

1 John 2: 12-17 “Maturity”

Jamal talked to us last week about loving each other. “We can change the world, but first we must change ourselves.”

By loving each other, in the community of Christian brotherhood and sisterhood, we can then learn how to love those outside of that community. And that love will change the world, as we spread the love of Christ to all! And what a great world that would be!

He also talked about some of the shortcomings we have...sometimes it can be as simple as neglecting the new person. Other times, it can be more overt.

This week, I am going to continue on our series in 1st John with chapter 2 verses 12-17. And I want to focus on the idea of Maturity.

1st John 2: 12-14

I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of His name. I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

John is laying out here exactly who he is writing to. EVERYONE.
Fathers, or in other translations, “those who are mature in their faith.”
Young men, or “those who are young in the faith.”
Children, or “God’s children.”

The best part, is that John is being encouraging for all three! The children of God are being forgiven, and are coming to know the Father! The fathers are experiencing a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. The young men are conquering the evil that surrounds them and overcoming the challenges in their lives and their faith!

So, while this letter may have been written to a specific community to address specific concerns, as Jamal introduced last week. It is also a letter that is all encompassing! Let me explain why.

All of us, if we have a relationship with Christ, are leaders in some way. Our level of faith, while being entirely concrete and founded on God, is relative to others.

This is what I mean. I am a co-director for a college ministry at a fairly successful church. I am weekly living my life as an example for others. I am teaching others how to connect with God, how to display God with their lives, and how to avoid temptation. By all outward appearances, maybe even on paper, I am a father of faith. I could be considered “mature in my faith.”

But I would consider myself, in relation to others, a child of God who is growing in his faith. I look up to John Hershman, to Shane Schlesman, to Brian King and the other pastors on staff here at WEAG. I look up to writers like Francis Chan and speakers like Andy Stanley. I look up to my own father and mother, and some of my closest friends all as fathers of the faith. All as people who are mature in their faith, and far more mature than I am myself.

In the same way, you may not consider yourself mature in your faith. You may even hardly consider yourself young in your faith! Maybe you still view yourself as an infant, a child in your faith with nothing to give to someone else. But I have some news for you. You are all of the above.

We are all Children of God, constantly learning more about the revelations and mysteries of God. We are all young in our faith, discovering more about ourselves and our beliefs every day. We are all fathers of our faith in some way, to some one. We have all been given the responsibility to train ourselves, to implement discipline in our lives, and to teach others about Christ, through our words AND our actions.

It might help to define what we mean by mature.

The definition of "Mature" is:
Fully developed in body or mind, as a person.

But it is more than that! Maturity isn't just claiming to be developed, it isn't just saying I am of one mind, one body, with myself. Maturity is knowledge, growth, development in action! You prove your MATURITY by behaving MATURELY.

But how do we apply this to our Christianity?

I have already mentioned that all of us are children, young men, and fathers in our faith from different points of view. The problem is, we don't always take responsibility for that. Much of the time, we don't do our best to lead those who are looking to us closer to Christ.

We all know those people who have been Christians longer than we have. But somehow, even though they have grown up in the church, and been surrounded their entire life by great people and great teachings, they just don't seem to get it. They don't have a depth to their faith and understanding. Its like, they just never put in any effort to actually understand why it is that they come to church every week, or why they are supposed to live their life in a certain way. They are just going through the motions!

We look at "maturity" as something that comes with age. The older you get, the more mature you get. But that isn't true. I have personally experienced being around someone who is older than me, and honestly being a little embarrassed at how immature they were acting. And I think most of us can think of an experience similar to that.

It is the same thing with our Spiritual Maturity. Our Spiritual Maturity is not defined by our age, its not defined by how long we have been in the church, its not defined by how many Christians we hang out with, or even by how many facts we know about Christianity.

Our Spiritual Maturity comes from the Holy Spirit, and from learning how to live in reliance on God. Spiritual Maturity comes from allowing God to work in us and through us, to make us more like Christ.

So what is the difference between a Christian who is maturing, and one who stays stagnate?

And by the way, this idea of being stagnate is fluid! We all move from these great constant leaps in our maturity, to periods of complacency, like it has all just become too much and takes too much effort. And we stop trying to grow our Spiritual Maturity.

Let me tell you where I'm at.

I'm busy. I'm too busy! Literally every day of my week has been planned out for nearly a full month now. And any down time I find, I spend on homework for Greek or Theology, or my various other responsibilities and commitments. And between Seminary and Ministry, nearly my entire life is at the church. But here's my problem. I can do all the homework and planning that is required, but I'm not working on my heart. I've pushed aside the things that will develop my maturity, and replaced them with busy-work. The busy-work of life. I have allowed things ABOUT God to take the place OF God in my life. And that should never happen.

Hebrews 5:12-14

In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

I have stopped living on solid food, and picked back up my baby-bottle full of skim milk. The watered down version of life in Christ. I am spiritually immature, steadily losing my ability to distinguish right from wrong. And what is wrong, is letting anything take the place of God in my life. And yet, I have justified reading someone else's theology as a proper substitute for preparing my heart for life in Christ.

I am a teacher, and I must live on solid food.

We may not all be teachers, but we are all examples of Christ's power. Our proclamation that Christ lives within us is a higher standard. And to grow from spiritual infancy, to spiritual youth, to spiritual adulthood, we must train ourselves constantly so we may be able to distinguish good from evil.

Now the question may be, How do we mature? We know there are others who look to us as examples of Christ. We know we should train for solid food...but how? How do I get back to maturity?

2 Peter 1: 3-7

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to your goodness, knowledge; and to your knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

It is a process! We have to put forth effort to become mature Christians. It's not just going to happen overnight. There are things that we, ourselves, must work on and develop and put into action in our lives.

Faith: Relying on God and believing the Truth that is His Son.

Goodness: Treating others not as they deserve, but as God calls us to treat them.

Knowledge: Diving into the Word of God, allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal to us the lessons God has for us.

Self-control: Developing the ability to take control of our bodies, not falling into every physical temptation.

Perseverance: Never giving up on ourselves, or on God. Regardless of the struggle.

Godliness: Living the life of righteousness which we are called to, following the example set out before us by Christ.

Mutual Affection: Treating our brothers and sisters in Christ as we would like to be treated. The Golden Rule.

And it all comes back to love. What we love, and how we love.

1st John 2: 15-17

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world-- the cravings of the sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-- comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

The world gets in the way! The world distracts us! Our cravings for instant gratification. The things which catch our eye and pull us away from God. Our pride in the things we have, or the things we can do. These can take many forms! From sex and pornography, to wanting more because we can never have enough, to looking for ways we can be better than others. If we love the world, and the things of the world, then we distract ourselves from our Spirituality and will never reach Maturity.

But, if we love as our Father in Heaven loves, if we love each other, if we love Christ and we love goodness, and we strive to do His will, then we will reach maturity in our faith, and we will live with God forever.

To close us out, I want to read the end of 1 John chapter 2.

1st John 2: 28-29

And now, dear children, continue in Him, so that when He appears we may be confident and unashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of Him.

Let us all mature in our faith constantly, let us all love as God loves, let us all do what is right and prove that we have been born of Christ, our Lord and Saviour.