



The Mature Christian

Sermons Presented By Stephen McIntyre
Posted online by A New You Ministry
www.anym.org

An old poem tells of a cat going to London to visit the famed Buckingham Palace. When the cat leaves the island to return home, he never tells his friends about the changing of the guard in all of its glamour and ritual. He doesn't mention the tapestried walls of the palace, the jeweled crown of the Queen, the rare and prized works of art, nor does he comment about the Queen with whom he visited. The only thing the cat can remember is the well-fed mouse under the Queen's chair. The point of this rather whimsical poem is simply this: What one is, generally determines what one sees. Is this not true? The vulture flying over a field of fragrant roses never sees the roses, but spots immediately the carcass of a dead animal. The man who says that there isn't an honest man in the world usually has a character problem himself. If Hitler and Schweitzer could both look at the same world, one would see a chance to exploit gullible peasants while the other would see an opportunity for benevolent service. The mature Christian, because of what he is, sees the world as no other person sees it. When a mature Christian looks at life, his vision is colored by his relationship to his Lord and his fellowman. This, of course, is the type that you and I want to be. We understand that we cannot view the experiences of life as the common, average, unredeemed man. We know that being a mature Christian demands more than an easy approach to life. The epitome of Christian maturity is found in the life of the great Apostle Paul. Taking him as an example, let us find out what a mature Christian sees when he looks at life.

A MATURE CHRISTIAN SEES THE VALUE OF JOYFUL FRIENDSHIPS

Paul is grateful for his unusually fine friends in Philippi. He says, **"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;"** (Phil. 1:3-5). This great Christian loves the people at Philippi for they have been an incalculable joy to his life and ministry. Paul is grateful that he is able to remember them in all of their graciousness. He underlines this matter of joyful prayer by using repetition-"Always in every prayer. . ." Paul never passes a chance to thank God for these valuable friends that have meant so very much to his ministry. This word "fellowship" means a strong union among people whereby they share the most intimate affairs of life. Paul is enjoying this close union with people who share in Christ's ministry and love his work. They have a common bond in Jesus Christ. They are a help to him as he defends and expounds the message of Christ. They offer him both financial help and encouragement. This relationship has given him unprecedented confidence in their salvation and future in Christ's service. Paul had eaten the bitter weeds of Galatia and had drunk from the contaminated cup at Corinth; it had been a heartbreak and disappointment for him. With several other churches there had been everything but a joyful experience. Here though, the friendship of these people is of mammoth value to Paul's own well-being, his peace of mind, and his ability to endure conflicts. Paul is so impressed with this friendship that he uses the word "joy" thirteen times in this one letter. Paul had spent seemingly endless hours in prayer with grief and tears for others, but never the church at Philippi. For them he prayed with joy for there was nothing in their relationship to alter the sweet emotions of praise. These people are in his heart - whether he is in prison or in the fellowship of some home. For a thought of the Philippians became the impetus for more effective and confident service. As in the day of Paul and the Philippians, our day is prominent with those who oppose the Gospel and the truth of God's word. Some take every opportunity to chisel away at the foundation upon which rests our most precious beliefs. We could run the gamut of opposition from agnosticism to belligerent communism, and find in every nook a lurking lion ready to tear effective members from the body of Christ. Within our own neighborhood, outspoken infidels and heretics of our faith storm with a hail of vicious verbiage. To meet such a formidable enemy, we must be willing to love, share, sacrifice, forgive, endure, and labor for a joyful relationship with one another. There is not time for small talk, immature bickerings, childish waverings, and infant frettings. The mature Christian, as the Apostle, must not look at his fellow-laborers with envy or jealousy. He must make them the recipients of all the love and joy he can possibly share. We, therefore, must encourage, strengthen, help, and support the work of those who share our faith. The Christianity which loves, lives. The church with the nailed doors and windows, and tall grass in the yard almost covering the "For Sale" sign seldom blesses a soul. In fact, it has been sold out long before the sign went up. But this will never happen if we see the deep value of joyful and happy fellowship as did Paul. Such fellowship and friendship can help save a man, save a church, or a denomination. So, let us be as Paul and do all we can to further joyful friendships through a mature look at our task. Others will think more of us, and our Lord's work will prosper.

During a British occupation of China some years ago, a lieutenant was sent to guard a very touchy situation. His commanding officer told him to be at his best and to resist all temptations to start a conflict,

for a small uprising might destroy a lot of progress. As the British marine was about to leave, the commanding officer said to him, "Remember soldier, the reputation of your king is at stake." When the marine arrived and was placed on duty, he was harassed, ridiculed, and cursed by the Chinese people. One young Chinese spat in his face. At this, the British marine lifted his rifle from the ground; the muscles in his face tightening. But as he was about to smash the face of that insolent man, he thought of the words of his commanding officer, "Remember, soldier, the reputation of your king is at stake." So he stood erect and took pride in his service. When we are tempted to take matters into our own hands and cause discord, let us remember that the reputation of OUR KING is at stake. Then we shall stand straight, and as a mature Christian we shall see the tremendous values of joyful relationships. No, it isn't easy, but neither were the words, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

A MATURE CHRISTIAN SEES BLESSINGS IN BURDENS

"But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel;" (Phil. 1:12). The word "furtherance" is from a Greek word used for putting away the underbrush and trees and removing any obstacles which would hinder the progress of an army. It is the word used for demolishing all that stands in the way of advance. Instead of Paul's imprisonment closing doors, it allowed him to penetrate places that ordinarily would have been closed to him. **"So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in other places"** (Phil. 1:13). The word "palace" can mean, and probably does here, "any group of people." It refers to the Praetorian Guard; the select Imperial Guard of Rome. Started under Augustus, this was a special group of ten thousand. In any event, Paul was chained (his word "bond" or "halusis" carries this meaning of being chained) to one of these men continually. Probably six different guards daily were bound to him by a handcuff around respective wrists. What an opportunity for such a man! Paul used this association to tell of Christ to the finest regiment in the Roman army. He also mentions "other places," but doesn't elaborate. William Barclay comments: No wonder Paul declared that his imprisonment had actually been for the furtherance of the gospel. All the Praetorian Guard knew why Paul was in prison; many of them were touched for Christ; and the very sight of all this gave to the brethren at Philippi fresh courage to preach the gospel and to witness for Christ. While in prison Paul was also able to be an example of Christian character. Some were preaching Christ out of jealousy of Paul, some doing it for money, and others for other improper motives. Paul, in true Christian maturity, did not let this bother him. "At least Christ was being preached," he said. He was too big to be little. In our language Paul would say, "the burden of imprisonment became a blessing." But that interpretation depends upon the one to whom the burden is given. A lesser man might as easily have said, "This whole affair is a rank injustice. I'll sit here in the corner and curse the earth upon which all of those wretched guards walk." But the mature Christian saw the guard not as an officer of penal justice, but as a candidate for conversion. How about us? Can we find blessings in burdens, triumphs in our defeats, and victories in our apparent losses? It depends on our relationship to God as it did in Paul's case. The Christian has more reason to see the calm in the storms of life than any other person. His burden should make him better, not bitter. The

Christian in every circumstance of life, be it joyous or sad, must see opportunities to bring blessings to his Lord. How about that time you were in the hospital? Did you speak to that lost nurse about Christ? Or maybe the Candy Striper-did you ask if she was dedicated to living for Christ? How about the fellow that ran the stop sign and dented your fender-did you find out where he went to church? Your burdens may be an everlasting blessing to someone if you let them; just as there were guards in Rome for whom Paul's burden was the greatest blessing they had ever experienced. **SOME WENT HOME DIFFERENT MEN TO WALK A DIFFERENT ROAD BECAUSE ONE MAN HAD A BURDEN.** When Fanny Crosby became a young lady, someone told her that her blindness was due to an accident of a careless doctor at her birth. Stunned for only a moment, she confidently replied, "*It may have been an accident with the doctor, but it was no accident with God.*" She then told how her blindness had enabled her to see deeper than those with sight. She told of those who came to hear her speak of Jesus who wouldn't have come had she had vision. There were also those blind people who were able to see their way to the cross because of the testimony of Fanny Crosby. The world might never had the blessing of the verse: "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! Oh, what a foretaste o glory divine!" had Fanny Crosby not had the burden of blindness. Take another look at your burden.

A MATURE CHRISTIAN SEES THAT LIFE IS WORTH LIVING FOR CHRIST

"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain," says Paul (Phil. 1:21). As Paul is looking seriously at life and the possibility of death, he sees that life is only worthy of his time if it can be used for Christ. For Paul, Christ is everything. Before the Damascus road experience Saul was a walking dead man. Life was tasteless and mean. Since then he has been a new person. Life started for him that day for the first time. To Paul, Christ is the source of life and the only source. He is the motive behind life and the goal to which life must lead. Christ, for Paul, is the beginning, the interim, and the end. All that Paul has he gives to Christ for Christ is all there is to Paul. Barclay is right when he says, "If Christ were to be taken out of life, for Paul there would be nothing left in life. To him Christ was nothing less than life itself." Paul, however, says that he is in a strait between two desires. The word for strait is the word one might use in describing a traveler in a narrow pass with a steep wall of rock on either side. Unable to turn to one side or the other he must continue straight ahead. For his own pleasure Paul desires to die and go on to be with Christ. Yet, he sees the need for his work among the saints at Philippi and elsewhere. He realizes that the decision is in God's hands, not his. "If life is worth living it has to be lived for Christ or I don't want any part of it," Paul is saying. He believes that he will "continue and abide" with them. The word "continue" carries a sense of tender watching and eager wanting to assist and help. Paul doesn't want to live for life itself; he wants to live only if the living gives him opportunity to serve his Lord. So, when the Philippians see Paul coming, they will know he is coming out of a sense of purpose and mission. What is the most important thing in the world to you? What, in your opinion, makes life worth living? Is it the Lodge? Is it your civic and social entanglements? Is it your occupation? Is it that group of close knit friends? All of these are fine and good, but they must be subordinated to your commitment to Christ. What do people think of when they hear your name? Is it "what a fine Mason he is?" Is it "what a loyal Rotarian?" Is it "what a nice fellow?" It would be better to learn that their first thought is, "What a Christian he is!" We can be these other things also, but let us be known foremost for our relationship with Christ. All else would be in vain and life would be useless if it weren't for our relationship with Christ. Only

through Him do we find reason enough to continue on earth. We were saved for a purpose and outside that purpose we lose our claim to life. We give all to him, for he is all to us. Could we not say with the Psalmist: **"Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord; neither are there any works like unto thy works. Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name. I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name forevermore"**. What you are determines what you see. When you, Christian, look at the world, do you see the need for joyful friendships and cordial relations? Do you see that there can be blessings in burdens and opportunities for Christ within the conflicts of life? Do you see that life is all in vain if you do not use it as a time of service to Christ? Some of these questions you may not be able to cope with at the present. Could there be something in your life making you blind to certain areas where a Christian should see clearly? What robs you of your spiritual maturity? Paul, a truly mature Christian, saw these things in life-do you? If not, there may be a need for a closer walk and a deeper commitment to your Lord. Maybe your vision has been hampered by recent doubts, wanderings, or infidelities. When you look at life, what do you see? Remember, you can change what you see by letting your living Saviour change you!