



## *The Maturity Test*

Each year countless students around the world press on to learn more. Inevitably, in the learning process they have to be tested to see if they are “**getting it**” whatever “**it**” is. More often than not “**it**” is usually something that can be tested objectively. In other words, does the student know how to compute this kind of math problem, does she know how to write with correct grammar, does she know the scientific facts, can she perform this skill correctly, etc. For most things, by testing it can be objectively determined if the student has moved forward in their knowledge or skill level.

However in most learning situations, there is also the hope that the student will mature during the learning process so that she can use her knowledge. A synonym for the word “**mature**” is the word “**ripe**”. I like to think of our faith maturity that way. When something is ripe, it is ready to be used. When our faith is ripe, when our faith is mature, it is ready to be used. So how do we determine if our faith is ready to be used? Consider verses 15-16,

***“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. Only let us live up to what we have already attained”.***

Let’s take a look at these verses. First of all Paul is definitely saying that faith is a growing thing, there is a maturing process to our faith. Faith is not something you capture and put on the shelf just so you can know that you have it. True faith is alive, and anything that is alive is growing and changing. All over scripture there is the implication that faith grows. In verse 15 here, Paul implies that some people have faith that is mature and some have faith that is not mature, because he says,

***“All of us who are mature...”***

So how do you determine if you are a person who is mature in your faith? I want to talk about that today. As we discussed earlier, testing maturity is a subjective task. Measuring knowledge that relates to our faith is objective but measuring if you are ready to use that knowledge is subjective and therefore more difficult. Even still, I think it is important to give it some thought, to test our faith maturity. In these verses Paul really says three things that can be evaluation tools for testing our faith maturity. First he says,

### ***1. “All of us who are mature should take such a view of things”***

What view is he talking about? He is referring to the view about life in Christ that has been presented in verses 7-14. I believe he is saying, “*If you are mature in your faith, you will view life this way.*” So let’s look at this view and you can evaluate your own thinking and life to see if your view lines up:

- † The world and all it has to offer is trash compared to Christ
- † I can never be righteous on my own, only through Christ
- † I need to put time and effort into knowing Christ
- † I am willing to share in Christ’s sufferings
- † I believe that somehow through faith God is going to bring the “dead places” in me to life
- † I realize I haven’t arrived yet, but I know what my goal is
- † I am forgetting the things that are behind me
- † I am straining toward what is ahead
- † Christ died for me and called me heavenward so I will press on no matter what

So did your view line up? These are some serious viewpoints. If so it is a mark of maturity in your faith. Secondly Paul is saying,

### ***2. “...and if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.”***

I believe this is a real word for us as believers and a real test of maturity in our faith. It is a challenge for me. As Paul says this, I sense in him a love for people, a freedom in Christ and a humbling himself under the knowledge that the Holy Spirit is our teacher. Sometimes as Christians we get an understanding or knowledge about something and we then think it is our job to make sure that everyone else understands too. I once heard someone refer to this as having the "Holy Spirit Junior Syndrome". When we take on this role it can cause real issues.

Can you imagine the changes that Paul has made since he came to know Christ? He moved from being a legalistic violent Jew to a faith filled humble believer in Christ. Don't you just know that every time He came into a new understanding about something he would want to make sure that every believer around him knew it too? Now, there is nothing wrong with wanting to share what God has shown us and if you are a teacher, to teach it too. In fact God used this desire in Paul to write a big portion of the New Testament! But, the mark of maturity that I see in Paul here is that he realizes it is the Holy Spirit's job to impart understanding. He is free from that responsibility and has determined a different viewpoint isn't going to change how he treats people. He is free from all the junk that can come when two people or two groups view things differently. We all know what that junk can look like. In this passage, I sense that Paul has gotten to a place where even if someone thinks differently from him, he can still love those people, he can still talk to those people, and he can still fellowship with those people because he knows that God will make clear what needs to be made clear. He has realized that the Holy Spirit is the True Teacher. I believe that is a mark of maturity in our faith. How does your life line up with that kind of approach? It is challenging, I know! And now let's look at his last remark,

***"Only let us live up to what we have already attained."***

Because faith is alive and growing, our faith has been growing ever since it started. Just as a baby is born and begins to grow, so also our faith grows. Think about how much a baby grows in one year, it is amazing the changes that take place. My husband asked a group of believers one time if their maturity in their faith was in line with their age in their faith. Let me explain. Think how much that baby changes from day 1 of life to 15 years old. If you have been a Christian for 15 years, have you changed that much? When Paul says

***"Only let us live up to what we have already attained."***

I think this is what he is saying. He is marking maturity as a place of really living out your faith. If you have been a believer for 15 years, you ought to look like a 15 year old Christian, living out the years that you have had to grow in your faith. If you have attained faith about being honest, then live like it. If you have attained faith about forgiveness, then live like it. If you have attained faith about the love of God, then live like it. If you have attained faith about hope, then live like it. You get the picture. The question is, how are you testing for maturity? It is one thing to know it, another to live it!

You know, only you and the Lord know where your faith maturity is. All of us have known of people that we thought were mature in their faith and then they fell right before our eyes. They were not as mature as we thought. And... we have known those who appeared not as mature in their faith and then their maturity really shined at an unexpected moment. That is because it is not easy to measure maturity in faith. It is very subjective.

I just know that I want my faith to be ready to be used! For instance, I don't want to memorize this passage just to say I did it. I want to memorize this passage so that these words can take root in my soul and change me, change the way I think and change the way I live. So... I encourage you in this class of Faith Living 101... learn the verses so you can say them well, you know get a "good grade" on the objective part. But... make sure that they are taking effect in your heart, in your mind, and in the way you live each day. That is the maturity part and it is so important.

In closing there are two more things I want to share... first a verse in Hebrews 6:1 that I recently saw. Paul wrote this verse too. I think you will recognize His familiar verbiage,

*“Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity...”*

So press on to this maturity described in these verses and whatever other marks of maturity that God calls you toward. His plan for us is always good. Secondly I want to close with some remarks about maturity that I received from Caitlin Smith. Caitlin is one of our memorization leaders for this project and she is a freshman at the University of Richmond this year. She gave me permission to share this with you as I believe it displays the heart of a believer who is pressing on to maturity.

*“These verses are especially relevant to me, so thanks for choosing them, Sharon. I am one who easily loses focus on God and becomes obsessed with things of the world. Those things may not be inherently bad, but they are pulling my attention away from God and therefore having a negative effect on my life. These verses are showing me that these earthly things are a “loss”.*

*The verse I just started working on: ‘All of us who are mature should take such a view of things,’ hit me hard. I am constantly criticized by myself and others for not being “mature,” I feel I should be at 18, or at least getting there. I know this memorization project is causing a positive change in my actions as I am challenged to be more mature in Christ. This project comes at the perfect time, as I have just left the comforts of home and rules and have been thrust into an environment of absolute freedom. I can now do whatever I want whenever I want. Without my parents here, the only things controlling me are my personal convictions- and this project has been a great way for me to hold on to those and keep them in mind constantly; to spend time in the Word focusing on God and not on the world.”*

Way to go Caitlin! Let us all press on to maturity!  
Maturing with you...

*Sharon Thomas*

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