone who loves other disciples and everyone with the same grace afforded to them by Christ.**
- **Someone who bears fruit.**
- **Someone who denies themselves for Christ.**

Last time we learned that a disciple is someone who seeks to become more like Christ, Christ-likeness. Today, we develop this a bit further by looking at another attribute of a disciple - maturity.

I don't know how many of you like cheese - I love cheese and when we are at Casa Harului in Romania, the Christian Holiday Centre that we serve on - I am the “Cheese-on-toast-chef!” After all the work is done, the children are in their beds, hopefully sleeping, I with the help of some others run a little “Cheese on toast Cafe” It's great, we start with around 10 covers and by the end of the week, the word has spread and were doing up to 50 covers!!

As you know there are many types of cheeses, and for some cheeses they taste better when they are “matured”, they are left for longer periods of time, and as they are matured the taste develops, gets stronger and, for some - a better taste.

**Cheddar - Brie -
Stilton**

Same with meat. Simon Howie, the Perthshire award winning butcher has made his name, and his money because he started to “mature” the beef. Hanging it for 20 days, or for however long and it “matures”, it tastes better and is much more tender.

In the short passage we are studying today we see that it is God's will and plan for every born-again believer, every disciple of Jesus - to grow and mature:

- **Not just to start coming to church.**
- **Not just to coming to know Christ, being baptised.**
- **Not just to come to Church to spectate.**

BUT TO "PRESENT EVERYONE MATURE IN CHRIST"

There is much to give thanks for in the growth of the Christian church globally, huge exponential growth in China, Asia and South America. There are now more Christian believers who now worship God every Sunday in China than all the churches of Western Europe put together!! Who would have thought, and yes we praise and honour God. Jesus says in Matthew 16: 18,

"I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

However, what Jesus meant was - not just numerically, but in spiritual maturity.

The Christian leaders in these countries though are not triumphalistic, far from it, because what they are concerned for is that there is numerical growth, but often without depth! Mrs Cao Shengjie in 2006, at that time President of the China Council said "some say the church is doing well when there is growth in numbers, and yes, we want to see people added to the church every day. But not only looking for the increase in numbers, but for the increase in numbers to go in parallel with the confirmation of the faith of the church."

This shows that "growth without depth" or statistical growth with no corresponding discipleship is not a judgement inspired by the rest of the world; it is the view of the Christian leaders themselves including the late theologian John Stott.

More than that this situation is displeasing to God - How do you know that Gary?

Well we dare to say this because the apostle whose letters we find in the New Testament rebuke their leaders for their IMMATURITY AND URGE THEM TO GROW UP! Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3: 1 - 3.

“Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but worldly - mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?”

And in today's passage Colossians 1: 28 - 29 Paul says

“We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.”

So from the passage 3 things to reflect on:

1. **“To be presented perfect/mature in Christ.”**

What is Christian maturity? Well most of us from time to time suffer from lingering immaturities. Even in the grown adult, the little child is still hiding somewhere, and we can and should approach maturity as a whole person.

- **Physical - develop, health and fitness.**
- **Intellectual - a trained mind, in the Christian sense, by developing a biblical mind-set (Romans 12: 1 - 2)**
- **Moral - trained to distinguish between good and evil.**
- **Emotional - leaving childlike behaviours behind, a balanced personality, able to establish and maintain healthy relationships.**

But spiritual maturity, Christian maturity. What is that? The apostle Paul calls it “maturity in Christ” that is having a mature relationship with Christ. So then, to be “in Christ” is to be personally, vitally, related to Him:

- **To worship Him.**
- **To trust Him.**
- **To obey Him.**
- **To love Him.**

So how do Christians become mature?

If Christian maturity is maturity in our relationship to Christ, then it is so important that we have a clear vision of who Christ is.

The truth is though that there are many Jesus' on offer in the world's religious supermarkets, and many of them are false Christ's, distorted Christ caricatures of the authentic Jesus.

- **Jesus the capitalist** - reference the recent legacy of the late Margaret Thatcher.
- **Jesus the socialist** - reference the use by Tony Blair in “New Labour”.
- **Jesus the clown of Godspell.**
- **Jesus Christ “Superstar”**
- **The comical Jesus in Life of Brian.**
- **The Last Temptation of Christ**
- **The sentimental part of the baby Jesus in the manger.**

But these are all defective!

For true Christian maturity, we need above all a fresh and true vision of Jesus - as we read at the start of service, is this our image of Jesus? Colossians 1: 15 - 20

- **Lord of creation** - “For by Him all things were created...He is before all things and in Him all things hold together.”
- **Lord of the church**- “And he is the head of the body, the church” The supremacy of Christ in all things, including the church.
- **The redeeming Lord** - “and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on the earth, or things or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.... Once you were alienated from God....But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death, **TO PRESENT YOU HOLY IN HIS SIGHT”**

Wow, what a vision!!! Is this the vision you have of Jesus? That is who Christ is, that is what he has done for us - I say, God’s word says, away with our Jesus clowns and pop stars. Away too with our political messiahs.

Where shall we find the authentic Jesus - in the Holy Bible, the word of God, the Bible is full of Christ - from the first chapters to the last words! Ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ himself.

If only we could see Jesus in the fullness of who He is and what He has done for us. Why then surely we would see how worthy he is of our **WHOLEHEARTED ALLEGIANCE - TRUST, FAITH, OBEDIENCE, and WORSHIP would be drawn out of us, and we would grow into maturity. God will enable us, by us being a people that,**

“Delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night.”

Psalm 1: 1.

- **And by the power of His Holy Spirit enable us to “mature”.**

That maturity comes from growth in the knowledge of God and conformity to the likeness of Christ, from the point of conversion, being “born again” by the spirit of God, until we die. The fancy theological word for this is sanctification, what is this?

Sanctification is a progressive work of God and man that MAKES US MORE FREE FROM SIN, AND MORE LIKE CHRIST IN OUR ACTUAL LIVES. The ordinary cause of Christian life will involve continual growth - and the New Testament encourages us to give effort and attention to this vital area!

You see, we cannot read the words of Paul today “present everyone mature in Christ” and not try and understand its application to our lives today, So just briefly, sanctification happens in three stages.

- 1) **A definite beginning: Straight after conversion, after coming to know Christ through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit and being “born-again”.**

“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

- 2) **The process of growth in Christ then continues throughout life.**

Throughout the Christian life, “we are all being changed into his likeness” 2 Corinthians 3: 18.

“Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever increasing, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.”

Romans 6: 19.

“Forgetting what is behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. I press on towards the goal for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3: 13 - 14.

- 3) **When we die: “To present you holy in his sight”**

Much of the New Testament is taken up with instructing believers in various churches on how they should grow in likeness to Christ. All of the moral exhortations and commands in the NT epistles apply here, because they all challenge believers to one aspect of greater sanctification in their lives. It is the expectation of all the

NT authors that our growth in likeness to Christ WILL INCREASE THROUGHOUT OUR CHRISTIAN LIVES.

So the question God challenges us with today is how are we, how am I, how are you PROGRESSING in our Christian lives?

In Philippians 1: 21 - 24 Pauls says:

“Convinced of this I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your PROGRESS AND JOY IN THE FAITH.”

Your “progress in the faith”, there is no doubt from the New Testament scriptures that we should be growing towards maturity. How are you doing?

In Ephesians 4; 13 - 16 Paul says,

“To prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, GROWS AND BUILDS ITSELF UP IN LOVE, as each part does its work.”

2) So who was Paul talking about?

“To be presented mature in Christ” Who? “that we may present EVERYONE mature in Christ.”

You see the context of Paul’s letter to the Colossians was that he was combating false teachers in the Colossian church. They believed that spiritual perfection was a secret hidden plan and that only a few privileged people could discover it. This was called “Gnosticism”, but Paul says know (please look at Colossians 1: 26 - 28).

God’s purposes were not just restricted to the Jews, but were to embrace the entire world. God is revealed in Jesus Christ as the Lord of the whole world.

To whom is Paul and God's message directed: **TO EVERYONE**, there should not be an elite, nor should there be passengers or spectators. In Philippians 1: 6 Paul says,

“Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it onto completion, until the day of Jesus.”

Do you believe this, do you believe in a God, who, that if he has started a work in you will carry it onto completion?

As you have come here today, are you aware that wherever you are in your walk with Jesus, God wants you to **progress**, and from the passage today we see that it is God's will and plan for every Christian to progress and grow into maturity.

3.) Thirdly, it is the role of Christian leaders to ensure that this happens; it has to be one of their priorities.

Paul says:

“To this end I LABOUR, STRUGGLING WITH ALL HIS ENERGY WHICH SO POWERFULLY WORKS IN ME.”

Colossians 1: 29

The popular view of Paul is that of an evangelist, a church planter, set up a church and move on. But this is only one aspect of Paul, he was also a Pastor, a Teacher AND HIS GREAT LONGING IS TO GO BEYOND EVANGELISM TO **DISCIPLESHIP**, TO ENSURE THAT CHRISTIANS ARE PROGRESSING IN THEIR FAITH - THEY ARE CONTINUALLY NURTURING THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS AND SELF-CONTROL.

To this end I “labour”, the word here comes from a farm labourer, uncompromising hard work, like in the hot fields.

“struggling with all his energy” the word “struggling” here whose root can mean “to compete in the games” carries, as often in Paul the idea of an athletic contest. **PAUL DOES NOT GO ABOUT HIS WORK HALF-HEARTED, HOPING VAGUELY THAT GRACE WILL FILL IN THE GAPS, WHICH HE IS TOO LAZY TO WORK AT HIMSELF!!**

He doesn't imagine that it is all up to him, to burn out, he knows that it is God's desire to bring Christians to maturity, but what he seeks God's empowerment for is that He has been called as a Christian leader to have a share in that work.

I believe that what God is teaching us through this series and in particular today, is that if this was a particular goal that Paul was aiming at, something that Paul spent energy on - SO SHOULD WE!! As leaders in the church, as individual members of the congregation, "TO THIS END I LABOUR AND STRUGGLE"

So in summary:

- **Maturity in Christ is the goal!**
- **Maturity in Christ is the goal - is what every Christian member should be aiming for!**
- **The question for us today is "What are we aiming at?"**
- **What has coming to this church become for you?**
- **Is God saying to you "Time to stop going through the religious motions" "Time to stop just paying me lip-service"**
- **What are your goals for spiritual growth? Might they be?**
- **I want to be more like Christ. I want to develop the Fruit of the Spirit in my life?**
- **I need to develop a truer, bigger, biblical, awesome vision of Jesus.**
- **I want to find out how to serve God?**
- **I want two of my friends at work to come to know Christ, and I am going to focus my time and priorities on that.**
- **I am going to ask my Pastor, my church leaders, my house group leader to enable me to develop a deeper knowledge of the scriptures, leading to a deeper commitment to Jesus?**

If we have learned anything today, it is that God does not will for us to stand still.

God does will for us to become stale, not to be constantly struggling spiritually, not just to fill a seat in a pew on a Sunday morning and not to give another thought for the other seven days.

"A sign of maturity is a desire to mature"

There is no other higher goal either for leaders to pursue this goal with the whole church and I conclude with what I said earlier as to what should be our wider vision within the church,

"To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4: 13 - 14.

For his sake and for his glory I pray.

Amen.

Gary Torbet

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