

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF DISCIPLESHIP
FROM COLOSSIANS
AND ITS APPLICATION
TO BECOMING SPIRITUALLY MATURE DISCIPLES

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ABSTRACT

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF DISCIPLESHIP FROM THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS AND ITS APPLICATION TO BECOMING SPIRITUALLY MATURE DISCIPLES

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This project elucidates the relationship between discipleship and spiritual maturity. This is accomplished through a study of twenty-two commands in Colossians, which are characteristics of spiritual maturity envisioned to become evident in the Colossian believers' lives. The reason for this expectation is the need for believers to be presented as spiritually mature before Christ at the believers' judgment.

The purpose of ministry is to equip believers to become spiritually mature. Discipleship is the component of spiritual transformation. It provides the propulsion that induces spiritual growth, which fosters spiritual maturity. The commands in Colossians reveal seven overarching traits of spiritual maturity. These seven traits are examined. Each of the twenty-two commands is studied and applied. Their relationship to discipleship is illuminated.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE REASONS FOR AND NATURE OF THIS PROJECT

This chapter orients the reader to the project. The rationale for this project is given along with discussion as to how the project fits into the ministry of discipleship. This chapter also sets forth the structure of this project providing a preview of the content along with a concise statement of the problem and the research question. This chapter will also consider theological and biblical issues and review some relevant resources.

Nature of Discipleship Ministry

Biblical discipleship is the act of one person intentionally impacting the life of some other person in the direction of Christlikeness. It is intentional in that discipleship is not simply someone learning about Christ. It is not accidental. Discipleship is not a function of the learning of the learner but of the teaching of the teacher. Someone must intend to do it.¹

Discipleship does not happen because a student is excited about or impressed by a teacher. Discipleship is impactful when it brings about a change in virtues, values, beliefs, and lifestyle. Discipleship is not covering material; neither is it being part of a group (a class, congregation, family, etc.). Discipleship is personal—one person dealing with another person. Discipleship is not just a mentee modeling a mentor. The modeling must be moving in the direction of Christlikeness.²

This definition of discipleship, along with its components, summarizes the

¹ Dr. David A. DeWitt, *Seven Principles of Biblical Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Relational Concepts, Inc.) www.relationalconcepts.org, n.d.

² Dr. David A. DeWitt, *Seven Principles of Biblical Discipleship*.

process of disciple making and focuses correctly upon the outcome, which is Christlike maturity.

Rationale for the Project

Determining the depth and breadth of a disciple's spiritual transformation toward Christlikeness and spiritual maturity can frequently seem elusive. Paul clearly articulated the purpose of his ministry as "admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete [mature] in Christ."³ It seems then, that the trajectory of discipleship is spiritual transformation and maturity. If so, then understanding the spiritual maturation process is essential for an effective discipleship ministry. This is significant because efforts to disciple people should be consistent with the purpose of the Apostle Paul's discipleship.

A significant concern of discipleship ministry, then, must be the spiritual maturation of one's disciples. Investing personal time and energy into a disciple's life is entirely for this purpose. But it may not be quite clear as to how this maturity is evidenced. What does spiritual maturity look like in a disciple's life? What role does a discipler play in the maturation process of his or her disciples? Are there ways to measure a disciple's spiritual maturity? These are concerns that this dissertation will address.

Statement of the Problem

Discipleship has generally been understood as a way of instilling biblical knowledge through teaching and mentoring. This is an essential component of discipleship, but just passing on knowledge through formal or informal means does not

³ Col. 1:28. All Scripture quotations are from the NASB version unless otherwise stated.

fulfill the purpose of Paul's discipleship ministry nor of the teaching about it in the New Testament. Instead, discipleship ministry is the avenue through which people learn, grow, and *mature*, in such a way that one can be confident of being presented *complete in Christ*.

Advancing maturity in believers encompasses the biblical scope of discipleship. Maturity is a process of full development, which is reached through continual growth. Spiritual maturity is also a process of full comprehensive development into the image of Jesus Christ, which is reached through continual growth.

This perspective brings the scope of discipleship further than just instilling biblical knowledge. The development of spiritually mature believers is also consistent with much of scripture that commands and expects God's people to grow up and mature as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Some of these passages include: "Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."⁴ "But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity."⁵ "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him is the glory, both now and to the day of eternity."⁶ Each of these verses sets the trajectory of Christian discipleship in the direction of spiritual maturity and transformation.

⁴ Eph. 4:13

⁵ Heb. 5:14-6:1

⁶ 2 Pet. 3:18.

Theological and Biblical Issues

Since discipleship involves making an impact upon one's actual spiritual transformation and maturity, a study of the theology of discipleship, found in Colossians, is essential to understanding and participating in such a ministry. To assist a discipler in understanding this process, studying Colossians is helpful for the following reasons.

First, in Colossians Paul indicated that the sine qua non of his discipleship ministry was to present every person mature in Christ.⁷ This is clearly the trajectory of his entire ministry. There are a number of specific aspects of spiritual maturity that Paul was striving to see exemplified in the Colossian believers' lives through discipleship. Examples of these aspects include being filled with the knowledge of God's will; not being deluded by persuasive arguments; continuing to seek things above; putting on a heart of compassion; and letting the word of Christ richly dwell within.

These attributes, along with several others in the book, describe the aspects of spiritual maturity that should characterize one who is being transformed into Christlikeness. Each aspect demonstrates and is consistent with one being presented complete in Christ. These characteristics can be generally categorized under different headings. Some of these may include living with an eternal perspective, knowledge of God's Word, and practical holiness.

Second, Paul revealed that this was why he was suffering on their behalf.⁸ This forms the essence of his teaching and admonishing people with the Word of God.⁹ This

⁷ Colossians 1:28.

⁸ v. 24.

⁹ v. 28.

also drove him to labor and strive with God's power.¹⁰ This also included protracted intercessory prayer on behalf of his disciples.¹¹ These responsibilities of a discipler impact and contribute to one's spiritual maturity. The book of Colossians forms a template through which the apostle Paul distilled these basic rudiments of discipleship. The combination of these establishes the ultimate trajectory of discipleship as the spiritual maturity and transformation of believers.

Third, Paul explained that discipleship was hard work requiring both the effort of the discipler and the power of God in order to be effective. In Colossians 1:29 Paul expressed that his discipleship efforts brought him to the point of exhaustion. The labor he expended encompassed physical, personal, and emotional energy on behalf of those he wanted to disciple. He described these efforts as striving and agonizing on behalf of believer's spiritual growth and maturity.

The key to Paul's labor was the power of God. Paul labored, but so did God. Influencing people toward spiritual maturity was hard work but that effort was also according to God's powerful work within him. The labor and the striving reflected the commitment of Paul to the task of discipleship. The energy supplied and the powerful force at work through that effort came from God. O'Brien comments, "If one asks the question: 'Where is God powerfully at work?' then in this context the answer would be: 'Where Paul toils energetically'."¹² Seeing believers move forward from babes in Christ to spiritually mature disciples is a difficult task requiring God's power at work in us.

While the power of God is understood to be a significant factor in effective

¹⁰ vv. 29-2:1.

¹¹ v. 3, 9.

¹² Peter T. O'Brien. *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 44: gen. eds., David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, (Waco: Word Books, 1982) 91.

discipleship ministry, this project will emphasize the responsibility of disciples to pursue their spiritual maturity through obedience to and application of the commands in the book of Colossians.

Review of Resources

There have been recent studies that have focused on an empirical observation of the maturation process in disciple making. One such study is the book *The Shape of Faith to Come* by Brad J. Waggoner. The subtitle of the book indicates that its narrative relates to spiritual transformation and the future of discipleship. Waggoner states,

For this study, *disciple* means, “to be a learner and a follower of Jesus Christ.” It implies obedience. It implies a lifestyle that demonstrates spiritual formation in terms of character and service. It means, “to be like Christ.” The word *discipleship* refers to a deliberate process of moving Christians forward spiritually. Paul summarizes this process in his letter to the Colossian church. “We proclaim Him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. I labor for this, striving with His strength that works powerfully in me” (Col. 1:28-29). ... For those who repent and believe, we teach them God’s wisdom, God’s Word. And we do so with the goal of Christlike maturity.¹³

This book supplies practical insight into the need for an understandable and efficient process that fosters spiritual maturity.

In the book, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow*, the authors, Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, acknowledge that God’s agenda for spiritual maturity requires a long amount of effort.

God is more committed to who we’re becoming than where we’re going. This is a significant adjustment for us to make because we have in our minds a picture of a “mature disciple,” and we can become so fixated on a person meeting certain qualifications, developing certain habits, and practicing certain principles that we

¹³ Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2008) 14.

can lose sight of the goal of inner transformation. We must come to love and accept the long road if we want to be engaged in transformational discipleship.¹⁴

The introduction to the book emphasizes the need for clarification about the process and outcome of spiritual maturation. The fact is “...much confusion still abounds about how people really grow. The book you hold in your hands is meant to be a helpful tool in describing that process...how God shapes and forms believers...”¹⁵ This book is a very recent study on some of the aspects of discipling believers to become spiritually mature disciples of Christ. It assists one in understanding how the spiritual transformation process takes place and setting priorities as to where to focus one’s attention.

In his book, *Christlike: The Pursuit of Uncomplicated Obedience*, Bill Hull evaluates views of the gospel many believers have adopted, which teach that we can become a Christian and not a disciple.¹⁶ These views of the gospel include the forgiveness-only gospel, the gospel of the left, the prosperity gospel, and the consumer gospel. Each of these “gospels” creates a certain kind of person and church, he laments, which often creates disciples who live by formulas and who interpret the Christian message as primarily a narrative about their own needs.¹⁷ He concludes this section by reminding us of the original impact the gospel had in people’s lives. “At the beginning of Christianity, something took hold of believers on the inside, and it created a revolution. The life of God invaded humans and took up residence inside them.”¹⁸ The value of a

¹⁴ Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group and Lifeway Research, 2012) 210.

¹⁵ Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, 2.

¹⁶ Bill Hull, *Christlike: The Pursuit of Uncomplicated Obedience* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010) 17.

¹⁷ Hull, 39.

¹⁸ Ibid.

discussion like this is the idea that the gospel is actually the means by which believers can experience the life-transforming work of Christ. This life change is consistent with allowing Christ to rule in every area of one's life so that the believer can be presented complete and mature in Christ.

A number of other resources are investigated that focus on the spiritual maturity, spiritual development, and the spiritual transformation of believers. A number of commentaries are also consulted in conjunction with a study of the book of Colossians, and are related to its emphasis upon the process and outcome of spiritual maturation. Other resources consulted include a number of Internet articles, journal and magazine publications, and web page pieces that contribute to the understanding of spiritual maturity as the trajectory of discipleship ministry.

Methodology and Procedure

The question this professional project will attempt to answer is: *What aspects of spiritual maturity can we expect to be demonstrated that contribute to one being presented complete in Christ according to the book of Colossians?*

The project will attempt to answer this question with a study of the biblical theology of discipleship in the book of Colossians. This will involve identifying and collating all of the commands and expectations the Apostle Paul articulates in his letter to Colossae for the believers there to emulate. Identifying these attributes will be an essential ingredient for establishing exactly what the essence of spiritual maturity is that Paul envisioned for a believer in order to be presented complete in Christ.

The kind of role a discipler has in this maturation process will also be delineated from the book of Colossians. Explaining how Paul engaged himself in this process on

behalf of every believer will assist in identifying the discipler's role and its contribution to the spiritual maturation of one's disciples.

Analysis and Evaluation

The essence of the study will be an analysis of the subject of discipleship ministry in the book of Colossians, and especially of its application to the spiritual maturity of believers. That analysis will encompass all four chapters of the book to determine the specific aspects of spiritual maturity by identifying them, defining them, categorizing them, and explaining their function.

The study will be collated into a formal procedure that will enable the results of the study to be taught individually or in a small-group setting. The curriculum will be included in an appendix. A series of lessons will be formulated for study, which can be used by individuals as well as small groups. The subject of the lessons will be the study of the aspects of spiritual maturity in Colossians, which are the outcome of discipleship.

This format will also include a spiritual-maturity assessment tool based on each aspect of spiritual maturity catalogued from Colossians that will assist one to gauge his/her own spiritual transformation and maturity. This assessment tool will also be included in the appendix. It will provide an appraisal on the lessons taught that will measure one's knowledge of these aspects of spiritual maturity, their influence in the individual's life, and an application of a plan of action to ensure that one pursues these aspects of spiritual maturity personally.

Participants in the Study

This study has been conducted with a group of ten men from a variety of ages

who voluntarily agree to participate. They were taught the lessons on spiritual maturity from Colossians one on one, and in some cases, small groups. They employed the spiritual maturity instrument as part of the process. This assessment will form the basis of an analysis of how the lessons and studies contributed to their understanding of the need for and awareness of their own spiritual maturity. Those findings will be included in the major project and will form the basis of the evaluation of the research. The results of this research will be available in the project.

Outcome and Benefits

It is expected that the product of this research will increase awareness of the need for spiritual maturity among those discipling others. It's also anticipated that this project will prepare discipplers to transfer the material they have studied and concepts they have learned into their own ministry of discipleship with people they are investing into spiritually. Additionally, this material will also be included in the discipleship curriculum of the researcher's own discipleship ministry as well as those discipling others through that ministry.

The spiritual-maturity assessment will measure a person's knowledge of the aspects of spiritual maturity studied, the current influence it had on the individual's life, and a plan of action to ensure that the disciple pursues these aspects of spiritual maturity personally. The hope is that the assessment will increase the need for and awareness of one's own spiritual maturity. The assessment is designed to provide participant's insight into the development of their spiritual maturity; assessing that development and then producing a plan of action to increase spiritual growth consistent with the assessment. Participants can be confident in knowing they have an instrument, consistent with biblical

teaching, to guide them in further spiritual growth.

The expectations of both the studies and assessment are that (1) they will provide a measurement of the level of spiritual maturity consistent with those traits taught and learned from Colossians; (2) they will increase awareness of the need for spiritual maturity in one's own life and ministry; (3) they will provide motivation to set the trajectory of one's own discipleship ministry in the direction of the spiritual maturity of his or her disciples; and (4) they will allow for the use of the studies and the assessment tool to become a part of the curriculum one uses to teach others.

Structure of the Project

Chapter one introduces the project. It begins by describing the nature of the discipleship ministry as it is envisioned in this project. It provides a rationale for the project stating the problem to be researched and the question to be answered. It reviews some of the biblical and theological issues that will be addressed. It provides the methodology and procedure that will be followed. This chapter also furnishes an analysis of the outcome and benefits that might be achieved from this project for the participants as well as future patrons. Finally, it explains the need for an analysis of the outcome of the project and an evaluation of the study.

Chapter two explains the theological and biblical foundations of this project. This includes a study of Paul's purpose for his ministry. That purpose is the spiritual maturity of his disciples as expressed in Colossians 1:28-29. The chapter will also include an overview of the spiritual maturity traits in Colossians that Paul desires to see epitomized in the life of the Colossians. The chapter concludes with an exegetical analysis of the specific commands Paul gives to the Colossians, which are meant to convey those aspects

of spiritual maturity he expects to be embedded within the life of a mature disciple.

Chapter three focuses on the extra-biblical foundations of this project. This chapter covers a study of the significance of spiritual maturity as discovered from extra biblical literature pertinent to this project. This also includes a study of the evidences of spiritual maturity from sources outside of Colossians but relevant to the traits found in the book. The chapter will conclude with additional insights from the spiritual maturity traits in Colossians and specific ways they can be applied.

Chapter four provides an evaluation of the project's effectiveness as well as gauging how the lessons contributed to the results of the spiritual maturity assessment. The assessment's results will be evaluated as to what they reveal about the knowledge and outcome of the lessons taught about spiritual maturity. Participants can expect to gain knowledge about their own rate of spiritual maturation and be confident in knowing that they have an instrument that is consistent with biblical teaching to guide them in further spiritual growth. This chapter determines the impact of the project on the participants.

Chapter five explains the preliminary results of this project. This chapter will discuss those results and the understanding that was gained from the outcomes reflected in the assessment. An implementation strategy will also be explained that will include the context of ministry in which the lessons and assessment will plan to be used. Specific objectives related to those plans will also be discussed.

Chapter six will conclude the study by explaining the implications of the project and possible future benefits that can be expected as a useable instrument for discipleship ministry. Conclusions will be drawn and recommendations made about the future use of the project resources in discipleship ministry.

CHAPTER TWO

THE THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT

The call for the development of spiritually mature believers is a consistent theme throughout scripture. God expects His people to grow up and mature as disciples of Jesus Christ. Colossians adds a vital component to discipleship ministry, namely, producing spiritually mature believers. Discipleship is specifically for the purpose of making an impact that contributes to one's actual spiritual transformation and maturity. Paul indicated that the trajectory of his entire ministry was presenting every person mature in Christ.

The nature of the trajectory of this ministry will be examined in this chapter. The specific aspects of spiritual maturity from Colossians, which Paul strives to see exemplified in all believers' lives, will also be investigated. These aspects are in the form of commands in the book of Colossians. Each of these aspects will be identified and explained. One can make an honest assessment of his or her spiritual maturity based on these traits.

Spiritual Maturity: The Purpose of Ministry

The purpose and challenge of ministry is to present every individual believer spiritually mature in Christ. Colossians 1:28 summarizes the goal and purpose of this ministry. Two basic concepts related to this purpose are communicated from this verse about both the proclamation related to spiritual maturity and the presentation of spiritually mature believers before Christ.

Proclamation and Spiritual Maturity

James P. Sweeney summarizes the teaching of Colossians 1:28:

Paul spoke pointedly about the Christocentric focus of his ministry... The *content* of Paul's proclamation was Christ—the personal and objective disclosure of God's own mystery ... the *means* by which this proclamation was carried out was through admonishing and teaching, *accompanied with* all wisdom. The *goal* of Paul's ministry was to “present every man complete in Christ.”¹⁹

This sketch provides an outline for explaining the meaning conveyed in the verse.

Presenting spiritually mature believers before Christ is the focus of the proclamation of God's Word. A ministry of discipleship involves disseminating this Word to believers for the purpose of becoming Christlike.

The content of proclamation

The content of the proclamation includes both the gospel of Christ and teaching of or about Christ. David G. Peterson suggests that there are “three allied modes of communication” associated with this proclamation. These include “announcing good news about Jesus, teaching about its scriptural foundation and deepest implications, and urging people to make the proper response...In various situations, the balance between them may vary, but any one of these modes of Christian communication is inadequate without the others.”²⁰ Discipleship utilizes the Word of God as the foundation for life change, spiritual transformation, and maturity. Its message is not theoretical or philosophical but in the context of a life that teaches revelation from God.

¹⁹ Sweeney, James P. *Guidelines on Christian Witness in Colossians 4:5-6*, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159:636 (October-December 2002) 454.

²⁰ Peterson, David J. *Maturity: The Goal of Mission*, *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul's Mission*, Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson eds., (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000) 191.

The means of proclamation

The means of this proclamation has a dual thrust. It includes admonition along with instruction. The apostle Paul indicated that this dual thrust was evident in his proclamation. James D. G. Dunn makes this connection between the relationship of admonishing and teaching to proclamation. He says, "It should be noted that the idea of proclaiming Christ is thus supplemented, or indeed explained, by a double emphasis on instruction: the two belong together, and presumably the former without the latter would be dangerously lacking in content and guidance for everyday praxis."²¹

Murray J. Harris agrees with this assessment when he says, "Admonition and teaching are two natural and necessary concomitants of the proclamation of the mystery of Christ but necessary concomitants are sometimes (as here) also essential ingredients." He indicates that they both refer "to believers (warning against sin and error, [and] imparting mature teaching)."²²

The nature of this dual thrust of proclamation is designed to penetrate its truth into one's life. Peter T. O'Brien explains,

The public proclamation of Christ as Lord is explained and developed in the following words about admonition ... and instruction. ... For it is through the teaching and warning of every man that the proclamation of Christ is carried out. ... Clearly for Paul and his colleagues evangelistic and missionary outreach was not effected by some superficial presentation of the saving message about Christ to the world, but rather was prosecuted through warning and intensive teaching in pastoral situations.²³

²¹ James D. G. Dunn, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* eds. I Howard Marshall, W. Ward Gasque, and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996) 124.

²² Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010) 65.

²³ Peter T. O'Brien, *Word Bible Commentary: Colossians, Philemon*, gen eds. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, Waco, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1982) 87-88.

This proclamation is conveyed to every individual believer, which is repeated three times in the verse. According to Robert Gromacki, “The triple usage of the phrase ‘every man’ shows that no believer, regardless of sex, race, or social status is excluded from the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit through spiritual men and women.”²⁴ So every single individual believer is to be admonished and instructed for the purpose of his or her spiritual maturity.

O’Brien further notes:

The expression “every man” occurs three times in verse 28, being repeated to emphasize, on the one hand, the universality of the gospel as taught by Paul and his coworkers, and to contrast the intellectual exclusiveness of the false teachers on the other. ...The singular is used to show that each person individually ... was the object of the apostle’s care.²⁵

Every individual believer is a legitimate beneficiary of discipleship ministry. There is no elite spiritual status in the body of Christ. Harris agrees and notes that “Paul counteracts any intellectual elitism or exclusiveness: there is no special gospel or teaching for a spiritual or intellectual elite.”²⁶

This proclamation is accompanied with all wisdom. This wisdom includes the skill to put the admonition and instruction that is proclaimed to practical use in one’s life. Wisdom is the means by which one establishes order in his or her life. Dunn observes, “The addition of ‘in all wisdom’...reiterates the indispensability of divinely given wisdom for daily living...so here the wisdom necessary is that Wisdom displayed in the cosmos ... and on the cross. The warning and teaching in all wisdom is also the

²⁴ Robert Gromacki, *Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series: The Books of Philippians and Colossians: Joy and Completeness in Christ*, gen. eds., Mal Couch and Ed Hindson (Chattanooga: Tyndale Theological Seminary, 2003) 161-162

²⁵ O’Brien, *Word Bible Commentary*, 88.

²⁶ Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 66.

proclamation of Christ.”²⁷

Presentation and Spiritual Maturity

The purpose of proclamation in discipleship ministry is the development of Christlikeness. Believers who are conforming to Christ’s image are becoming spiritually mature disciples. Discipleship influences believers to move in the direction of Christlikeness. The goal and outcome is that a believer will be presented as spiritually mature before Christ.

The goal of presentation: spiritual maturity

The eschatological presentation of believers includes at least two dimensions. The first is preparing presentable believers before Christ at the believer’s judgment. This entails the dimension of spiritual maturity. The second is the expression of that spiritual maturity by the reproduction of Christ’s character in the life of the believer here and now. This implies the dimension of Christlikeness.

The presentation of every individual believer as mature in Christ is the focus of Paul’s whole apostolic ministry. All of his apostolic endeavors were engaged in this goal. James G. Samra argues, from the undisputed books of the Apostle Paul, that spiritual maturity is central to Paul’s understanding of his apostolic commission, and central to his life, work, and thought. This is in contrast to the traditional understanding that his task was primarily the evangelistic proclamation of the gospel. Samra states that this understanding is the basic premise of his own study on maturity. He says, “We will argue that Paul’s apostolic mission entailed delivering mature believers on the day of Christ

²⁷ Dunn, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 124.

Jesus.”²⁸

Samra validates this premise by examining central Pauline passages in support of this understanding. After careful exegesis of these passages, he concludes that Paul’s understanding of his apostolic mission to the Thessalonians had the “goal for his converts to be blameless with regard to holiness at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (3:13) and this is part of Paul’s responsibility as an apostle.”²⁹ The understanding of his mission to the Philippians “is concerned with eliminating blamable behavior at Philippi, not because it is detracting from his true mission, but because it is part of his mission.”³⁰ To the Romans the understanding of “Paul’s apostolic task involves his converts displaying the obedience of faith.”³¹ It seems clear that presenting spiritually mature believers before Christ is the summation of Paul’s ministry.

The book of Colossians also catalogues Paul’s understanding of his apostolic mission. That mission is particularly articulated in Colossians 1:28. Hagelberg says that here Paul is giving “his personal vision statement, and [it] is a good statement of the purpose of this letter.”³² He adds, “This verse is a concise statement of Paul’s entire ministry and the underlying purpose behind that ministry.”³³ He identifies the

²⁸ James G. Samra, *Being Conformed to Christ in Community: A Study of Maturity, Maturation and the Local Church in the Undisputed Pauline Epistles* (London: T & T Clark International, 2006) 36.

²⁹ Samra, *Being Conformed to Christ in Community*, p 38. The central Pauline passages Samra exegetes are 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13; Philippians 2:12-18; and Romans 15:14-21. In addition, he surveys several other passages to support his contention (pp. 42-47).

³⁰ Samra, *Being Conformed to Christ in Community*, p 40.

³¹ Samra, *Being Conformed to Christ in Community*, p 42.

³² Dave Hagelberg, *A Commentary on Colossians: The Proclamation of Christ that Leads to Spiritual Maturity* (Delhi: Rev. Dr. Ashish Amos of the Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2011) 69.

³³ Hagelberg, *A Commentary on Colossians*, 70.

presentation that Paul looked forward to here as “clearly at the end of the age when the Lord will return to set up His Kingdom.”³⁴

This presentation is eschatological in nature. This is also recognized to be so by MaGee who notes,

Most likely, Paul’s offering of believers in Colossians 1:28 is to be understood eschatologically as well. In short, the image of presenting believers complete before God on the last day ... aligns well with Paul’s vision elsewhere of the anticipated appearance before Christ and God of prepared and “presentable” believers.³⁵

Becoming a presentable believer is the goal for a disciple of Christ and for a discipleship ministry. A. Boyd Luter, Jr. says that Paul was teaching the “believers in Colossae ... the message and ministry of Christ ... [giving] a clear goal for the life of the disciple—maturity in Christ.”³⁶

The significant condition for presentation before Christ is that of maturity. Harris notes that this word speaks of “a person mature in faith ... and in the knowledge of God’s will ... someone who has attained mature adulthood...and is no longer misled by false doctrine.”³⁷ Dunn also agrees with this understanding. He explains that, “the desired state for those to be thus presented is described in a rich word... (‘whole, complete...mature.’). ...The word is also prominently used of someone whose instruction is ‘complete,’ one who has advanced to ‘maturity’ and become ‘perfect’ in mastery of subject or craft...the

³⁴ Ibid., 71.

³⁵ Gregory S. MaGee, *Portrait of an Apostle: A Case for Paul’s Authorship of Colossians and Ephesians* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013) 107.

³⁶ Luter, A. Boyd. *Discipleship and the Church*, Bibliotheca Sacra 137 (July 1980): 547.

³⁷ Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament*, 66.

vision is again eschatological, with a view to the last judgment.”³⁸

Another aspect of a believer’s presentation before Christ comes in the form of a warning. It is a warning about a believer’s evaluation at the judgment seat of Christ.

Charles C. Bing articulates this view declaring,

All believers will be presented before the Lord, but only those who persevere faithfully and hold firmly to their hope will be presented without reproach. That hope will inspire godly living that will result in a good evaluation at the judgment seat of Christ. ... The concept of being presented to the Lord is found elsewhere in the New Testament (2 Cor. 4:14; 11:2; Eph. 5:27; 1 Thess. 5:23; Jude 24), and in every case (except 2 Cor. 4:14), the quality of the presentation is in view. ... While all believers will be presented to Christ fully justified in position, not all will blameless in experience. ... This view is consistent with the sense of spiritual maturity expressed as the apostle’s goal in verse 28. ... This presentation is not to qualify a person as saved, but to qualify him or her as complete or mature.³⁹

Bob Wilkin echoes this warning to believers to make themselves presentable to Christ as mature disciples. He says, “Paul is...speaking of the Bema, and of being presented there as holy, blameless, and beyond reproach *in our experience*. Not all believers will be so presented. Some will be rebuked by Christ and will not have His approval (cf. Luke 19:20-26; 1 Cor. 9:27; 2 Tim. 4:6-10).”⁴⁰

The outcome of presentation: Christlikeness

Both the proclamation and the presentation are linked together to accomplish the task and responsibility of discipleship. Proclamation serves as the entry point into that ministry while presentation serves as the focal point of its outcome. Together they serve as linchpins to the discipleship enterprise. As R. Kent Hughes affirms, “Paul’s goal is

³⁸ James D. G. Dunn, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 125-126.

³⁹ Charles C. Bing. 2007. *The Warning in Colossians*, Bibliotheca Sacra: 164 (January-March): 85-87.

⁴⁰ Bob Wilkin, “Salvation” by Perseverance to Paul’s Gospel: Colossians 1:23 and 1 Corinthians 15:2, <http://www.faithalone.org/magazine/y2009/salvation.html>.

nothing short of presenting to Christ complete, mature, full-grown Christians. He was not into the “I’ll save ‘em,’ you raise ‘em!’ type of thinking.”⁴¹

The outward manifestation of spiritual maturity is Christlikeness. This is the ongoing expression of one’s spiritual transformation. This relates to the process of how one becomes spiritually mature. That process is conformity to the character of Jesus Christ. Alignment with Christ’s character enables one to become presentable to Christ at the judgment. Todd D. Still echoes this assessment:

Christian maturity does not occur instantaneously or automatically; rather, it is a perpetual process, as Paul knew full well. ... Paul’s aim, then, was for people to grow up in Christ, i.e., as Christians ... so that at the coming of Christ he might have the apostolic privilege and pleasure of presenting to Christ mature believers, not spiritual babes...he longed to present “perfected” people to the Perfect One. ... To present people complete in Christ was the overarching purpose of Paul’s labor and toil.⁴²

Samra says that the “term ‘Christlike’ describe[s] Paul’s conception of a mature believer [and] suggests that Paul viewed Christ as a standard toward which the attitudes and actions of believers were to be oriented and a norm against which they were to be measured.”⁴³ After analyzing the motif of conformity to the image of Christ, Samra concludes,

Scholars have declared that “conformed to the image of Christ” refers to having one’s character changed to be aligned with the character of Christ, where “character” indicates the non-material aspects of man. To be conformed to the image of Christ is to become like Christ so that the character of Christ is manifested in the life of the believer.⁴⁴

⁴¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon: The Supremacy of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1989) 48.

⁴² Todd D. Still, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary Revised Edition: Ephesians ~ Philemon*, Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, gen. eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006) 303.

⁴³ Samra, *Being Conformed to Christ in Community*, 72.

⁴⁴ Samra, *Being Conformed*, 107-108.

In Samra's comprehensive study of spiritual maturity and the maturation process, he devotes an entire chapter to the concept that maturity is exemplified in the apprehension of Christlikeness. He explains, "Paul combines most explicitly the ideas that being a mature believer means *being* like Christ and that maturation is a process of *becoming* like Christ."⁴⁵ Samra posits that Paul's emphasis on a believer's need for spiritual transformation in the present life is associated with the reality of our complete conformity to Christ in eternity. He says,

For Paul, *this future transformation shapes the goal of his present life*. Since he will become like Christ when Christ appears, he has made it his goal now to gain Christ, to be found in Christ, to be conformed to Christ's death and to know Christ. Progress in this process of being conformed to Christ in this age is the reason for Paul's hope of attaining the ultimate resurrection from the dead in the future.⁴⁶

After studying several Pauline texts, Samra concludes, "The implication is that Christ provides the prototype for [a] believer's new life. ... Christ is the prototype for all who become sons of God after him—thus he is the standard of maturity."⁴⁷ The chapter ends with this insightful verdict,

Certainly conformity to Christ is part of a web of motifs at the centre of Paul's theology. Furthermore, if Christ is the standard of maturity and if there is a maturation process in Paul then it follows that conformity to the image of Christ—a motif that more than any other explicitly incorporates both of these ideas—would be the central motif of Paul's conception of maturity. ... Paul's concept of maturity and maturation is one in which believers are progressively becoming more like Christ in their attitudes and actions (i.e., their character) while awaiting the consummation of this transformation at the appearance of Christ.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid., 96.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 97.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 98.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 111.

This understanding supports the contention in this paper that maturity is demonstrated in the life of a believer whose character exemplifies that of Christ's. The incorporation of that character into a believer's life is also the purpose of biblical proclamation today. Abraham Kuruvilla argues for this thinking when he describes his concept of *christiconic* interpretation.

This concept is built upon the idea that biblical pericopes depict what it means to fulfill a divine demand. Kuruvilla states, "Since only one Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, perfectly met all of God's demands, being without sin...one may say that each pericope of the Bible is actually portraying a facet of Christlikeness, a segment of the image of Christ: what it means to fulfill the particular divine demand in that pericope after the manner of Christ." It is the fulfillment of the divine demand, projected as a world in front of the text, that the author of any biblical pericope intended the reader to inhabit by adopting that world's precepts, priorities, and practices.⁴⁹

This projection of a world in front of the text is the world that encapsulates the character of Christ. Inhabiting this world with its precepts, priorities, and practices is the focus of biblical exegesis and exposition. Kuruvilla explains,

Each pericope, then, portrays an aspect of that image, a facet of Christlikeness. Thus, in fulfilling the divine demand, text by text, a believer becomes progressively more Christlike as the divine demands of pericopes are sequentially met. Such a reading of the text that sees each pericope as projecting facets of Christlikeness I call *christiconic* interpretation.⁵⁰

This explanation highlights God's intention for his people to look like Jesus Christ in his perfect humanity. It is the responsibility of proclamation, as a facet of

⁴⁹ Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text: A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013) 260.

⁵⁰ Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text*, 260.

disciple making, to nurture conformity to the image of Christ in the here and now. Jesus Christ is the model image by which believers progressively conform into godly character. Jesus' image then, is the model of biblical pericopes. Kuruvilla affirms,

Interpreting biblical pericopes in this fashion, to discern the divine demand that moves God's people close to Christlikeness ... is the essence of christiconic interpretation ... in this life ... as one progressively conforms to divine demand, pericope by pericope, one gradually becomes more Christlike. This is the purpose of preaching: "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ" (Col. 1:28).⁵¹

Kuruvilla bridges proclamation of God's Word to Christlikeness revealing that each related in this way is essentially the God given means of producing spiritually mature Christlike believers. He explains how this is true when he says,

That glorious transformation, at least on this side of life, happens through the textual agency of Scripture and by the divine power of its Author, a gradual, pericope-by-pericope conformation to Christlikeness. In this monumental metamorphosis into the image of his Son, God has co-opted preachers to play a significant role. ... Each pericope is an instrument that is geared to moving believers one step closer to Christlikeness. Since in this conception, every biblical pericope portrays a facet of the image ... of Christ that man is to be conformed to, this model of biblical interpretation for preaching is labeled *christiconic*.⁵²

Christlikeness comes from inhabiting the world each pericope reveals.

Determining what an author is doing with what he is saying about that world provides the theological framework for adopting the character of Christ into one's life. That world is where one discovers the Christlike character that can be emulated:

When the theological intention of an author is understood and communicated, then the text is privileged. When the text is privileged it points to what aspect of each character is exemplary and what is not, i.e., what is Christlike and what is not. ... Therefore the role of each pericope is to demonstrate an aspect of Christlikeness, and to the extent one obeys the divine demand in a given pericope, to that extent one has become more like the perfect Man, Jesus Christ ... and

⁵¹ Ibid., 262.

⁵² Ibid., 265.

aligning ourselves with this image, obeying the divine demand in each pericope, that God's purpose for his people is being fulfilled: to be "conformed" to the image of his Son.⁵³

In Colossians 1:28 the focus is on presenting every individual believer mature in Christ. Spiritual maturity is the purpose of ministry. That purpose is accomplished through proclamation that contributes to one's presentation before Christ at judgment. Proclamation uses the dual thrust of admonishing and instructing as both the content and means of this ministry.

The goal of proclamation is to prepare believers to be presentable to Christ as spiritually mature. The outcome of spiritual maturity is conformity to the image of Christ. Christlikeness is the expression of spiritual maturity in the here and now. Christlikeness is the adopting of the character of Christ incorporated into the character of a believer. This formulates the preparation necessary to make one presentable to Christ.

David G. Peterson concludes that Paul's mission was propelled by the determination to escort believers into the realm of spiritual maturity. He says,

Maturity was a goal of Paul's mission on two levels. On the one hand, he was concerned that his converts should realize and express the maturity that was potentially already theirs in Christ. On the other hand, he was concerned to move them forwards towards the ultimate encounter with Christ, when the perfection of Christ himself would be fully experienced by his people altogether. To achieve this goal, the apostle gave himself wholeheartedly to a ministry of proclamation, warning and teaching that included the writing of his epistles. As he unfolded God's total plan of salvation, he showed Christians how to live appropriately in the light of what is already fact and what is yet to be attained in Christ.⁵⁴

Spiritual maturity is still the purpose of ministry today. Like Paul, we proclaim God's Word admonishing and instructing believers to become Christlike in every dimension of their lives. Paul did the same with the Colossians. He gave them several

⁵³ Ibid., 266.

⁵⁴ Peterson, *The Gospel to the Nations*, 200-201.

commands that are consistent with aspects of Christlikeness. Each of these commands exemplifies a Christlike life in a number of ways. These commands will be the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

Implication of the Purpose of Ministry

There are two implications we can consider from our discussion of the purpose of ministry. First, service that qualifies as ministry is always focused upon the eternal welfare others. Ministry is to people with eternal values in mind. Service may have some temporal benefit but it is not ministry. Ministry may include service but is never exclusively service. Ministry must have an influence and impact that is eternal in nature. Specifically, it contributes to one's spiritual maturity by shaping that person's character in the direction of Christlikeness.

A second implication is that the scriptures are essential for spiritual transformation. Biblical discipleship employs God's Word in the task of teaching, instructing, and correcting. Influencing disciples in the direction of Christlikeness is a direction consistent with a proper understanding of the Word of God. Grasping the will, heart, and mind of God, discovered from the author's intended meaning in context, is the basis upon which spiritual maturity is possible.

Aspects of Spiritual Maturity from the Book of Colossians

Stages of Spiritual Growth

While the Bible directs us to pursue spiritual maturity, not everyone displays it. There seems to be something different about those who are spiritually mature. Spiritual

growth is required of all believers. But that spiritual growth is not characterized the same in every believer. Some are babes. Some are children. Some are mature.

The expectation of Scripture is for believers to grow up and mature spiritually. This study attempts to explain what a spiritually mature believer looks like from the commands given in the book of Colossians.

Characteristics of Maturing Believers

There are commands in Colossians relating to (being presented complete in Christ) spiritual maturity. It is reasonable to conclude that Paul's passion to present every individual believer as mature before Christ is followed up with what that looks like, and what that looks like is encapsulated within a series of commands given to the Colossians.

Spiritual Maturity in a Colossian Nutshell

There are twenty-two commands that relate to the Colossians' need to become spiritually mature. These twenty-two commands can be grouped under seven major categories, each of which contains some of these commands. The categories and commands summarize the Apostle Paul's expectations for those who are spiritually mature. If one is to be presentable to Jesus Christ, it is these commands that need to be exemplified in the life of a believer. Hagelberg notes that these "commands in this letter, logically flow from what Paul has just told them about his ministry and their response to the gospel. If Paul's (and in fact God's) purpose is that they should be mature and steadfast ... Paul can urge them forward in that same direction."⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Hagelberg, *A Commentary on Colossians*, 76.

An Overview of the Categories of Spiritual Maturity in Colossians

<i>The Goal of Ministry: and we proclaim him admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom that we may present every man mature in Christ Col. 1:28</i>	
CATEGORY	SPIRITUAL MATURITY LOOKS LIKE
Discernment and Spiritual Maturity	A believer who perceives correctly
Outlook and Spiritual Maturity	A believer who has an eternal perspective
Sin and Spiritual Maturity	A believer who is sin sensitive
Godliness and Spiritual Maturity	A believer who adopts Christ's character
Household Relationships and Spiritual Maturity	A believer who aligns roles in the family by God's design
Hierarchal Relationships and Spiritual Maturity	A believer who aligns with the authority structure in superior to subordinate relationships
Practical Holiness and Spiritual Maturity	A believer who assumes spiritual responsibility

Each of these seven categories expresses a major aspect of spiritual maturity representing an *overarching character quality* of maturity in one's life. The incorporation of Christlikeness is comprehensive. The exhibition of Christlike maturity is extensive not intensive. It is not displayed in the most exhaustive way possible but it is evident in every dimension of one's life. When this transpires it places one into a category of spiritual maturity.

These categories include both an inward attitude of the heart (discernment, eternal outlook, sin sensitivity, and godliness) that is displayed in the outward relationships and responsibility (in family relationships, hierarchal relationships, and practical holiness) of one's life. These categories of spiritual maturity are displayed in a series of charts that include each command associated with that category. An application of each command is also suggested.

The charted categories provide an overall framework of how the commands in

Colossians convey aspects of spiritual maturity. These qualities are expected characteristics in the life of a spiritually mature believer.

An Explanation of the Categories of Spiritual Maturity in Colossians

Discernment and Spiritual maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Perceives Correctly

2:6	Command: you walk in Him...	As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in Him 2:6
	Application: Spiritually mature believers conduct their lives consistent with Christ	
2:8	Command: see none deceitfully captivate you...	See to it that no one takes you captive through <u>philosophy</u> and <u>empty deception</u> , according to the <u>traditions of men</u> , according to the <u>elementary principles of the world</u> , and not according to <u>Christ 2:8</u>
	Application: Spiritually mature believers avoid the deceptive wisdom of the world	
2:16	Command: do not let another judge you...	Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day 2:16
	Application: Spiritually mature believers avoid letting others restrict their spiritual freedom	

Outlook and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually mature believer has an eternal perspective

2:18	Command: let none defraud you...	Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by <u>delighting in self-abasement</u> and the <u>worship of the angel</u> , taking <u>his stand on visions he has seen</u> , <u>inflated without cause</u> by his fleshly mind 2:18
	Application: Spiritually mature believers avoid keeping up spiritual appearances	
3:1	Command: keep seeking things above...	If then you have been raised up with Christ keep seeking the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God 3:1
	Application: Spiritually mature believers develop an eternal perspective about everything	
3:2	Command: set your mind on things above...	Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth 3:2
	Application: Spiritually mature believers concentrate on the eternal not the temporal	

Sin and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer is Sin Sensitive

3:5	Command: consider members of your body dead to sin...	<i>Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry...3:5</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers mortify fleshly tendencies</i>	
3:8	Command: put aside abusive speech...	<i>But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth...3:8</i> <i>Do not lie to one another...3:9</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers put off careless and malicious speech</i>	
3:9	Command: do not lie to one another...	
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers are not dishonest with one another</i>	

Godliness and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Adopts Christ's Character

3:12	Command: put on a heart of compassion...	<i>...as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience bearing with one another, and forgiving each other...and beyond all these things love...3:12-14</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers put on compassionate benevolence</i>	
3:15	Command: and let the peace of Christ rule...	<i>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...3:15</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers arbitrate peaceful outcomes and are thankful</i>	
3:16	Command: let the word of Christ dwell...	<i>Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing with thankfulness...3:16</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers put out the welcome mat for the Word of God</i>	

Household Relationships and Spiritual Maturity: Spiritually Mature Believer Aligns

Roles in the Family by God's Design

3:18	Command: wives be subject to your husbands...	<i>Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord...3:18</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature wives voluntarily submit to their husbands</i>	
3:19	Command: husbands love your wives...	<i>Husbands, love your wives...3:19</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature husbands serve the greater good of their wives</i>	
3:19	Command: husbands do not be embittered against your wives...	<i>And do not be embittered against them...3:19</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature husbands do not treat their wives harshly</i>	
3:20	Command: Children obey your parents...	<i>Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord...3:20</i>
	Application: <i>Children exemplify spiritual maturity by permitting parents to establish boundaries</i>	
3:21	Command: Fathers do not exasperate your children...	<i>Fathers do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart...3:21</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature fathers do not presume upon their children's obedience</i>	

Hierarchal Relationships and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Aligns with the Authority Structure within Superior to Subordinate Relationships

3:22	Command: slaves in all things obey Your masters...	<i>Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men...3:22</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature subordinates honor superiors by work performed with integrity and excellence</i>	
3:23	Command: do your work heartily as unto the Lord...	<i>Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men ...3:23</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature subordinates recognize the manner in which work is done is important to God</i>	
4:1	Command: masters treat your slaves with justice...	<i>Masters, grant to your slaves justice</i>

	Application: <i>Spiritually mature superiors treat subordinates with justice and equity</i>	<i>and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven...4:1</i>
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*Practical Holiness and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Assumes
Personal Spiritual Responsibility*

4:2	Command: devote yourselves to prayer...	<i>Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving...4:2</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually Mature believers pray in the rhythm of daily life</i>	
4:5	Command: conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders...	<i>Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person...4:5</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers engage pagans so interchanges are personally and spiritually productive</i>	

Implications of Features of Spiritual Maturity in Colossians

- Spiritual maturity encompasses the personal, relational, moral, and spiritual realms of a believer's life.
- Spiritual maturity is an understanding that requires spiritual discipline, holiness of character, and moral excellence as preparation for eternity.
- Spiritual maturity focuses upon one's value to God and avoids conflict that would violate the character of God. The goal is aligning one's life with the character of God.
- The aspects of spiritual maturity to be exemplified in a believer's life require time. Maturity is walking with God over time.

A Study of the Facets of Spiritual Maturity in Colossians

Beginning in chapter two, Paul employed a series of commands that encapsulate the character of spiritual maturity. These commands are consistent with what Paul envisioned should characterize a spiritually mature believer. These commands are to be given top priority in one's life.

What follows are commands to be obeyed that are consistent with one being presented mature or complete in Christ. This study will delineate each of these commands by explaining their function in a believer who is spiritually mature.

Discernment and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Perceives Correctly

Spiritually mature believers conduct their lives consistent with Christ

The command in Colossians 2:6 is for spiritually mature believers to go on walking or living their lives in “Christ as the sphere circumscribing the entire life of the believer.”⁵⁶ This verse serves as the foundation for the life of one who is spiritually mature. The Colossians had received Christ Jesus as Lord, and predicated upon this is the motivation from within to walk consistent with Christ. This walk includes the ability to discern life from God's point of view—an aspect of spiritual maturity.

David W. Pao writes, “The affirmation of Jesus as Christ and Lord should lead to changed behavior. ... In the context it is clearly an imperative that exhorts the Colossians to lead lives consistent with their confession.”⁵⁷ Hagelberg provides a more precise

⁵⁶ Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 80.

⁵⁷ David W. Pao, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Colossians and Philemon*, Clinton E. Arnold gen. ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 155.

assessment of this command when he says, "If Christ meant *Life* to you when you became a believer, let Him mean *Life* to you each day now."⁵⁸ The content of their faith comprised everything the Colossians had learned about the person and work of Jesus Christ. They had received and welcomed that revelation into their lives. In the same way they needed to live their lives in Him. Still notes that being in Christ means that Christ is

the one in whom the gospel is grounded and on whom their faith is founded, that the Colossians are commanded to walk. ... They are not to live in him periodically in fits and starts but continuously. ... Their standing in and service of Christ are meant to be congruent and complementary.⁵⁹

The Colossians were confronted by deviant teaching that attempted to lead them astray. H. Wayne House posits that this is one reason why Paul gave this command. He says,

Paul was concerned that the Colossians might succumb to a philosophy completely estranged from his apostolic message. ... Paul urged them to live in accord with the fact that they had received Jesus Christ... Paul's concern was not that they simply possess the right Christology and theology in general, but that they also live in accord with it.⁶⁰

Implication

Spiritual transformation is a progressive type of growth into Christlikeness. It happens over time as one attempts to apply the life of Christ in every life situation. Spiritual maturity is an investment in the direction of Christlikeness. This is the primary designation of a mature believer. Christ is the paradigm, and to be mature is to be like Christ.

Being in Christ implies that He is the measurement of maturity; defining the

⁵⁸ Hagelberg, *A Commentary on Colossians*, 77.

⁵⁹ Still, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 309.

⁶⁰ H. Wayne House, *The Christian Life According to Colossians*, *Bibliotheca Sacra*: 151 (October-December 1994) 441.

standard of what it means to be mature. That meaning is embedded within the proclamation Paul made, which included admonition and instruction, and together delivers the image of Christ to be incorporated within our own lives.

Spiritually mature believers avoid the deceptive wisdom of the world

This command is the first of four warnings (2:8, 16, 18, and 20). They are a combination of instruction with the purpose to “guard against false teachings that would lead...away from simple devotion to Christ, and replace that simple devotion with various false paths to Christian maturity...these warnings are mixed with teachings, and their purpose is so that they can be presented mature in Christ Jesus.”⁶¹

The nature of the warning reveals that the danger is imminent. It is urgent that the believers be vigilant. Still notes, “At the outset, Paul commands the congregation to be watchful ... [and] to warn his audience to be alert and on the lookout for people who and precepts which are to be avoided.”⁶² The idea is to be attentive to the danger of deception that lurks at every turn and attempts to abduct you under its rubric. The false teachers of this world endeavor to claim believers as their booty and to exploit them for their own purposes.

This rubric is described as an empty deceitful philosophy. Commenting upon this designation O’Brien says, “He [Paul] exposes it as a hollow sham, having no true content, seductive and misleading ... as ‘deceitful’ it stands opposed to the gospel...while the designation of it as ‘empty’ ... sets this philosophy in sharp contrast to

⁶¹ Hagelberg, *A Commentary on Colossians*, 79.

⁶² Still, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 311.

the mystery ... and Christ.”⁶³

Paul does not specifically identify this philosophy as a body of teaching, though he does itemize characteristics of this philosophy enumerated in what follows. Dunn suggests, “Paul may have left his warning vague so that it could cover a wider range of possible alternatives to his gospel than the more specific challenge at Colossae.”⁶⁴

This hollow, deceptive philosophy is based upon three components, each of which begins with the prepositional phrase, “according to.” Harris indicates a sequence of thought that can be considered by the use of this phrase. The first use is “denoting the origin or source of the ‘philosophy’ (‘human tradition,’ as opposed to divine revelation), the second...describing its content or substance...the third as introducing the negation of the two preceding clauses (the essential weakness of this ‘philosophy’ was that Christ was neither its source nor its substance).”⁶⁵

False philosophies come in all sorts, sizes, shapes, and colors, and there is no short supply of them today. Regardless of its nature, worldly philosophy has a negative impact on the believer’s walk in Christ. Still argues, “Paul propounds, it is predicated on ‘human tradition.’ In Paul’s perception, the ‘philosophy’ was manufactured by humans, not given by God. ... to embrace the ‘philosophy,’ then, would not signal spiritual maturity and progress; rather, it would mark spiritual immaturity and regress.”⁶⁶

Pao thinks the language describing this philosophy may also be coupling it with spiritual forces. He says this depiction is to be clearly “understood as a force that must be denied. ... Any teachings that challenge the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ are to be

⁶³ O’Brien, *Word Bible Commentary*, 110.

⁶⁴ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, 148.

⁶⁵ Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 85.

⁶⁶ Still, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 311-312.

unmasked to reveal their true nature as personal spiritual forces that threaten the Christian community.”⁶⁷ It may be that both human and spiritual forces are alluded to as threatening believers’ spiritual growth.

Implication

It is possible for a believer to be deceived in at least three ways. First, one can be deceived by information that is speculative. Second, one can be deceived by arguments that are nonsensical. Third, one can be deceived by teaching that is fabricated. Though the information, arguments, and teaching may seem attractive, a spiritually mature believer discerns the error and pursues the truth.

Spiritually mature believers avoid letting others restrict their spiritual freedom

The command either demands the termination of some action already begun or depicts an action that must always be avoided.⁶⁸ For the Colossians, they were to constantly evade letting others pass judgment upon their spiritual freedom. The concept includes accusation and condemnation. An aspect of believers who are spiritually mature is evading or shunning both the accusers as well as their accusations about the perimeters of spiritual freedom.

The attacks were leveled against the particular practice of certain customs and religious rituals. Still suggests:

It seems there were some...who were seeking to act as umpires over what the Colossians ate and drank...a number of early believers, presumably under the influence of their Jewish brothers and sisters, were scrupulous about what they ate and drank and in some instances about where and with whom they dined...ascetic

⁶⁷ Pao, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 161.

⁶⁸ Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 104.

tendencies...dietary scruples and revelatory longings appear to be linked in the Colossian context.⁶⁹

The danger is the threat to the spiritual freedom of the Colossians. Because of the potential related to this threat, O'Brien states, "The apostle Paul lays down the principle of Christian liberty: don't let anyone sit in judgment on you...the scrupulous were threatening to impose their rigid principles on the rest of the congregation. Christian liberty, needed to be asserted in the light of false attempts to undermine it."⁷⁰

Apparently, there were some who wanted the Colossians to place their Christian freedom under their control. Limiting that freedom, under their tutelage, meant submitting to their prohibitions or the observances of certain perfectly legitimate activities.

Dunn believes that these scruples were Jewish in nature. He indicates that both the religious festival and the New Moon celebration have Jewish religious significance and may identify the protagonists as Jewish believers. According to Dunn, the mention of the Sabbath day marks these qualms as distinctively Jewish.

The issue is put beyond doubt by the third element, the "Sabbath." The Sabbath was another Jewish tradition, which marked out Jews as distinctive from Gentiles, another essential mark of Jewish identity and covenant belonging. ...If Sabbath is so clearly a distinctively Jewish festival, then the probability is that the "festival" and "new moon" also refer to the Jewish versions of these celebrations. The point is put beyond dispute when we note that the three terms together, "Sabbaths, new moons, and feasts," was in fact a regular Jewish way of speaking of the main festivals of Jewish religion.⁷¹

Still suggests that identifying these advocates "is now impossible to know precisely ... nonetheless ... Paul perceived [these] enforced regulations regarding diet and days to be

⁶⁹ Still, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 316-317.

⁷⁰ O'Brien, *Word Bible Commentary*, 139.

⁷¹ Dunn, *The New International Greek New Testament Commentary*, 174-175.

both peripheral and passé.”⁷²

Spiritually mature believers are not susceptible to the machinations of ascetics or legalists who determine the depth and devotion of spirituality by religious formalities. Hagelberg adds, “If someone judges us because we do not follow their rules in this sort of thing, we are commanded to disregard their words. These are not moral issues: our relationship to the Lord is simply *not* improved by keeping any sort of Sabbaths or holy days.”⁷³

Implication

Spiritually mature believers do not listen to anyone who wants to judge them when they are told that their spiritual life is defective because they are not following religious protocols. Spiritual transformation is not attained by attempts to subject one’s physical body. Since Christ has released us from legal requirements one does not rely on artificial and merely ritual preferences as the means of spiritual transformation. John MacArthur, Jr. counsels, “We, like the Colossians, must not be intimidated by those who would make something other than knowing Christ through His Word a requirement for spiritual maturity.”⁷⁴

Outlook and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Has an Eternal Perspective

Spiritually mature believers avoid keeping up spiritual appearances.

⁷² Still, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 317.

⁷³ Hagelberg, *The Commentary on Colossians*, 94.

⁷⁴ John MacArthur, Jr, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Colossians and Philemon*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992) 122.

Colossians 2:18 highlights the fact that there are contrary views of the nature of the spiritual life. Addressing these antithetical notions is essential to counter their influence upon believers.

Pao writes:

Paul now focuses his critique of false teachings by warning the Colossian believers not to be misled by ascetic practices and cultic acts of worshipping angels. ... In this context...it is best to take this in the general sense of "condemn"... or "pass judgment"..."Let no one condemn you" builds on the similar call in v. 16 with a greater sense of urgency.⁷⁵

These deviant practices included self-humiliation or self-abasement. Apparently this was coupled with some type of angel veneration. Harris explains, "What Paul is countering here is not Christian humility but perhaps that parade of misguided, false humility, or self-humiliation that imagines that God is so holy that he is accessible only through angelic mediation."⁷⁶

Those who were advocating asceticism, flaunting humility, and revering angels were also visionaries. O'Brien notes, "Accordingly, the false teachers claimed to have joined in the angelic worship of God as they entered into the heavenly realm and prepared to receive visions of divine mysteries."⁷⁷ Pao suggests "worshipping the angels ... is an attempt to enter into the heavenly realm through visionary experiences to gain possession of that which escapes mere mortals."⁷⁸

These fanciful ritualistic notions were motivated by pride. Still says, "Paul viewed such visions and visionaries as vain. The apostle perceived proponents of the 'philosophy' as puffed up and eaten up with conceit. He seeks to deflate those whom he

⁷⁵ David W. Pao, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 187-188.

⁷⁶ Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 107.

⁷⁷ Peter T. O'Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 143.

⁷⁸ David W. Pao, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 190.

regards as inflated by and infatuated with such visions by linking their ‘revelatory experiences’ to the ‘fleshly mind.’”⁷⁹ The basis of this artificial spirituality is a worldly temporal perspective.

The spiritually transforming process is constantly under attack presenting alternatives, suggestions, and deviations—all pointing away from Christ. The deception is placing value in appearances, mixing Christianity with pagan cultural practices, validating faith through mystical experiences, and seeing value apart from God. A spiritually mature believer understands that transformation does not come by compliance with fanciful ritualistic and mystical notions of human origin.

Implication

We should be vigilant enough not to be deceived by appearances that seem to assist believers spiritually. This deception in reality just draws believers into legalism, mysticism or asceticism. We should always encourage believers to discipline themselves rather than determine legalistic measures to do so. The command in scripture is to deny yourself not legalize others.

Spiritually mature believers develop an eternal perspective about everything

A spiritually mature believer scrutinizes life from heaven’s vantage point. Gromacki states, “Paul’s use of the present imperative in this verse stresses constant, daily seeking....Christian perfection is a goal that demands diligent pursuit.”⁸⁰ Life is to be lived in the vertical not horizontal. This requires perpetually scanning his or her circumstances through an eternal lens.

⁷⁹ Still, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 319.

⁸⁰ Robert Gromacki, *Philippians & Colossians*, 191.

The reason believers must live with this eternal frame of reference is because they “have been raised with Christ,” and the implication is that “their lives are to be different: they have no life of their own since their life is the life of Christ. So their interests must be his interests.”⁸¹

Dunn indicates that this change is ubiquitous,

The language is metaphorical and not literal. The resurrection with Christ in a resurrection like Christ’s still lay in the future ... what was in mind was a change of perspective, not (yet) a (complete) ontological change ... the sort of change which follows from complete identification with another person or cause, when the service of that person or cause becomes all-consuming, the basis determiner of all priorities, the bubbling spring of a motivation, resolution, and application which perseveres despite even repeated setbacks.⁸²

Pao agrees. “The passive verb ‘you have been raised’ ... points to God’s actions ... in light of sharing in the resurrection of Christ, they are called to ‘seek the things above’. ... Paul makes it clear that the center of such heavenly attention is nothing but Christ himself.”⁸³

This perpendicular surveillance of a spiritually mature believer is motivated by Christ’s position in heaven. His position there encourages the Colossians “to give Christ an allegiance that takes precedence over all earthly loyalties. His ends are to be their ends; and it follows that the means by which those ends are attained must be his means.”⁸⁴ Harris states:

Paul is making two distinct affirmations—Christ is resident in “the realm above,” and he is enthroned there at God’s right hand.... “God’s right hand” is the place of unrivaled prestige and unparalleled authority; consequently, although believers

⁸¹ Peter O’Brien, *Word Bible Commentary*, 160.

⁸² Dunn, *The New International Greek New Testament Commentary*, 203.

⁸³ David W. Pao, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 210-211.

⁸⁴ G. B. Caird, *Letters from Prison*, New Clarendon Bible, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976) 202.

now “sit with Christ in the heavenly realms.” ... They do not “sit at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms,” as Christ does.⁸⁵

Christ’s position in heaven is permanent. It is a position of supreme privilege and authority. Christ is at God’s right hand, the place of honor and eventually judgment. Dunn says:

The picture is clear. God sits on a throne in heaven...with the exalted Christ sitting on a throne beside him. ... What made Christ’s throne different from other thrones ... is its proximity to God’s throne ... the exalted Christ sat on God’s immediate right...the image is one of power. The right (hand) of God ... was a way of expressing strength, powerful protection, and favor ... to sit at the king’s right was a sign of special recognition and authorization.⁸⁶

This actuality demands that a believer acclimatize his or her life to this heavenly outlook. Dunn understands that “the consequences for the Christian perspective are thus also clear. If Jesus, the Christ, is so highly favored and acknowledged to be God’s ‘right-hand man’ ... then [the] Christian life should be entirely oriented by reference to this Christ. ... What is in view is a complete reorientation of existence.”⁸⁷

Implication

In a practical way, to seek the things above involves: giving one’s attention to Jesus; giving Him first place in everything; giving Him priority; desiring Him above anything on earth; continually making a deliberate choice to follow Him, obey Him, think about Him, and meditate on His life-giving Word. MacArthur states it this way:

[Paul] desires that the Colossians’ preoccupation with heaven govern their earthly responses. To be preoccupied with heaven is to be preoccupied with the One who reigns there and His purposes, plans, provisions, and power. It is also to view the

⁸⁵ Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 120.

⁸⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *The New International Greek New Testament Commentary*, 204.

⁸⁷ James D. G. Dunn, *The New International Greek New Testament Commentary*, 205.

things, people, and events of this world through His eyes and with an eternal perspective.⁸⁸

Spiritually mature believers concentrate on the eternal not the temporal

Colossians 3:2 is an extrapolation of the preceding verse. A spiritually mature believer evaluates decisions from an eternal vantage point rather than an earthly one. The two commands differ in that the first emphasizes the more practical pursuits of life whereas the second stresses the whole bent of life. The first is outward and the second inward. Pao explains:

“Set your minds” goes beyond “seek” in emphasizing the need to dwell intently on the things above. ... This involves the transformation of one’s mind in the obedient submission to God’s will as manifested in both thoughts and actions. ... The second way this verse goes beyond v. 1 is the presence of the polarity between “above” and “earth.” Not only is Paul calling believers to focus intently on the things above, but he also urges them to reject the “things of the earth.”⁸⁹

“Set your mind” refers to the basic orientation, bent, and thought patterns of the mind, rather than the intellect per se, and thus it refers more to one’s inner impulse or disposition. A safeguard to impede seeking the earthly and temporal is a perpetual setting of one’s mind upon the things above. Harris posits:

The [present] tense denoting “a sustained effort or perspective”... focuses on the practical pursuit of heavenly or spiritual goals ... [mind] emphasizes the inner attitude necessary in that pursuit. ... Paul is not detracting from the importance of the material world and earthly concerns but rather is rejecting an earthbound mind-set. The remedy for submission to mundane regulations... is concentration of desire and thought on heavenly obligations.⁹⁰

Setting one’s mind on things above involves an act of one’s will and is something one must choose to do as a command not as an option. Jurgen Goetzmann notes, “The

⁸⁸ John MacArthur, Jr, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, 128.

⁸⁹ David W. Pao, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 212.

⁹⁰ Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 121.

way one thinks is intimately related to the way one lives, whether in Christ, in the Spirit and by faith, or alternatively in the flesh, in sin and in spiritual death. A man's thinking and striving cannot be seen in isolation from the overall direction of his life; the latter will be reflected in the aims which he sets himself."⁹¹ O'Brien says, "[Mind] expresses not simply an activity of the intellect, but also a movement of the will; it has to do with aims and the motives underlying them."⁹²

Implication

A spiritually mature believer is not determining temporal or horizontal solutions to life situations nor does he or she plan to prevail by taking advantage of the world's wisdom. One needs to approach each task, challenge, triumph and tragedy from a heavenly point of view. That means employing God's view of the world collaborating with the Word of God to invoke life decisions and change.

Sin and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Is Sin-Sensitive

Spiritually mature believers mortify fleshly tendencies.

They put a stop to sinful patterns of living and behavior. The imperative *put to death* "is based upon the previous indicatives which spell out what God has done in his Son the Lord Jesus Christ."⁹³ This verse marks a transition for the Colossians to conform to the new life Christ has secured for them.

⁹¹ Jurgen Goetzmann, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 2. Colin Brown gen. ed., Fifth Printing 1979 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 617.

⁹² Peter O'Brien, *Word Bible Commentary*, 163.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 176.

Dunn recognizes the force of the command stating, "The first specific exhortation is something of a surprise: 'therefore kill off your members which are on the earth'...but the metaphor should be allowed its force: the person's interaction with the wider world as through organs and limbs is what is in view."⁹⁴ T. K. Abbot understands this command to say, "Your true life is hidden, carry out this death to the world, and kill whatever is carnal in you."⁹⁵

Paul reiterated the believer's identification with the risen and enthroned Christ. Knowing this is true about us, we understand that we can and should put to death the things in our life that are contrary to our identity with Jesus. So, here is a command to act decisively and put away our old life that springs from our earthly nature. The members of the body are the "vehicles" to carry out the carnal desires of the flesh.

The list of sins to be mortified is primarily sexual. House notes that "Paul moved from the theological to the practical, into the realm where the believer is responsible for his actions. Five things Christians should exclude are fornication, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed or covetousness."⁹⁶

Immorality probably covers the whole range of unlawful sexual intercourse. Impurity refers to uncleanness or indecency. Lust is uncontrolled passion of an unrestrained sexual appetite. Evil desire is desire for something forbidden including sexual in nature. Greed is a consuming ambition that can be linked to an unrestrained

⁹⁴ Dunn, *The New International Greek New Testament Commentary*, 212.

⁹⁵ T. K. Abbot, *The International Critical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979) 280.

⁹⁶ H. Wayne House, *The Christian Life According to Colossians*, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151 (October-December 1994) 450.

sexual appetite in a person with power to gratify it.⁹⁷

Greed is connected to idolatry. This is the only place where idolatry is described with something other than overt worship of some other god. Apparently anything one lusts for or covets can be a god one worships. O'Brien states, "Instead of setting his aims and whole orientation on the things above, at the center of which is the exalted Christ, he is seeking the things below. He worships and serves the creature rather than the Creator."⁹⁸

Spiritually mature believers comprehend the struggle with sin that exists. Dunn posits:

Paul and Timothy clearly did not harbor any illusions regarding their converts. They did not attempt to promote a Christian perspective which was unrelated to the hard realities of daily life. On the contrary, they were all too aware of the pressures which shaped people like the Colossian Christians and which still held a seductive attraction for them. They were concerned that the Colossian believers' death with Christ, the atrophy of old habits of evil, had not yet worked through the full extent of their bodily relationships.⁹⁹

The process of spiritual transformation entails mortifying fleshly sexual inclinations. Being sin sensitive motivates a believer to take decisive and immediate action against this sinful desire in one's life.

Implication

Sin in the life of a believer is not to be tolerated. An aspect of spiritual maturity is the decisive nature by which sinful urges related to sexuality are sequestered. Those sinful tendencies cannot be reformed but they can be managed by decisive acts of

⁹⁷ Dunn, *The New International Greek New Testament Commentary*, 214-215.

⁹⁸ O'Brien, *Word Bible Commentary*, 184.

⁹⁹ Dunn, *The New International Greek New Testament Commentary*, 213.

estrangement. A spiritually mature believer pursues personal and spiritual integrity and sexual purity.

Spiritually mature believers put off careless and malicious speech (3:8)

On the one hand spiritual maturity is characterized by putting to death sexually sinful impulses. On the other hand spiritual maturity is distinguished by taking off angry emotions and attitudes. Hagelberg suggests that this is “a list of sins that relate to anger and our speech. We are to take off all these things. While the image in 3:5 is about killing off things, here it is about discarding old clothes that are no longer appropriate to wear.”¹⁰⁰

This list of sins consists of vices related to anger. Dunn notes, “The imperative is the cue for another fivefold vice list...in this case the vices named focus on personal relationships within the Christian community, warning against the outbursts particularly of careless or malicious speech that can be so damaging to community relations.”¹⁰¹ These angry sinful impulses do not suit believers who are spiritually mature.

The content of this list is inclusive of all sins related to anger. There are five of these that are catalogued. O’Brien states, “The sins to be out of are anger, quick temper, malice and the language which accompanies these things, slander and foul talk. ... As outbursts of temper they are destructive of harmony in human relationships and both [wrath and anger] must be put away.”¹⁰²

Anger is a reference to a smoldering bitterness. Wrath connotes an explosion of angry words or deeds. Malice is an attitude that intends harm to someone. Slander is

¹⁰⁰ Hagelberg, *A Commentary on Colossians*, 114.

¹⁰¹ Dunn, *The New International Greek New Testament Commentary*, 218.

¹⁰² O’Brien, *Word Bible Commentary*, 187.

utterance of false charges or misrepresentations. Abusive speech is shameful and abrasive and is further modified by the words 'from your lips' and concludes the inventory.¹⁰³

Implication

Put these habits of the old life away. Lay them aside like you would filthy, smelly, dirty clothes. A spiritually mature believer does not justify resolving conflict by intimidating others with abusive speech. Anger, wrath, and malice are sinful urges that are used to injure people. The pursuit of spiritual maturity will never include these attitudes in one's arsenal.

Spiritually mature believers are not dishonest with one another

The command is to stop lying. The present tense indicates that one is not to go on telling lies. Gromacki comments:

The first two commands stressed a crisis decision, a determined resolution to put away the sinful practices of the past. The present imperative ... points out daily interpersonal relationships within the church. It denotes two basic ideas: Stop lying if you have been doing it; and continually do not lie to one another. To lie is to tell a deliberate untruth, to create a wrong impression by revealing a partial truth, and to distort the facts by exaggeration.¹⁰⁴

Dishonesty characterized the former life and would damage relationships between believers in the household of God. Lying is an attempt to communicate falsehood with the evident purpose of misleading. According to MacArthur:

Paul warns against a final sin by exhorting believers not to lie to one another. Satan lied in deceiving Adam and Eve. ... Cain lied to God after murdering Abel. ... Abraham lied, claiming Sarah was his sister. ... Sarah lied to the three angelic visitors. ... Isaac lied by denying that Rebecca was his wife. ... Rebecca and Isaac lied in their conspiracy to defraud Esau of his birthright. ... That list does not even get us out of Genesis. Lying characterizes Satan ... not God. So it is not

¹⁰³ Still, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 328.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Gromacki, *Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series*, 198

unnecessary for Paul to urge those who are complete in Christ, and partakers of His risen life, to kill sin.¹⁰⁵

Lies of any kind are a perversion of something good. Truth by nature is good. Sin will pervert that good by the use of lies. The reason one can be called a liar is because truth exists. The reason one can be dishonest is because honesty exists. Truth and honest by nature are good. Lies and dishonesty are perversions. A trait of spiritual maturity is truth and honesty.

Implication

The habits of language are in need of constant and deliberate supervision. These patterns will not die swiftly or dislodge without regular skirmishes. A spiritually mature believer is engaged in this struggle so that his or her life is characterized as honest and truthful.

Godliness and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Adopts the Character of Christ

Spiritually mature believers put on compassionate benevolence

There are several Christlike attitudes that encompass the lifestyle of a believer who is exemplifying those characteristics that will coerce him or her to become complete in Christ. These characteristics reflect the character and attitudes of Jesus Christ. A spiritually mature believer is continually putting on godly character. Harris says, "Paul is enjoining the Colossians to wear those moral garments that are appropriate to their

¹⁰⁵ MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Colossians & Philemon*, 145.

calling and status.”¹⁰⁶

Spiritual transformation is associated with decisive action to clothe oneself with appropriate attitudes and actions consistent with someone who is spiritually mature. Gromacki indicates that the command “continues the imagery of clothing—removal of the old and putting on of the new. ... Here Paul describes believers three ways. First, they are the ‘chosen of God’ ... second, believers are ‘holy’ ... [and] third, believers are ‘beloved.’”¹⁰⁷

Chosen of God is the divine side of our salvation. To be holy describes believers being set apart to God and separated from the profane and the common in the world. Beloved means that believers are the objects of God’s love. This spiritual status requires a corresponding spiritual conduct. A directory of spiritual virtues chronicles this conduct.

Gromacki says “eight virtues are delineated within four general categories. The first two show believers’ treatment of others; the next two, their estimation of themselves; the next three, their reaction to ill treatment; and the final one, the all-pervasive principle of true discipleship.”¹⁰⁸ This catalogue of virtues is the core exhibition of a Christlike nature.

A “heart of compassion” denotes feelings of concern for the needs of others. “Kindness” is grace in action. “Humility” is dependence upon God. “Gentleness” is a spirit marked by quiet submission. “Patience” is a long temper. “Bearing with one another” means making allowances for each other. “Forgiving one another” is the act of violating justice by absorbing the hurtful consequences of someone’s action. Specifically,

¹⁰⁶ Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 139.

¹⁰⁷ Gromacki, *Philippians & Colossians*, 201.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 201

this forgiveness is to be applied toward whatever grievances or complaints one may have against another. How? By forgiving them as the Lord forgave—graciously, freely and magnanimously.

“Love” is beyond all these things as if love was the capstone of this moral edifice. Love is the overarching Biblical standard of moral behavior. Gromacki specifies “love...holds all of the other virtues in place. ...Love is the girdle that holds the other spiritual qualities, the clothing of the new man, in place. ...Love is ‘the perfect bond of unity.’ As the bond...it is that which binds together practical righteousness.”¹⁰⁹

“Perfect” describes the state of completeness, perfection, and complete maturity, full grown or in good working order. “Bond of Unity” ironically conveys the idea of a prison chain, which is described as leading to Christian maturity. The love produced by Christ constrains, restricts, or forces Christians to love and serve one another. The bond of perfection is the power, which unites and holds together all those graces and virtues, which together characterize spiritual maturity.

Implication

Grudges are not domicile in a spiritually mature believer’s life. An unforgiving ethos is inconsistent with spiritually mature transformation. Love is the bedrock upon which all Christian virtue is based. It is the essential ingredient for the exhibition of godly character. Compassionate benevolence sums up this entire archive of spiritual virtue.

Spiritually mature believers arbitrate peaceful outcomes and are thankful

The presence of the peace of Christ in a believer’s life is a tangible virtue. Still

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 202.

argues, “Paul encourages the Colossians to allow the peace of Christ to act as umpire, judge, or arbiter ... in their hearts.”¹¹⁰ Spiritually mature believers allow the peace of Christ to rule or arbitrate every debate and circumstance in their lives. Harris explains, “In making your decisions, in choosing between alternatives, in settling conflicts of will, a concern to preserve the inward and communal peace that Christ gave and gives should be your controlling principle.”¹¹¹

Dunn adds, “The metaphor is an attractive one: of the knowledge of what Christ has achieved and the inward calm tranquility which believers can enjoy in consequence, determining what courses should be followed in difficult decisions and how the tensions of community relations ... may be resolved.”¹¹²

Peace is the dominant pursuit of spiritually mature believers kinship within God’s household. Abbot remarks, “The sense then appears to be, ‘let the peace of Christ be the ruling principle in your hearts’. ... In order that this principle may govern your actions and your words, it must first govern your hearts.”¹¹³ Gromacki suggests, “All believers were divinely called in one body to a position of peace before God and to a practice of peace within the true church. Peace and unity go together.”¹¹⁴

This peace of Christ or the peace that Christ gives penetrates into the relationships within the body of Christ to assure amicable outcomes. Still thinks, “Paul assures the church that Christ will—if they will be willing and obedient—encompass them and enable them to live in unity and harmony. Indeed, the Colossians were called by God...to

¹¹⁰ Still, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 333.

¹¹¹ Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 143.

¹¹² Dunn, *The New International Greek New Testament Commentary*, 234.

¹¹³ Abbot, *The International Critical Commentary*, 289.

¹¹⁴ Gromacki, *Philippians & Colossians*, 203.

live peaceably in one body.”¹¹⁵

The spectacle of peacefully arbitrated outcomes is reinforced by thankfulness and gratitude. Abbot believes that “thankfulness for this calling is the strongest motive for the preservation of the peace to which they were called.”¹¹⁶ Thankfulness is more than a parenthetical notion at the end of the verse.

Dunn notes, “Almost as an afterthought Paul and Timothy add ‘And be thankful.’ ... We could translate ‘Be thankful people,’ to those who are characterized by their thankfulness, or indeed ‘keep being or becoming ... thankful,’ the verb indicating an ongoing responsibility. ... A spirit of thanksgiving should be the basic attitude of the Colossian Christians.”¹¹⁷

Implication

Peace should rule or arbitrate every debate or circumstance. However, it is the peace of Christ, specifically, that constitutes this peace. It is not peace that comes from tolerance or conformity. That peace violates the peace of Christ. The standard of this peace is compromise and toleration. The measurement of the peace of Christ is whatever is consistent with the Word of God and God’s view of the world. Inevitably, the peace of Christ and the peace of the world will conflict.

Spiritually mature believers put out the welcome mat for the Word of God

A spiritually mature believer places a welcome mat for the Word of God. The scripture must dwell within, thus becoming a permanent abiding part of one’s life.

¹¹⁵ Still, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 333.

¹¹⁶ Abbot, *The International Critical Commentary*, 290.

¹¹⁷ Dunn, *The New International Greek New Testament Commentary*, 235.

The outcome of the indwelling word is wise instruction and counsel. Still says, “The congregation is encouraged to let this word dwell, live, or abide richly in their midst as an operative, transformative force. How is it that ‘the word of Christ’ is to make its home among the community? The answer appears to be, by means of the assembly’s ministry of teaching, admonishing, and singing.”¹¹⁸ Harris states, “The concept is dynamic, not static: ‘the message of Christ’ is not merely to be present as a resident...but is to be operative as a powerful force.”¹¹⁹

The Word of Christ is paramount for spiritual transformation. Dunn remarks, “There is a richness in ‘the word of Christ’ which makes it an inexhaustible source of spiritual resource, intellectual stimulus, and personal and corporate challenge; but without the participants’ positive response its ‘indwelling’ might be feeble rather than rich.”¹²⁰

There are three outcomes that ensue from Christ’s Word taking up residence within a believer. Each of these begins with the word “with.” The first statement is teaching and admonishing “with all wisdom.” Wisdom is the skill to determine the best course of action based upon how things usually work. It is the application of common sense. Wisdom is applied to both teaching—providing instruction, and admonition—and warning and correcting. The combination dispatches a life that skillfully adapts teaching and proficiently avoids danger.

The second statement is singing “with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” Psalms may describe sacred odes expressing deliverance or praise. A hymn is a song in honor to God’s work or character. Spiritual songs evoke praise or distinction. It is also

¹¹⁸ Still, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 334.

¹¹⁹ Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 144.

¹²⁰ Dunn, *The New International Greek New Testament Commentary*, 237.

possible that these spiritual modes edify.

Pao explains it this way:

To their fellow members of the body of Christ, believers are called to teach and admonish one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. To God, they are to sing these songs. Both “teaching and admonishing” and “singing” should be considered as means through which one can allow the word of Christ to dwell in our hearts and in our midst.¹²¹

The third statement is “with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Gromacki says, “Thankful people acknowledge the working of the sovereign will of God in their lives and circumstances.”¹²² Spiritually mature believers display grateful spirits associated with their comprehension of God’s benevolence. Dunn concludes, “It is wholly to be expected that such singing would be a natural expression of gratitude to God; inspiration and thankfulness go hand in hand.”¹²³

Implication

The scriptures are essential for spiritual transformation. Biblical discipleship employs God’s Word in the task of teaching, instructing, and correcting. Grasping the will, heart, and mind of God through instruction that is accurate and evocative is the basis upon which spiritual maturity is possible. The dialogue of discipleship, admonishing and teaching, and arousing praise and worship, is in collaboration with the Word of God to invoke life change.

Household Relationships and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Aligns Each Role in the Family by God’s Design

¹²¹ Pao, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 249.

¹²² Gromacki, *Philippians & Colossians*, 203.

¹²³ Dunn, *The New International Greek New Testament Commentary*, 239.

Spiritually mature wives voluntarily submit to their husbands

The command is that wives be subject to their own husbands. The point is for wives to voluntarily accept the headship of their husbands. Submitting, then, is in the context of their scriptural responsibility. Submission of the wife is based upon her recognition of God's sovereign, ordained creative order. Harris writes, "In the present context ... [it] means 'wife' not 'woman,' and... 'husband' not 'man' ... it is a case of voluntary submission in recognition of the God-appointed leadership of the husband and the divinely ordained hierarchal order in creation."¹²⁴

The word "submission" means to place or rank oneself under. O'Brien notes, "The middle voice of the verb denotes to 'subject oneself,' 'acquiesce in,' and to 'acknowledge someone's dominion or power.' ... in the forty or so NT occurrences the verb carries an overtone of authority and subjection or submission to it."¹²⁵ Pao adds, "'Submit' ... is a middle present imperative, signifying that the wives should voluntarily subject themselves to their husbands."¹²⁶

The obligation of submission is commanded for a "wife [to] resist the temptation to rule her husband ... the desire to control a husband is part of the effects of the fall on women."¹²⁷ Submission does not imply subjugation nor does it suggest inferiority. Harold W. Hoehner comments,

But what was Paul's view? Was he a man of his times? Paul clearly considered husbands and wives to be partners as is evidenced by his teaching on equal conjugal rights (1 Cor. 7:2-4), a concept which was unheard of in that day. ...

¹²⁴ Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 154.

¹²⁵ O'Brien, *Word Bible Commentary*, 221.

¹²⁶ Pao, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 262.

¹²⁷ Hagelberg, *A Commentary on Colossians*, 131.

This is evidence that Paul viewed the wives as equal to husbands qualitatively even though subordinate with regard to the lines of authority.¹²⁸

A wife's submission is "as is fitting to the Lord." O'Brien posits, "The Christian wife should recognize and accept her subordinate place in this hierarchy, 'as is fitting.'" ¹²⁹

Harris says, "The Lord (Jesus) is the yardstick for determining what is fitting (v.18) or pleasing (v.20)."¹³⁰ A wife's submission is to her husband as well as it is to Christ. Hoehner argues:

[Some believe] the wife's submission is seen as supremely or exclusively to Christ and her submission to her husband is the mere occasion of or training ground for her higher allegiance to Christ. ... The problem with this view is that the text specifically states that wives are to submit to their husbands as well as to Christ, so it cannot refer exclusively to Christ. Submission to the husband becomes merely a by-product of her submission to the Lord. The main point of the text is submission to her husband and not the other way around. ... As she submits to her husband she also submits to her Lord. ... She is subordinate in both sets [of relationships].¹³¹

It follows, then, that a demanding husband cannot force a wife's submission upon her against her will. It is not the husband's role to make his wife submissive. A spiritually mature wife voluntarily and willingly fulfills her biblically defined responsibility to submit to her husband. Submission is biblical when it is voluntary and not coerced and according to what is correct or prescribed for a particular situation.

Implication

Submission for a wife is in the context of her scriptural responsibility. A wife

¹²⁸ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002) 735-36.

¹²⁹ O'Brien, *Word Bible Commentary*, 222.

¹³⁰ Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 155.

¹³¹ Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 737-38.

submitting herself to physical and emotional abuse or forced into slavery or having her life threatened is not submission that is fitting and proper either to her husband or to the Lord. Submission is obedience in areas of disagreement that do not violate the character of God. Spiritually mature wives are willing to be in submission to their husbands.

Spiritually mature husbands serve the greater good of their wives

A husband cannot exercise his authority as a dictator but as a servant. Still explains, “Here he calls on Colossian husbands to extend and exhibit this Christlike quality [of love] in marriage. The selfless service and tireless sacrifice that bind believers together are what must characterize and concretize a husband’s commitment to his wife.”¹³² A husband shepherds his wife as his sister in Christ, and additionally as his wife. His marriage has increased his obligation of Christian love for a sister in Christ to one who is also his wife. He now owes her both brotherly love and husbandly love.

A husband’s love for his wife is exemplified by Christ’s love for the church. Pao states, “In light of this Christological model, such love is not to be defined simply in emotional or sexual terms; it is to be defined by the will and the action of one who is willing to consider the other as the object of one’s concern.”¹³³

O’Brien comments, “The wife’s subordination to her husband has its counterpart in the husband’s duty to love his wife. This is not simply a matter of affectionate feeling ... or sexual attraction ... rather, it involves his unceasing care and loving service for her entire well-being.”¹³⁴

Marriage is not a fifty-fifty proposition. It’s one hundred percent of a husband

¹³² Still, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 338.

¹³³ Pao, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 268.

¹³⁴ O’Brien, *Word Bible Commentary*, 223.

being a loving husband and one hundred percent of a wife being a submissive wife. For a husband, marriage comes down to one question: Is she number one in my life? In other words, am I willing to put one woman above everything and everybody else in my life except God? That includes one's children and one's parents. A spiritually mature husband will spend the rest of his life being worthy of his wife's submission.

Implication

God does not envisage wives to be unloved. God intends wives to be regarded with ardor. A wife is not tolerated, intimidated, patronized or dismissed by a loving husband. A spiritually mature husband savors his wife; relishing her greatest good in life and gives whatever is required without counting the cost. God never wants to see a wife unloved.

Spiritually mature husbands do not treat their wives harshly

A husband is commanded to not be embittered against his wife. Dunn observes,

The passive voice here presumably implies that the bitterness is experienced by the husbands. What is in view, therefore, is probably the feeling of the dominant partner who can legally enforce his will on his wife but who will not thereby win her love and respect and can thus feel cheated and embittered at not receiving what he regards as his due.¹³⁵

The command is to evade rancor with one's wife. A husband should never manifest hostility toward his wife. The structure of the passage intimates the husband as the leader in the marriage. That leading is not lording but sensitive and gentle.

Harris notes, "This negative definition of love relates to action that must always

¹³⁵ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, 249.

be avoided.”¹³⁶ O’Brien states, “Christian husbands are not to become angry or incensed against their wives, either in thought or in word and deed. ... Avoidance of bitterness is an expression of obedience to the commandment to love.”¹³⁷ A spiritually mature husband will not hold hard feelings against his wife. Still says, “Christian husbands are not to feast on those things that produce bitterness between them and their wives; rather, they are to put away and to hold at bay all bitterness.”¹³⁸

Implication

God is telling husbands that bitterness toward their wives can become a problem. A husband who becomes angry with his wife, turns against her, and takes her for granted violates God’s designed intent for the relationship. So a husband must not be embittered against his wife. He cannot be harsh toward her. He is not resentful of her. A husband must love his wife. She is not a husband’s personal property. She is his life partner.

Children display spiritual maturity when they allow parents to establish boundaries

The command is for children to obey their parents. O’Brien explains,

The injunction to children, like that to slaves, is put more strongly than the one to wives. While the latter was expressed in the middle voice ... suggesting voluntary submission, the admonitions to children and slaves are in the active imperative denoting absolute obedience. The absoluteness of the command is strengthened by the phrase “in all things.”¹³⁹

Parenting children is setting boundaries for them. Children being parented must not rebel against that authority. Pao articulates:

In two ways, this call demands more from these children as compared to wives.

¹³⁶ Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 155.

¹³⁷ O’Brien, *Word Bible Commentary*, 223-224.

¹³⁸ Still, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 338.

¹³⁹ O’Brien, *Word Bible Commentary*, 224.

First, the verb 'obey'... points to a stronger sense of obedience than the call for the wives to 'submit.'... Second, this imperative is followed by the all-encompassing phrase 'in everything' which emphasizes the comprehensive scope of their obedience to their fathers.¹⁴⁰

The phrase "well-pleasing to the Lord" means to obey the expectation conveyed through the boundaries that parents establish for their children. Those boundaries are appropriate in all spheres for children as long as the parameters do not violate biblical morality. Obeying and not rebelling against parents' authority pleases God because it reflects the order he established in the home.

Parenting is replaced with discipleship when setting boundaries is no longer applicable for adult children. O'Brien states, "Children are enjoined to obey their parents in all things...probably refers to children who are growing up and are still subject to their parents ... rather than those who have already grown up."¹⁴¹ Adult children are children who have established themselves outside of the home independent of their parents.

Implication

Whenever one reads something that is said to be pleasing to the Lord, it should be noted. Children who exemplify spiritual maturity will obey their parents. God is pleased when the God-given priorities within the family unit are honored. Still declares, "Children, at least ideally, benefit from the physical, emotional, and financial expenditures of their parents. ... Parents are to be responsible *for* children; children are to be responsible *to* parents. Both parties are ultimately accountable to Christ."¹⁴²

Spiritually mature fathers do not presume upon their children's obedience

¹⁴⁰ Pao, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 269.

¹⁴¹ O'Brien, *Word Bible Commentary*, 224.

¹⁴² Still, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 339.

Fathers are commanded to not provoke their children. Paul, addressing fathers, assumes they are the responsible disciplinarians of the family. O'Brien comments:

Fathers are enjoined not to irritate or provoke their children lest they lose heart and become timid. ... Here [it] signifies to "irritate" either by nagging at them or by deriding their efforts. ... Fathers are to obey the injunction so that their children ... do not become discouraged or think it is useless trying to please them within the common life of the home.¹⁴³

Still writes, "Paul warns fathers not to browbeat or ride roughshod over their children, lest they become dispirited, downcast, despondent, or disheartened. ... Overbearing fathers suck the marrow out of their children's lives by squelching their enthusiasm and motivation."¹⁴⁴

A spiritually mature father does not presume upon his children's obedience. Children must not be fathered in such a way that they are constantly agitated with unreasonable demands and unrealistic expectations that exasperate and provoke their spirits. David Dewitt admits:

Some children are rebellious because they are driven to it by an overbearing father who exercises law but not grace, and understands neither. Law is for rebellion, chaos, and disorder, but maturity comes only with grace. ... Discipline can keep him out of trouble, but it will never give him the motivation to live life.¹⁴⁵

Implication

When fathers and parents are nitpicking, unrealistically strict, demanding, or perfectionist they are often projecting their own personal, psychological or spiritual issues upon their children. Fathers must stop nagging and irritating their children.

¹⁴³ O'Brien, *Word Bible Commentary*, 225-26.

¹⁴⁴ Still, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 339-40.

¹⁴⁵ David DeWitt, *The Mature Man: Becoming a Man of Impact*, (Gresham, Oregon: Vision House, 1994) 175.

Parenting children is a responsibility to be fulfilled according to God's priority arrangement for the family. Children are not an inconvenience to be controlled.

Hierarchal Relationships and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Aligns with the Authority Structure within Superior to Subordinate Relationships

Spiritually mature subordinates perform excellent work with integrity

The nature of hierarchal relationships includes a superior and a subordinate. The thrust of the argument is that superior to subordinate relationships is to be aligned with a biblically established authority structure. Slaves, as subordinates, are addressed first.

Slaves are commanded to obey their superiors or masters. Gromacki comments, "Slaves must obey their human masters. The imperative ... stresses constant, daily obedience that extends to all things, both pleasant and unpleasant."¹⁴⁶

O'Brien suggests, "Slaves who have become believers are to accept their station as slaves [or subordinates] and to obey their earthly masters in everything. The expression ... 'your masters [or superiors] according to the flesh' is not to be understood negatively or disparagingly, but rather shows that they are only lords within an earthly realm."¹⁴⁷

The slave's responsibility is to do the will of another. Slaves serve superiors who have authority over them. As their earthly masters, they are to be obeyed. This signifies the powerlessness of the slave as the subordinate in the relationship, but forms the context within which godliness can be manifested. Paul's attitude toward slavery is

¹⁴⁶ Gromacki, *Philippians & Colossians*, 211.

¹⁴⁷ O'Brien, *Word Bible Commentary*, 226.

summed up in 1 Corinthians 7:20-24. He states:

Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able to become free, rather do that. For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called.

A subordinate's work is not to be done as solely external service to please men.

Harris lists three possible meanings of external service: "(i) service that is concerned only with what the eye can see (i.e., external appearances); (ii) service that is rendered only under the master's eye (i.e., only when he watching); or (iii) service that is performed only to make an impression in the owner's presence."¹⁴⁸

Most likely all three can be combined to emphasize the meaning here. Gromacki says, "Slaves must work for God. The imperative 'do' ... denotes faithful toil and labor. This covers all of one's assigned responsibilities ('whatever you do') ... must be done with enthusiasm. The adverb *heartily* ... literally reads 'out of soul' ... work should not be performed merely for humans."¹⁴⁹

Slaves serve with integrity not only when being watched by superiors but also with the awareness that they are accountable to God. Still warns:

They should not render "eye-service" ... i.e., working well when the master is watching in order to make a positive impression and possibly procure his favor. ... Such duplicitous, disingenuous service is performed in an effort "to pull the wool over" the master's eyes. The shortsighted goal of such service is not to be pleasing but to be a pleaser.¹⁵⁰

Fearing the Lord divulges the primary motivation for this single-minded obedience.

¹⁴⁸ Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 157.

¹⁴⁹ Gromacki, *Philippians and Colossians*, 211.

¹⁵⁰ Still, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 342.

Implication

The apostles never prohibited slavery or ridiculed superior to subordinate relationships. They saw all classes of believers as brothers in Christ, and that was to dominate their social relationships. For subordinates, submission to superiors is required. Agreement is not submission. Submission begins with disagreement. Obedience is only credible when a subordinate complies even when he or she disagrees with a superior. Spiritually mature subordinates will obey.

Spiritually mature subordinates are concerned about the manner in which they do their work

The command “whatever you do, do your work heartily” carries the idea of the commitment of a subordinate worker to go above and beyond his or her essential responsibility. The imperative “do” encompasses the idea of achieving every assigned responsibility appointed to a subordinate. According to Still, “The apostle admonishes slaves in particular to work heartily ... in whatever they do. Slaves are to not only obey their masters with singularity of heart but are also to perform their given duties with all the energy they can muster.”¹⁵¹

The work is to be done “heartily”—a word that conveys putting one’s entire sentiments behind the effort. These descriptions communicate the inner commitment and outward passion to perform one’s service as a subordinate. The manner in which the work is to be done clarifies the nature of the obedience. Dunn observes, “‘Whatever’ ... broadens out the scope ... to include the actions and commitments engaged in beyond

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 342.

what the master required.”¹⁵²

The exhortation to work enthusiastically is sustained by the motivation to do all the work as if the Lord had assigned it, even though it is being done for human masters.

Dunn acknowledges:

The implication is that one of the chief dangers of the slave status was a lack of personal motivation, which made all work a drudgery provided grudgingly, with lack of effort and always with a view to doing as little as one could get away with...the danger was such that it required repeated warning.¹⁵³

All endeavors of believing subordinates ought to be characterized by enthusiasm, confidence, excellence, and diligence.

Implication

Spiritually mature subordinates serve with magnanimity and without expectation of recognition. They never serve superiors with a spirit of entitlement. All work done by believers, whether it is building an orphanage or building a profit corporation should be done “as for the Lord rather than for men.”¹⁵⁴ That is the proper perspective for all labor, including a subordinate who is toiling for his or her master.

Spiritually mature superiors treat subordinates with justice and equity

The command is for masters or superiors to treat slaves or subordinates with justice and equity. There are two things a master is exhorted to give his or her subordinates: treating them justly and treating them fairly. Gromacki writes, “First, masters should render what is just. If a master refuses to do this, he does wrong ... and

¹⁵² Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, 255.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Col. 3:23.

will be judged by God for this sin. "¹⁵⁵ O'Brien summarizes, "The apostle does not command the masters to free their slaves, but he clearly 'points to an amelioration of the slaves' lot'... they are to treat them justly and fairly."¹⁵⁶

The emphasis is upon superiors dispensing equitable consideration upon subordinates who work for or serve them. Gromacki lists several interpretations of this concept: (1) It implies the emancipation of the slaves; (2) Masters should execute responsibility to their subordinates with the same care subordinates serve masters; (3) Masters should consider slaves the same way God handles masters; (4) It denotes the equality of the brotherhood; and (5) It could indicate a superior not give one subordinate more and another less for doing the same job or rendering the same service with comparable excellence. He should not exhibit partiality.¹⁵⁷ The point is that superiors should never lose sight of God's righteous character as they dispense just and equitable management of their subordinates.

Harris also understands this concept to be stressed by Paul. He writes, "But it may also point to concrete instances of fairness, acts that are equitable rather than equity as an abstract principle. Paul is not enjoining social equality through the emancipation of slaves but rather even-handedness of treatment."¹⁵⁸ The motivation for doing so is eternal not temporal. O'Brien states,

The motivation for this just and fair treatment is basically the same as the slave's motive for obeying his master. ... Masters also ... like their slaves, are answerable to a greater Master in heaven. ... This one Lord and Judge will decide

¹⁵⁵ Gromacki, *Philippians & Colossians*, 213.

¹⁵⁶ O'Brien, *Word Bible Commentary*, 232.

¹⁵⁷ Gromacki, *Philippians & Colossians*, 213.

¹⁵⁸ Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 162.

whether these earthly masters have done what is just and fair. His will is the assessment that really counts.¹⁵⁹

Paul warned that “he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done and that without partiality.”¹⁶⁰

Implication

Spiritually mature superiors will not defraud subordinates by cheating them or threatening or mistreating them or showing favoritism among them. Possessing power or authority over someone must be dispensed with reflection and deliberation. Slave masters or superiors have the same responsibility as their slaves and subordinates. Superiors are simply assigned a different role in life. But they serve the same master in heaven and will be judged by him who is not partial to masters or to slaves, but to those obedient to Him.

Practical Holiness and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Assumes Spiritual Responsibility

Spiritually mature believers pray in the rhythm of daily life

Biblical prayer is communicating a message to God when He is not visibly manifested. The command is to communicate messages to God continually, not occasionally. There are three facets associated with prayer.

The first is the command to be devoted to prayer. Gromacki notes, “The imperative ... means to devote one’s time, attention, and strength to a task.”¹⁶¹ Harris adds that it means to “adhere to, persist in, be busily engaged in [and] be devoted to [prayer].”¹⁶² Devotion to prayer requires endurance more than being adept at it.

¹⁵⁹ O’Brien, *Word Bible Commentary*, 233.

¹⁶⁰ Col. 3:25

The second facet is to be alert in prayer. Gromacki says, “Believers should be vigilant in their prayer life. They should watch and pray to avoid spiritual defeat. ... Watchfulness involves mental alertness and spiritual vigilance, a sensitive awareness that one is in danger.”¹⁶³ According to Harris, “Paul is encouraging mental and spiritual alertness in prayer ... perhaps even watchfulness against temptation.”¹⁶⁴ Since prayer is a message communicated to God, it is crucial to be alert and mindful of one’s dispatches to Him. Being resolute and alert while praying means that our prayers are about specific things, specific needs, and specific requests. It is much easier to be alert about specifics than about concerns that are just universal observations.

The third facet of prayer is praying with an attitude of thanksgiving. Dunn remarks, “Here it provides an important balance to the call for watchfulness: they are to keep alert, not in a spirit of fear or anxiety, but with the confidence and assurance that their resources (in Christ) are more than equal to the potential challenges.”¹⁶⁵ Thankfulness should always be the main theme of every prayer.

Implication

A spiritually mature believer devotes time and attention to prayer. A characteristic of spiritual maturity is preoccupation with prayer. This is tenacious praying that persists as a constant pattern in one’s life. Thomas L. Constable believes “that we should add watchfulness to our prayers, as an essential ingredient in a recipe. Along with praying we need to remain watchful to what is going on around us. ... [With]

¹⁶¹ Gromacki, *Philippians & Colossians*, 213.

¹⁶² Harris *Colossians and Philemon*, 166.

¹⁶³ Gromacki, *Philippians & Colossians*, 214.

¹⁶⁴ Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 166.

¹⁶⁵ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, 262.

thanksgiving ... we should pray, and keep alert when we pray.”¹⁶⁶ The most consequential practice to perpetuate in relation to God is prayer.

Spiritually mature believers engage pagans so that interchanges are personally and spiritually productive

Conducting one's life is a common idiom for one's lifestyle or behavior. The command is to walk in wisdom. Spiritual transformation produces wise living among unbelievers. Dunn suggests, “The final exhortation is directed to the Colossian believers' relations with their non-Christian neighbors and those they encountered at work and in the marketplace.”¹⁶⁷ Still states, “He begins by enjoining them to ‘walk ... with/in wisdom toward the ones outside.’ ... Walking worthily entailed, among other things, conducting themselves with wisdom in relation to non-Christians.”¹⁶⁸

Wisdom is a discerning grasp of the obvious. Biblical wisdom always incorporates the revelation of God recorded in the Bible. Wisdom fathoms how elements fit together and then connects the dots to portray the appropriate outcome. This wise conduct is intended to be on display in one's contact with pagans. Still remarks, “The apostle wanted the Colossians to make the most of their interaction with outsiders, or, as he puts it ...to ‘redeem [or buy back] the time.’ ...Paul is encouraging the Colossians not to squander any potential opportunity to share the gospel with outsiders by acting wisely.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Thomas L. Constable, *Talking to God: What the Bible says about Prayer*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995) 66.

¹⁶⁷ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, 264.

¹⁶⁸ Still, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, 347.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 347.

Opportunities come and go to bear witness of our faith to pagans. O'Brien conveys, "It is quite natural to take the participle as specifying the means by which the command for the readers to conduct themselves wisely is to be carried out, that is, by 'snapping up every opportunity that comes.'"¹⁷⁰ Harris posits, "Christians are to make a 'timely' purchase for themselves. In other words, they are to seize eagerly and use wisely every opportunity afforded them by time to promote the kingdom of God."¹⁷¹

A spiritually mature believer understands the requirement for a valid witness to be maintained. Premiere conditions must be established for an effective testimony. Dunn observes:

Here the note comes in a sequence in which responsibility toward others is emphasized, including the obligation to make the revelation more widely known. To hold a balance maintaining distinctive commitment and promoting genuine communication with others is never easy.¹⁷²

Implication

Spiritually mature believers employ opportunities to engage unbelievers with the gospel. Gromacki explains, "All have the same amount of time; the clock is no respecter of person. The child of God, however, must buy out...opportunities to reach the lost with an effective witness."¹⁷³ Conversation with pagans, about things pertaining to the gospel should be with grace not law. The interaction should be motivational and interesting (flavored with salt). The dialogue should be tailored to each individual not just a memorized approach. Conversation and witness with unbelievers should be stimulating.

¹⁷⁰ O'Brien, *Word Bible Commentary*, 241.

¹⁷¹ Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 170.

¹⁷² Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, 265.

¹⁷³ Gromacki, *Philippians & Colossians*, 215.

This chapter has elucidated specific aspects of spiritual maturity from the commands prescribed in the book of Colossians. The chapter began with an explanation of the nature of spiritual maturity and its relationship to Paul's ministry declared in Colossians 1:28. An overview of these traits was then graphed to exhibit the organic relationship between them. The remainder of the chapter was an extended exegesis of the specific spiritual maturity traits in Colossians.

CHAPTER THREE

THE EXTRA-BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. First, it elucidates the nature of the relationship between discipleship and spiritual maturity. That relationship has several components that are identified and then explained. Each of these elements combines to formulate the organic nature that amalgamates discipleship and spiritual maturity.

The second purpose is to disclose the essential qualities of spiritual maturity. These features include insights about spiritual maturity as well as evidences of spiritual maturity. The essence of spiritual maturity is delineated by several characteristics. These attributes are compiled in several kinds of groupings that highlight various aspects of spiritual maturity.

The Relationship of Discipleship to Spiritual Maturity

The trajectory of ministry is spiritual maturity. The process en route to spiritual maturity is spiritual growth. The apparatus of spiritual growth is discipleship. Discipleship is both modeled and mandated in scripture. Discipleship is the propulsion that induces spiritual growth, which fosters spiritual maturity.

Discipleship: The Impetus for Spiritual Maturity

In chapter one, discipleship was defined as the process whereby a person intentionally impacts another person in the direction of Christlikeness. Dr. David A. DeWitt provides further commentary on this definition of discipleship. "Discipleship is not just any-ole-thing that happens to people after they become Christians. It is a very

specific thing requiring a very specific focus.”¹⁷⁴ Disciple-making ministry compels the process of spiritual growth that sets one on the path toward spiritual maturity. This is the specific emphasis of discipleship ministry.

The provision of discipleship

The impulse of discipleship ministry is in the direction of spiritual maturity. DeWitt describes the contribution of discipleship to one’s spiritual growth leading to spiritual maturity, paraphrased as follows:

First, biblical discipleship is a ministry that someone initiates with another. It is something a discipler is resolved to do with a disciple. Someone deliberately begins the process of discipleship to engage with another’s need for spiritual growth.

Second, biblical discipleship is a ministry that influences spiritual growth to change someone. Life change is fostered by means of intimacy not proximity. One can make an impression at a distance, but life-change impact happens close-up.

Third, biblical discipleship is an incarnational ministry. Discipleship is a relational and personal endeavor. It instills spiritual competence into someone individually, one person at a time. It invests personally into the spiritual life of another to enhance spiritual growth.

Fourth, biblical discipleship is a ministry that fosters spiritual maturity. A person reproduces the life of Christ in greater degree within every dimension of his or her life. Discipleship is meant to propel one toward spiritual maturity. That process is traversed by

¹⁷⁴ David A. DeWitt, *Discipleship*, Unpublished Study Book, (Relational Concepts, Inc.) www.relationalconcepts.org, 1.

means of discipleship.¹⁷⁵

The progression of discipleship

Discipleship furnishes the procedure by which a person progresses into the realm of spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity is distinct from the realm of spiritual babyhood and childhood manhood or womanhood. This is the place where a believer's life consistently aligns with God's status as a member of His household. Spiritual growth enables one to exemplify spiritual maturity but, in doing so, one must span the other realms in order to venture into spiritual maturity. DeWitt posits some additional elements of what discipleship achieves in this progression, paraphrased as follows:

First, discipleship is a continual process of learning for both the discipler and the learner. As soon as either stops learning, the discipleship process begins dying. This is why the discipling teacher needs to be a perpetual learner.

Second, discipleship is a multiplication mentality. Disciplers often see large gatherings as a hindrance, getting in the way of the multiplication process. Disciplers think about how they can get their learner to reproduce his or her life in others.

Third, disciples are connected to a network of relationships in their lives. Those involved in discipleship may know people around town, across a region, and even overseas. They are personally involved with these people, helping, teaching, modeling, correcting or praying. These networks are the highways for discipleship.

Fourth, disciples are people who want to be disciplined. All ministry, including discipleship, requires three things: (1) a need, (2) someone ready willing and able to meet

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

that need, and (3) a willingness for the need to be met on the part of the one with the need.

Fifth, discipleship is life-long. The apostles never abandoned their disciples. They were not always physically with them but they always longed to be with them. The discipling relationship is one that is continued indefinitely. Sometimes it continues in some way all their lives.

Sixth, discipleship is restricted to the Word of God. Biblical discipleship employs God's Word in the task of teaching, instructing, and correcting. The focus is on the righteous character of God revealed throughout scripture and the incarnated person of Jesus Christ. It is not through the wisdom of the world.

Seventh, discipleship does not have a temporal perspective. Discipleship has no appeal to those who desire to be healthy, wealthy, and wise on this earth. If one wants to fix the world problems, influence its politics, or decide how to tolerate worldly wisdom, one will not be very intrigued by discipleship.

The barrier to discipleship

Inherent in discipleship is the tension created from pursuing the alignment in one's daily life with the new life one already possesses as a believer. This agitation comes from the infusion of God's view of reality into the life of a growing disciple. The process of spiritual growth forces a believer to incorporate a biblical perspective into his or her life. This process of growth toward maturity is the cause of spiritual struggle for the disciple.

In his research, George Barna reveals, "there is substantial interest among

Christians in doing something that will take them to the next level spiritually.”¹⁷⁶

However, according to the same research Barna notes:

To some people, mentoring may be a scary proposition. It implies personal openness to evaluation, willingness to consistently work on areas of weakness, and submission to the guidance of someone else. ... Our research revealed another important insight: Past positive experiences in mentoring do not automatically produce believers who are anxious to be mentored in the future.¹⁷⁷

J. Oswald Sanders acknowledges that believers must beware of “the peril of unconscious regression [that] confronts us all. ... The warning is plain. We should be alert to detect early signs of premature spiritual senility appearing in our inner lives, for it is not too difficult to maintain spiritual appearances, while inward reality is lacking.”¹⁷⁸

Sanders suggests that there are three areas of regression a disciple needs to ponder that mark a believer in spiritual regression. The first is “sluggishness in hearing the Word and achieving spiritual insight.” He writes, “God will not do our thinking for us, nor will He read the Bible and pray instead of us. This is our part, and if we fail to do it, our unused faculties will atrophy.”¹⁷⁹

The second is an inability to teach others when one ought to be able to teach. “In its ordinary sense the art of teaching is the ability to communicate truth, and in this sense all Christians should be teachers, passing on to others the truth they have learned and experienced...we are under obligation to share our discoveries with others who need it and can profit by it.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ*, (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2001) 48.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁷⁸ J. Oswald Sanders, *In Pursuit of Maturity*, (Grand Rapids: Lamplighter Books published by Zondervan, 1986) 187.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 190-191.

The third area of decline is a reversion to spiritual infancy. He says,

The *Corinthian* Christians were spiritual infants because of what they *did*. The *Hebrew* Christians had reverted to infancy because of what they had *failed to do*. ... Strong meat is for strong people, and strong meat makes strong people. A believer becomes mature through a diligent study of Scripture, which enables him or her to formulate standards of conduct that conform to the Word. The believer is careful to translate scriptural truth into practice.¹⁸¹

Barna mentions the fact that even though believers may indicate an interest in spiritual mentoring, only one out of seven adults in a survey he conducted said they are very interested in being mentored now or in the future. He posits:

Why the apparent change of heart? First, most church adults are busy, and being mentored is a time-consuming, energy-depleting commitment. More people are looking to simplify their lives than are seeking to add more time pressures. Second, participation in coaching requires an admission of incompleteness or immaturity, and people do not lightly admit to such deficiencies. Third, effective coaching requires that the student accept the expertise, motives, and style of the coach—all elements of trust.¹⁸²

Discipleship is not automatic. Discipleship is not easy. The adoption of a biblical conception of the world is daunting. It collides with a believer's original comprehension of the world's preferences requiring diligent effort to conform to this new standard.

Barna concludes:

The chief barrier to effective discipleship is not that people do not have the ability to become spiritually mature, but that they lack the passion, perspective, priorities, and perseverance to develop their spiritual lives. Most Christians know that spiritual growth is important, personally beneficial, and expected. ... In the end it boils down to personal priorities.¹⁸³

One of the principles mentioned earlier was that in order for discipleship to be effective a believer must be willing to be discipled. Without this desire disciple ministry is crippled.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 191.

¹⁸² Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 54.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 54.

Discipleship is an investment into one's spiritual maturity. That investment requires the time and energy essential for making an impact. Unfortunately, Barna notes,

For most of us, regardless of our intellectual assent to the importance of Christian growth, our passions lie elsewhere—and our schedule and energy follow those passions. ... Few believers, regardless of the route they select to generate growth, have goals—and most of the goals that have been set are either vague or elementary.¹⁸⁴

The resolve of discipleship

Biblical discipleship is relentless about the evolution of spiritual maturity in a believer's life. Sanders indicates, "Discipleship and spiritual maturity go hand in hand. The mature Christian will understand the principles of discipleship and will bring his or her life into conformity with the conditions so clearly enunciated by the Master."¹⁸⁵

He goes on to enumerate some of the fundamental principles Jesus taught his followers about growth through discipleship. The first is the continuance principle. Jesus often taught his disciples to continue in His Word. "This gives the *inward* view of discipleship, the attitude of the pupil to the teacher—permanent continuance in the words of the Master. Where this element is absent, discipleship is merely nominal and lacks reality."

The second is called the love principle. Jesus commanded the disciples to love one another. "This gives the *outward* view of discipleship and involves one's relations to others." Jesus expected the disciples to love others as he loved them. His love was selfless. His love was forgiving. His love was sacrificial. This is the paramount principle of discipleship.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 54-55.

¹⁸⁵ Sanders, *In Pursuit of Maturity*, 59.

The third is called the fruit principle. This is the *upward* view of discipleship. A fruitless disciple is a contradiction in terms. If there is no genuine spiritual fruit in one's life, he or she is not a disciple. Jesus indicated that one needed to die in order to produce spiritually. The fruit includes one's character. The disciple is recognized by his or her likeness to Christ in inward character. The fruit also includes fruit of service. One way this is displayed is when Christians are led to spiritual maturity.¹⁸⁶

Discipleship is about change. Christ engaged in discipleship to institute an entirely new frame of reference for his disciples. In the book, *Organic Discipleship*, the authors, Dennis McCallum and Jessica Lowery, summarize the goal for discipleship as embracing radical change in:

Character (having a good personal walk with God, becoming a loving person with successful relationships ... exchanging selfishness for other-centeredness; freedom from discrediting sin; manifesting the fruit of the Spirit, a relatively stable emotional life, etc.). ... Understanding (a thoroughly developed Christian worldview, good theology, knowledge of the Bible, and ability to use the Bible in ministry, wisdom, discernment, resistance to false teaching, etc.)....[and] Ministry capability (ability to successfully minister in evangelism, pasturing others, personal discipleship, teaching. ... Spiritual growth is never complete when it only benefits us. We are created to give love through serving others.).¹⁸⁷

McCallum and Lowery recognize that the combination of

these constitute a person who is "complete in Christ," as Paul puts it (Col. 1:28). Many of the changes we seek will be very difficult and involve many months of struggle ... [but] as we continue to grow and patiently convey what we know of God, our disciples will make surprising progress over the course of several years.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 61-67.

¹⁸⁷ Dennis McCallum and Jessica Lowery, *Organic Discipleship: Mentoring Others into Spiritual Maturity and Leadership*, (Columbus: New Paradigm Publishing, 2012) 23.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 23-24.

The authors suggest the manner in which a discipler can look for improvement in the life of one's disciple. They provide detailed explanation in nine areas about the outcome of disciple making.

First, God's grace. One's disciples need to understand the central bible themes of Law and Grace. Both personal salvation and spiritual growth are accomplished through drawing on God's grace, rather than through humanistic self-improvement.

Second, character change. It is important that our disciples see their lives changed and their character conformed to the image of Christ. Seeing real progress in character development is slow and often difficult. One's disciples must understand that being conformed to Christ's image is a process of growth, not a quick fix.

Third, interpreting the Bible. One's disciples should be equipped to use their Bibles. The scriptures are essential for spiritual transformation. Influencing disciples in the direction of Christlikeness is a direction consistent with a proper understanding of the Word of God.

Fourth, understanding God. One's disciples need to understand God and his attributes. The fact that one can trust God's character enables him or her to do ministry and to pray and serve based on the attributes of God as revealed in scripture. This is especially necessary to refute false teaching and correct people's misconceptions.

Fifth, Satan. One's disciples will need to know about who Satan is and how he works. This knowledge is essential to wage effective spiritual warfare. This includes comprehending worldly wisdom, which is used by Satan and demons to influence the world system where one lives, works, and raises a family.

Sixth witnessing. Disciples should be taught how to share their faith and address

unbelievers who may have questions or are antagonistic. A disciple should know what he or she believes and why in order to engage the curious whenever the opportunity emerges.

Seventh, the body of Christ. Disciples should grasp an understanding of the body of Christ. In addition, a disciple should learn biblical principles of Christian ministry. Involvement in discipleship is service that has eternal ramifications and it accelerates spiritual growth in disciple's lives.

Eighth, special relationships. Effective disciples develop specific skills that apply to particular relationships. People are all over the continuum of spiritual growth. Knowing how to assist people to make movement toward spiritual maturity from where they are at on this continuum is required for those engaged in a ministry of discipleship.

Ninth, the Holy Spirit and Jesus. Growing disciples are knowledgeable about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. They understand the need for His transforming power to change lives. When it comes to Jesus, one's disciples should grasp His person and work and be capable to refute teaching that diminishes biblical Christology.¹⁸⁹

These nine domains fuse together who a disciple is becoming and what a disciple is doing, along with what a disciple is learning. This amalgamation navigates a disciple's course toward spiritual maturity.

The implications of discipleship

The goal of the Christian life is to become like Christ. In the gospels, discipleship was possible because Jesus was physically present. After Jesus ascended to heaven, no

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 271-77.

longer physically present, this necessitated a change in the concept of discipleship.¹⁹⁰

James G. Samra explains,

In the gospels, becoming like Christ was accomplished by physically going where He went, seeing what He did, hearing what He said. But in Acts and the Epistles, because Christ was not physically present, becoming like Him could not be accomplished by spending time with Him. Instead of the word “disciple,” a new but related concept was brought to the forefront, namely, the concept of imitation.¹⁹¹

The concept of imitation becomes the locution for spiritual maturity. Samra states, “Imitation then is similar to discipleship in the sense that it is the process of transferring one’s lifestyle to the next generation. Having progressed in the process of imitating Christ, Paul encouraged his converts to imitate *him*.”¹⁹² Imitation of Christ’s life by a discipler is a valuable medium by which spiritual transformation can flourish in the life of our disciples.

Samra comments, “As less mature believers interact with more mature believers who are incarnating Christ’s character, the less mature believer becomes more like Christ. Seeing the truths of Christianity lived out in someone makes these truths real.”¹⁹³ This is how a mature believer initiates and sustains ministry with a less mature disciple. The imitation of Christ in the life of a discipler substantiates his or her discipleship ministry to others.

Samra provides several themes conveying exactly what it is believers should imitate. The themes include humility, self-sacrifice and unconditional love. To imitate Paul and Christ was to seek the good of others and not one’s own good. Paul also

¹⁹⁰ James G. Samra, *A Biblical View of Discipleship*, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:638 (April-June 2003) 222.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 224.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

encouraged Christians to consider others better than themselves and to serve others' interests above their own. To serve others was to follow the example Christ set for us.

Another theme to be imitated was commitment to serving God. Samra writes,

Paul urged the Philippians to imitate him as he earnestly sought to become like Christ (Phil. 3:17). Paul rejected the things of this world ... and sought desperately to have full knowledge of Jesus Christ and to be transformed by the power that raised Him from the dead. He wanted the Philippians to follow him in this endeavor.

An additional theme to imitate was receiving and sharing the gospel with joy. Paul commended believers in Thessalonica for imitating him by receiving his message with joy in spite of great suffering. Here one sees Paul complimenting them for reproducing what they had learned and complimenting them because of the influence upon believers they were having in the larger region."¹⁹⁴

A further theme to imitate was holy living and lives of faith. "In Galatians 4:12 Paul urged his readers to become like him in living by faith rather than seeking to achieve merit legalistically (Rom. 4:12). Paul wrote, 'The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things' (Phil. 4:9)."¹⁹⁵

A final theme to imitate was suffering for Christ. "Peter stated that believers should imitate Christ and endure suffering without sinning or seeking revenge (1 Pet. 2:21-23). Paul commended the Thessalonians for being imitators of the churches in Judea who endured great suffering because of their faith (1 Thess. 2:14)."¹⁹⁶

Samra concludes with two interesting and unique observations about Paul's discipleship ministry one can emulate today. Samra asserts,

Two things should be noted about Paul's practice of doing discipleship. Though as an apostle he was in a position of leadership within the church, he treated other believers as equals in the body of Christ. For example he referred to Timothy and Silvanus as apostles with him, even though they were clearly subordinate to him both in authority and Christian maturity. ... Nowhere did Paul identify the role of

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 228-229.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

“discipler” as a spiritual gift or as an office of the church. Rather all Christians, both those imitating and those being imitated, are equal in the body of Christ. Paul’s ability to hold these two in tension is a helpful example for spiritually mature leaders, who must acknowledge that they are on equal footing with even the most immature Christian. The second aspect of Paul’s practice of discipleship was his willingness to invite people to imitate him. Though not the founder of Christianity, he could call others to imitate him as he imitated Christ.¹⁹⁷

Biblical discipleship is a process whereby someone is becoming like Christ. This is the essence of disciple making. It includes proclamation and promotes imitation. Its provision is spiritual growth. Its progression is spiritual transformation. Its barrier is spiritual infancy. Its implication is spiritual maturity.

The priority of discipleship

The orientation of discipleship is toward spiritual maturity. Ministry should align with this. The authors of *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults* illustrate the centrality of disciple making. One of the authors, Richard Dunn, recounts a conversation with his doctoral mentor that made this point vividly. His mentor’s commitment to discipling people taught him three leadership principles that shaped the legacy of his own life.

“First, how a leader measures success determines how he or she can invest heart, time, gifts, and resources. In other words, how one keeps score determines how he or she plays the game. The investment of one’s life into the lives of others ... for the glory of Christ is an eternal measure (score) of a well-lived life.”¹⁹⁸

Second, Dunn learned,

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 229-30.

¹⁹⁸ Richard R. Dunn and Jana L. Sundene, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults: Life-Giving Rhythms for Spiritual Transformation*, (Downer Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012) 222.

When it comes to the effective use of a leader's gifts and resources, the "good" is always in competition with the "best." So many things scream for our attention and time. ... Most experiences, possessions and accomplishments are not inherently good or bad, but if investing our lives in the next generation gets crowded out, we have settled for the lesser good.¹⁹⁹

Third, he discovered,

The biblical strategy for reproducing Christ's heart in the church and expressing Christ's heart in the world ... is simple: Disciples entrusting their hearts and the gospel of Christ to other disciples who will in turn do the same for others. The biblical script for our lives ... is one in which we're increasingly investing our hearts where he invests his heart: in the souls of people he created for eternity. Of all the things that a person can do with his or her days, whether they be many or few, the one thing that God wills above all is the investment of the life of Christ in the lives of those who will in turn invest their lives in others. ... The only question that remains, daily, is whether we will choose the best by choosing to participate in the generational chain of eternal life experienced in the disciplemaker's journey.²⁰⁰

Discipleship is a ministry that invests in the human heart. It is within the heart of a man or woman that life change is nurtured. This is where the life of Christ is implanted and where it engages in the process of spiritual transformation.

Barna acknowledges, "The real obstacles to becoming fully devoted, zealous disciples of Christ are not money, time methods, or knowledge. The major obstacle is the human heart. When that changes, all else changes."²⁰¹

Barna challenges one to be a true disciple. What does this look like when it performs?

First, "true discipleship produces holistic personal transformation, not mere assimilation into a community of church members."

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 166.

Second, “true discipleship is witnessed by people who are determined to be a blessing to others—people who are never content to simply accept and enjoy God’s blessings.”

Third, “true discipleship creates Christians who aggressively pursue spiritual growth rather than passively experience spiritual evolution.”

Fourth, true discipleship spawns individuals who develop renewed lifestyles instead of believers who mechanically check off completed assignments on a developmental agenda.

Fifth, “true discipleship results in people who are more concerned about the quality of their character than the extent of their knowledge.”

Sixth, “true discipleship builds churches known for their culture of love, commitment, and service rather than for their events, information, and programs.”

Seventh, “true discipleship facilitates people devoted to a lifelong journey to imitate Jesus Christ rather than the completion of a short-term regimen of tasks and responsibilities.”²⁰²

On the one hand, one might wish for every believer to advance into the realm of spiritual maturity. On the other hand, it is not a realistic possibility even when one considers the ministries of Jesus and Paul. Instead, one should recognize that eventually discipleship ministry must be focused not on more people but on a higher commitment from a few. Concentration on their spiritual maturity is a legitimate enterprise.

While the goal of ministry is the spiritual maturity of believers, that ministry is often concentrated on the few who exemplify a desire for spiritual growth. The remainder

²⁰² Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 167-68.

of the chapter will disclose the essential qualities of spiritual maturity. An explanation of the features of this level of growth will provide a framework for understanding the nature of spiritual maturity as it is produced in the life of a believer.

Spiritual Maturity: The Trajectory of Discipleship

Spiritual maturity is not merely an option for a believer. The purpose of ministry is to develop, encourage, and nurture the spiritual maturity of every individual believer. Spiritual maturity is the aim of discipleship. Christ is the paradigm, and to be mature is to be like Christ. Christ provides the ultimate and defining standard of what it means to be mature. Disciple making is engaging in another's growth to maturity. This concept is embedded in scripture.

The process of spiritual maturity

Spiritual maturity is often compared to the process of growing up. The image of infancy to maturity emerges as a motif of spiritual maturity. This image is a legitimate representation of the operation of spiritual transformation. Gordon Smith recognizes this imagery in his discussion about spiritual maturity. He states,

The image of spiritual growth toward maturity suggests the idea of progress in the faith; spiritual maturity does not come quickly but occurs over time as a person responds to the means of grace and thus “grows.” Surely this is precisely what the author of 2 Peter wants his readers to understand. He speaks of faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control and more, concluding with love, and he speaks of possessing these qualities in increasing measure (2 Pet 1:8).²⁰³

Smith says,

In 2 Peter we are also reminded that new birth is not an end but a beginning: our election or calling in Christ and to Christ is for a particular purpose—maturity in

²⁰³ Gordon T. Smith, *Called to be Saints: An Invitation to Christian Maturity*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2014) 20.

Christ. To put it more bluntly, our conversion has meaning only if it leads to the goal of conversion: namely, this very spiritual maturity (2 Pet 1:10-11).²⁰⁴

After stating this, he raises the specter of two heresies connected to a theology of sanctification or spiritual maturity. The first he calls the “danger of perfectionism” and the second, “pelagianism.”

Perfectionism calls Christians to live according to the law as a guide to character and virtue. Pelagianism is the belief “that the human person has an inherent capacity to become mature or holy through consistent practice, diligent effort and strength of will.”²⁰⁵ These two heresies are problematic, Smith says, because one digresses into mere moralism instead of actual maturity. The other acknowledges the capacity of human effort to mature rather than maturing by means of human response to the enabling grace of God.²⁰⁶

The outcome of both heresies, Smith notes, creates a process of spiritual maturity that is perceived as “deadly,” an “impossible weight, a crushing burden, an impossible taskmaster,” “an impossible burden,” and “oppressive.” This outcome can be avoided if “spiritual formation is not synonymous with virtue or character development.” The law is a guide to character and virtue but its effects are deadly when it is disconnected from its source. Failing to link law-keeping with faith in Christ makes the law a crushing burden. It is “the weight of the law without the gospel” that produces this tyranny.²⁰⁷ He states, “If moral development is not derivative of our union with Christ, it is an impossible

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 22.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 21.

burden.”²⁰⁸

Smith concedes that believers have a personal responsibility to mature. He notes, “The Scriptures clearly speak of personal responsibility and effort—witness Paul’s affirmation of his struggle for the believers in Colossae (Col 1:29) and for his own soul (Phil 3:12-14).”²⁰⁹ This responsibility though must be tempered by the understanding that “When it comes to the life we have in God, God is the actor. It is all of God. It is all gift. But this does not mean the human person is passive or a non-actor. We can and should take human agency seriously. However, the genius of human action is that it is an act of *response* to and *participation* in the actions of God.”²¹⁰

Smith believes, “The biblical vision of holiness is one in which spiritual maturity is the fruit not of human effort toward an objective standard (a holy law, perhaps), but rather human response to the call and enabling of God.”²¹¹ Smith attempts to validate this premise with the concept of a believer’s union with Christ. He declares that much of his book is designed to articulate this perspective. He says, “The heart of the matter and the all-encompassing and defining vision, Christian spiritual maturity—the ‘perfection’ to which we are called—will be described as union with Christ.”²¹²

This description is encapsulated in these statements. “Thus conversion, as the appropriation of the justifying grace of God, is the launch of a journey of union with Christ, the incarnate one, in the death and resurrection.” The goal is “union with Christ. Our righteousness is not self-produced but arises from our union with Christ, and thus our

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 22.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., 35.

only hope is to be participants in or partakers of the life of Christ.” As believers “we are in Christ and thus we know his justifying grace. We are united with Christ through God's justifying grace and we grow into union with Christ through God's sanctifying grace.”²¹³

Smith posits the question,

What is the essential meaning of the Christian life? ... We need to stress that spiritual maturity is not to be equated with moral maturity, though spiritual maturity most assuredly includes the latter. Rather, spiritual formation is the cultivation of a dynamic faith in Christ, and moral reform and renewal is derivative of this union with Christ.”²¹⁴

He summarizes with the following:

To be a Christian is to be a follower, a disciple; it is to respond to the call of God on our lives, an obedience of faith wherein we are drawn into the life of Jesus and deny (set aside, put to death) the life of autonomy and independence from Christ. ... The mature Christian is one who lives in consciousness and intentional response to the presence of the Spirit in one's life. And the baseline indicator or reference for the work of the Spirit is always this: that by the Spirit Christ is glorified in us and through us; we are drawn to union with the risen and ascended Christ.”²¹⁵

This articulation of the process of spiritual maturity emphasizes the aspect of a believer's union with Christ as the rationale for his or her spiritual growth. However, there is another element that is understated in this synopsis.

The argument minimizes the significance of regeneration, the new life that is freely given to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. A believer is made or constituted righteous through the new birth.²¹⁶ God has renewed the heart of a believer so that he or she can desire to please God. The heart is the seat of human emotion, intelligence, morality, volition and spirituality. With the psalmist, a redeemed heart can

²¹³ Ibid., 50.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 52.

²¹⁵ Ibid

²¹⁶ Romans 5:19.

declare, “I will give thanks to You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and will glorify your name forever.”²¹⁷ A redeemed heart can testify, “But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed.”²¹⁸

God is not acting unilaterally through a believer who is simply responding to and participating in the action God has initiated. Human agency is also operative in one’s spiritual growth. Regeneration means a person is performing freely from the heart based on his or her own desires to act in obedience to God. A believer has the ability to individually respond to God’s Word. A believer is even commanded to personally pursue his or her spiritual maturity.²¹⁹ A believer is capable of volitional participation in his or her spiritual growth. One is also accountable to God for his or her own faithfulness and obedience at the Judgment Seat of Christ.²²⁰

Additionally, there are several motivations for individual and personal obedience in the Christian life presented in the scriptures. One powerful motivation for living the Christian life is gratitude to God for saving us by His grace.²²¹ Believers should also be motivated by the knowledge that their heavenly Father both blesses obedience and disciplines disobedience in His children.²²² “God is not mocked; for whatever a [person] sows, this he will also reap.”²²³ Finally, every Christian must stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, not to determine his eternal destiny, for that is already set, but to assess the

²¹⁷ Ps. 86:12.

²¹⁸ Rom. 6:17.

²¹⁹ Heb. 6:1.

²²⁰ 1 Cor. 3:10-15.

²²¹ Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 5:14 -15; Gal. 2:20.

²²² Heb. 12:3-11; Lev. 26:1-45.

²²³ Gal 6:7.

quality of his Christian life on earth.²²⁴ Anticipating either reward or loss of reward at the Judgment Seat should also motivate believers to perseverance and faithfulness and ultimately to God's revealed will.²²⁵ One's capacity to glorify Jesus will forever be based on how faithful he was in his stewardship in this life.²²⁶

Smith does provide a significant description of spiritual maturity worth considering. He says, "spiritual maturity has four particular expressions, each distinct but interdependent on the others."²²⁷ His list includes wisdom. A mature Christian has a heart and mind informed by the truth, largely through the witness of the Scriptures. It includes good work. A mature Christian has clarity about his or her calling—with the courage and humility and capacity to fulfill this vocation. It consists of the ability to love others. A mature Christian knows how to love others in Christ as Christ has loved us. It also comprises joy. A mature Christian lives with a deep and resilient joy, even in the midst of a fragmented world.²²⁸

Aspects of spiritual maturity

Spiritual maturity encompasses a variety of characteristics that are exemplified in the life of a maturing believer. Thomas Bergler mentions some of these characteristics in relation to his understanding of the general nature of spiritual maturity. He writes, "Spiritual maturity is central, not incidental, to God's plan" because the New

²²⁴ 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 22:12.

²²⁵ 1 Cor. 3:10 -17, 9:24 -27; Jas. 5:8-9; 1 John 2:28.

²²⁶ Grace Evangelical Society, "Affirmations of Belief," www.faithalone.org.
<http://www.faithalone.org/about/beliefs.html> (accessed January 15, 2015).

²²⁷ Smith, *Called to be Saints*, 184.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 184-185.

Testament connects spiritual maturity to Christ's ascension.²²⁹ "Connecting spiritual maturity to Christ's ascension connects it to the drama of salvation, to the ultimate purposes of God in Christ."²³⁰

He also suggests "the special gifts and/or roles Christ gives to leaders in the church are for the purpose of equipping all believers to help each other grow up into maturity in Christ. Growth toward spiritual maturity is the job of every Christian, and we need each other's help to get there." A third element of spiritual maturity includes "unity with other believers, knowledge of Christ, and being like Christ. ... Mature Christians actively love, serve, and maintain peaceful relationships with their brothers and sisters."²³¹

Bergler lists two other components of spiritual maturity. These include the insistence that believers "must 'no longer be children' who are easily swayed by false doctrines and other deceptions. That must mean that Paul does not envision Christians staying in a state of immaturity." The final trait is "that the body [of Christ] can grow to maturity. It is even implied that the body of believers can itself become mature."²³²

Bergler discusses the relationship between maturity and holiness. Though these concepts are associated they are not identical. He delineates their relationship in an insightful way. He says,

Most interpreters agree that the New Testament writers have several meanings when they apply the words for "holy" to living Christians. First, all those who belong to Jesus Christ are already holy ... but this *status* of holiness does not mean that they are perfectly righteous. So in other passages, the biblical writers

²²⁹ He cites Ephesians 4:8-9 as an example.

²³⁰ Thomas E. Bergler, *From Here to Maturity: Overcoming the Juvenilization of American Christianity*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014) 41.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid., 41-42.

exhort believers to “be holy”... to devote themselves to the *process* of “sanctification” by which God is making them morally and spiritually pure. The *ultimate goal* of this process is perfect conformity to the image of Christ who is the perfect image of God. Thus for Christians holiness is a current *status*, an ongoing *process*, and an ultimate *goal* only reached in the life to come.²³³

In contrast to holiness, spiritual maturity is possible for a believer during his or her lifetime. Bergler notes,

Passages that exhort Christians to grow from infancy to maturity clearly assume that maturity is fully achievable in this life. Maturity must therefore be a stage in the larger process of sanctification. ... In fact, spiritual maturity may be more than just an early stage of sanctification. It may actually be a crucial foundation for further holiness.²³⁴

These aspects of spiritual maturity are significant as to the centrality of spiritual maturity in the spiritual life of believers. Bergler asks, “What does all of this mean? What do Christians need to know to have the right expectations regarding maturity?”²³⁵ He provides two answers to these questions:

First, Christians need to have the right expectations regarding maturity. Spiritual maturity is *desirable*. Maturity is the gateway to the kind of deep, powerful, experiential relationship with Christ that energized Paul. It is the oath to a beautiful life of love. It is *attainable*, something to be expected in the life of every believer after the normal period of training. Finally, it is *visible*. People who fail to display the qualities of maturity are either spiritual infants or are slipping back into immature ways.²³⁶

In addition to having the right expectations, Bergler indicates,

Christians today also need to know the content of spiritual maturity. First, mature believers *know the basic truths* of the gospel and the Christian way of life. Second, they *display discernment*: the ability to apply those basic truths to their lives. In particular, mature Christians are able to detect and stand firm against false teaching and they are able to recognize how to love others in everyday situations. Third, mature believers are *connected to the body of Christ* (the church) where they are *helping others become mature* and are *sharing with them*

²³³ Ibid., 47.

²³⁴ Ibid., 47-48.

²³⁵ Ibid., 48.

²³⁶ Ibid., 48-49.

in the mission of the kingdom of God. Fourth, they *live a life of love*, displaying godly character qualities and avoiding sins that damage relationships. Fifth, they are actively putting off the old self and *growing to become more and more like Jesus*. In all of this, mature Christians are living a *Christ-focused, cross-and-resurrection-shaped life*.²³⁷

The bottom line is that spiritual maturity is not optional for a believer who desires to make progress in his or her spiritual growth. It will take time. It will be costly. It requires dedication and commitment. Spiritual maturity is the ultimate expression of one's development in holiness.

Gauging spiritual maturity

Spiritual maturity can seem elusive, especially if one is unable to comprehend the means of measuring it in his or her life. There are specific elements one can determine to gauge spiritual growth that produces maturity. J. Oswald Sanders suggests one begin by first considering what does not constitute spiritual maturity.

First, *Christian maturity is not an aging process*. Gray hairs and spiritual maturity are not necessarily wedded. Because we are aging, we should not conclude that of necessity we are progressing in maturity...It has been said that it is the *intensity* of years and not their *extensity* that is a true measure of maturity, for maturity is an attitude of life. It is our attitudes, not our arteries that determine the quality of our life. Spiritual growth is not measured by the calendar, and it can continue to the hour of death or translation if we are willing to comply with the laws governing growth.²³⁸

Sanders enumerates several other ideas to contemplate which are not tantamount to spiritual maturity. He explains that "spiritual maturity is not instantaneous and final...the whole tenor of Scripture is against the idea that one supreme act of decision permanently

²³⁷ Ibid., 49.

²³⁸ J. Oswald Sanders, *What Constitutes Christian Maturity? Knowing and Doing*, C.S. Lewis Institute, Summer 2005, www.cslewisinstitute.org.
http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm_send/424 (accessed March 1, 2015) 2.

secures to us all the blessings of sanctification.”²³⁹ Affirming this point, he asserts, “No living thing comes to maturity instantaneously. ... Growth toward spiritual maturity will of necessity involve moral effort, discipline, renunciation, and perseverance in pursuit of the goal. There are no shortcuts.”²⁴⁰

Sanders believes “spiritual maturity is not automatic as a result of the mastery of scriptural teachings. ... The accumulation of biblical information is of immense value, but it is only as the principles of Scripture are worked out in daily obedience that spiritual growth is advanced.”²⁴¹ An additional consideration is that

Spiritual maturity is not the mere possession of spiritual gifts. ... These spiritual gifts are valuable, but only if they are exercised in love and only as they result in the unity and upbuilding of the church. The true index of Christian maturity is not the possession of gifts of the Spirit, but the production of the fruit of the Spirit.”²⁴²

A final reflection from Sanders about what does not constitute spiritual maturity is that “spiritual maturity is not copying Christ. No one can live by the Sermon on the Mount, for example, without first experiencing the new birth and living it out under the control of the Holy Spirit. The steps of the Master are too majestic for unaided or unregenerate people to follow.”²⁴³ He concludes,

The supreme goal of the church is not evangelism, important and indispensable as that ministry is. The ultimate goal is stated by Paul when he wrote: “We proclaim him, teaching everyone with all wisdom, *so that we may present everyone perfect [mature] in Christ.*” ... Col 1:28. ... God’s purpose is to produce disciples who reflect the perfect humanity of His Son, people who are able to react to the exigencies and trials of life in an adult and not a childish manner—meeting adult situations with adult reactions. In short, God’s purpose is to produce people who fulfill their humanity and become what God designed for them.”²⁴⁴

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

Spiritual maturity is a process in which one is gradually conformed to the character of Jesus Christ. It is the image of Christ reproduced in the life of a believer that determines the depth and breadth of one's spiritual maturity. Sanders believes this image incorporates the totality of the character of Christ: "The measure of our maturity is seen when the 'fullness of Christ'—the sum total of all the qualities that make Him what He is—is increasingly exhibited in our lives."²⁴⁵

Sanders utilizes this measurement to identify several principles that extrapolate on this idea:

First, a spiritually maturing believer is growing in both a personal and experiential knowledge of God. This mark is "coupled with a strong aspiration to know Him better."²⁴⁶ (Sanders illustrates this principle with the development of Moses' intimacy with God in Exodus 33.) Each request Moses made of God "was granted. Every forward move toward a deeper knowledge of God was met by a positive response."²⁴⁷

Second, a spiritually maturing believer has a life objective of securing the glory of God. "Every choice in which the honor and glory of God is involved will have only one answer from the mature Christian. There is no room for debate. ... Since the servant is not greater than his or her Lord, the maturing Christian will experience a growing passion for the glory of God."²⁴⁸

Third, a spiritually maturing believer finds holiness more attractive than happiness. "The mature Christian has learned that true happiness is a by-product of

²⁴⁵ Sanders, *In Pursuit of Maturity*, 39.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 40.

holiness. A consuming desire to be holy is clearer proof of sanctification than is an itch for thrilling and exciting experiences. ... True happiness comes only along the pathway of holiness.”²⁴⁹

Fourth, a spiritually maturing believer is dissatisfied with only the “milk” of the Word of God desiring its “meat” even more. “No longer is the maturing Christian solely dependent on pre-digested spiritual food and artificial stimuli. The spiritual infant has now learned how to nurture the inner life on the Word of God and delves more deeply into its teachings.”²⁵⁰

Fifth, a spiritually maturing believer develops discernment “to discriminate between truth and error, and good and evil. ... It is a spiritual sensitivity that comes from ‘training’ ... through the mastery of the principles of Scripture and their consistent application to the decisions and events of daily life.”²⁵¹

Sixth, a spiritually maturing believer “prefers serving others to being served by others... True spiritual leadership springs not from a desire to rule but from a passion to serve. ... Christ’s view of His kingdom was a community of people characterized by serving one another and the needy world outside.”²⁵²

Seventh, a spiritually maturing believer is “characterized by giving rather than receiving. ... In the Christian life we are mostly on the receiving end, but Jesus exemplified our responsibility to give as well as to receive ... [and] to give our very selves to those in need around us.”²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 40-41.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 41.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 42.

²⁵² Ibid., 42.

²⁵³ Ibid., 43.

Eighth, a spiritually maturing believer “will be fruitful, not barren. The ability to reproduce oneself is the proof of physical maturity, and this is also true of spiritual maturity. ... A fruitless Christian is a contradiction in terms. ... There will be fruit in character {as well as} fruit in service.”²⁵⁴

Ninth, a spiritually maturing believer accepts rather than resents God’s discipline that he or she “allows to come into his or her life. If one is maturing as a Christian, he or she may not actually enjoy the experience while passing through it ... but...regard[s] the will of God as being ‘good, acceptable, and perfect.’”²⁵⁵

Tenth, a spiritually maturing believer is “willing to accept responsibility in the work of the kingdom [of God]...The immature Christian is content to accept all the blessings and benefits of faith but is unwilling to share the accompanying responsibilities. ... The mature believer will be willing to accept responsibility for failure, too, and will not shuffle the blame onto a subordinate.”²⁵⁶

Eleventh, a spiritually maturing believer “will demonstrate a growing love for God and others. ... God stimulates and enlarges our hearts and enables us to love Him in return. Love begets love. But when love cools, every grace languishes.”²⁵⁷

Twelfth, a spiritually maturing believer “is stimulated by sharing the knowledge of God with other believers. ...Paul talks of attaining ‘the unity of faith’ as well as spiritual maturity, for that develops best not in isolation but in the corporate life of the church.... It is the team that is fully integrated and works together unselfishly and

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 43-44.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 44.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 45.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 46.

harmoniously that wins the game.”²⁵⁸

Gauging one’s spiritual maturity means measuring its influence in his or her life. Spiritual maturity is about growth. When the outcome of spiritual growth is evidenced it always reveals new depths, new heights, and a swelling circumference of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom displayed in one’s life.

Robert Hanson gauges spiritual maturity in his book “*8 Steps to Spiritual Maturity*.” What is especially pertinent is his discussion of spiritual growth patterns leading to spiritual maturity, based on a passage in Colossians.²⁵⁹ These principles are of particular interest since they are integral to the purpose of this project.

Hanson states, “Growth over the process of time is the result of the addition of truth to life, one-step at a time. Little by little, we grow as we apply the principles of God’s Word to the experiences of life. In writing to the believers at Colossae, Paul establishes this element of spiritual growth. Within the Colossian passage, Paul addresses five crucial ingredients connected with our growth as a Christian.”²⁶⁰ The trajectory of spiritual growth is oriented toward spiritual maturity. These ingredients are essential to this process:

The first ingredient “establishes the fact that there is a beginning point in what we know as the Christian walk.”²⁶¹ The phrase, “‘as you received’ carries the thought of receiving Jesus Christ as your own personal possession. ... The progress of spiritual

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Col. 2:6-7.

²⁶⁰ Robert A. Hanson, *8 Steps to Spiritual Maturity*, (Maitland FL: Xulon Press: 2004) www.xulonpress.com, 40-41.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 41.

growth has its foundation within the new birth.”²⁶²

The second ingredient “states that we are to walk with Christ in the same manner that we received Christ. How did we receive Christ? The answer ... it was by faith. ... Faith was the instrument that took hold of the Lord Jesus and claimed the promises connected with Him. ... The role of personal faith continues in the growing process.”²⁶³

The third ingredient “indicates the very character of our walk. ... [It] is the context of a believer’s walk [focusing] on Jesus Christ the Lord. ... The believer’s walk is to function under our Lord’s control. ... The quality of our walk with God should display ... how God has changed and is changing us.”²⁶⁴

The fourth ingredient is “a continued growing and maturing process in our spiritual lives. ... In the unique walk of faith in the Lord, we are rooted, built up, and established in the faith. ... Clearly, the maturing process of every believer is threefold ... firmly planted or solid in Him ... in the process of continual growth ... [and] established and abounding in a fruitful or productive life.”²⁶⁵

The fifth ingredient “indicates that we are to come to the place in our walk with the Lord where we are able to respond constantly with a heart of thanksgiving. God’s final purpose is that He establishes us on a level where we are not only secure and solid but also abounding with thanksgiving. A thankful heart is a sign of a mature heart!”²⁶⁶ Collectively, these ingredients establish the pattern of spiritual maturity, which often provides the environment necessary for one to grow spiritually.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 42.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 43.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 44.

The Development of Spiritual Maturity

Spiritual maturity takes time. A new believer can be spiritual but not mature. All believers are spiritual in the sense of being regenerated, indwelt, baptized and sealed by the Holy Spirit at conversion. In order to grow spiritually a believer handles his or her old nature from the standpoint of their new nature. Maturity means that this has been done over the years while raising a family, managing sickness, recovering from disasters, enduring attacks, and maneuvering the increasing responsibility of life. Maturity is walking with God through the seasons of life over a long period of time. This walk is characterized by the increasing capacity to apply godliness into one's life situations over time.

DeWitt addresses the development of spiritual maturity over time in one's life. He brings this issue to the forefront by asking a question. "Is there any difference between spiritual growth, in general, and growth to maturity? Does the Bible recognize maturity as something distinct from, and different from, spiritual growth in general? It seems (to me) that it does, even though the Bible does not give categories."²⁶⁷

He asks us to consider the lives of men and women in the Bible that exemplified this understanding of spiritual maturity. "Consider ... Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Samuel, David, Daniel, Ruth, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles during their ministries. It seems that there is something more, and actually, something spiritually different than there is in the lives of, say, Abel, Noah's sons, Joseph's brothers, Saul, Eli, and the followers who left Paul and went back into the world."²⁶⁸

DeWitt identifies categories of growth and differing kinds of growth that account

²⁶⁷ DeWitt, *Characteristics of Spiritual Maturity*, 1.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

for the development of spiritual maturity. DeWitt explains,

When the Israelites came out of Egypt, they needed the order of the Mosaic Law. When Jesus encountered Israel bogged down in the order of the Pharisees, they needed to press on to maturity. Paul treated the chaos in Corinth with orderly rules, and the orderly man Timothy with creativity pursuing maturity ... as we grow today, we go from something like chaos, to order, to maturity. And it takes discipline to get to order and it takes creativity to get to maturity.²⁶⁹

This is the process that produces spiritual maturity in a believer's life. This explanation is a legitimate framework for how this process occurs.

The differing kinds of growth refer to people who grow either by means of discipline or creativity. DeWitt notes, "If we look closely at Scripture, we can discern that not only did God encourage spiritual growth, but two kinds of growth. One is for chaotic people who need order. We shall call that *Control Growth*. The other is for orderly people who need maturity, and that we shall call *Creative Growth*."²⁷⁰

Dewitt expands on the concepts of the process of growth with explanation as to the dynamics of control and creative growth. Control growth requires discipline, balance, law and fear. Creative growth requires desire, excellence, grace and freedom. Dewitt suggests,

Control discipleship asks the question, "What should I do?" Creative discipleship asks the question, "What would I *like* to do?" When I'm in chaos, I can never be disciplined asking, "What would I like to do?" and I can never become mature asking, "What should I do?" If I'm addicted to drugs, I cannot do what I want to do; but if I'm starting a drug rehabilitation clinic because of my desire to do so, then I need only ask, "What do I want to do?" If I back up into drug use, then I am no longer free to pursue my desires because now I'm in chaos, and I need order.²⁷¹

The stages of spiritual growth require different responsibilities. For one who is in

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 2.

²⁷⁰ DeWitt, *The Mature Man: Becoming a Man of Impact*, 188.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 189-191.

chaos, they need to develop control over their chaos. For one who is ordered, they need to expand on their order to move on to maturity.

DeWitt makes ten observations about the subject of maturity in relation to control and creative growth. These observations sum up the development of spiritual growth for a believer:

First, “if you are in chaos, you need order. If you are orderly, you need to go on to maturity. You can go from chaos to order and from order to maturity, but you cannot go from chaos to maturity. You first develop some kind of order. The Mosaic Law and Proverbs are God-inspired examples of getting your chaos to order.”²⁷²

Second, “the way to establish order is very different than the way to establish maturity. Order comes through discipline. Maturity comes through creativity. Creativity should never be applied to chaos. ... If you apply creativity to chaos you risk disaster. ... You will never advance your life into areas of creative development in the context of chaos.”²⁷³

Third, “left to themselves, all areas of our life will tend to move...toward chaos. Order and maturity require effort.”²⁷⁴ One’s spiritual life will naturally atrophy without intentional effort to move in the direction of spiritual maturity.

Fourth, “the down side to order is that it tends to see itself as an end in itself. The state of orderliness will usually settle into systems and organizations that oppose maturity just as much as they oppose chaos. Order must be creatively overcome in order to

²⁷² David A. DeWitt, *Characteristics of Spiritual Maturity*, Unpublished Paper (Grand Rapids, MI: Relational Concepts Inc.) 2.

²⁷³ Ibid., 2-3.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 3.

become mature.”²⁷⁵

Fifth, “we move from chaos to order by joining some group, which gives us a sense of community, accountability, and structure. But we move from order to maturity individually. The Nation of Israel was to keep the Mosaic Law but no national law-keeping could write the Psalms, teach the Sermon on the Mount, or go on missionary journeys.”²⁷⁶

Sixth, “order is boring. If growth is only defined in terms of order, there will be little motivation for it. That’s why people slip back into chaos.”²⁷⁷ Order provides protection from chaos but mature growth is much more than that. Mature growth is about newness; advancing into realms of growth that go beyond order without violating the order already in one’s life.

Seventh, “we are all in different areas of our lives. Some of what we think or do is chaotic, some orderly, and ... some aspects of our lives are mature.”²⁷⁸ So, spiritual growth is a process that requires time in order to observe sustained change from one category to another.

Eighth, “a mature person is not someone who is mature in all or even most areas of his or her life. ... A mature person is mature in the most important areas of life, which always includes two areas, (1) the area of his or her relationship with God and (2) the area of calling [in life] and desires.”²⁷⁹

Ninth, “the areas where we are not called or where we easily tend toward chaos,

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

should receive only enough attention to get them to order. Then they can be managed through habits, laws, and traditions. Get it to order and forget it. We should not spend much time outside of our calling [your gifts, talents, family role, opportunities, and life situation].”²⁸⁰

Tenth, “life is the most rewarding, exciting, and motivational in the areas of maturity. ... The main reason people keep bouncing in and out of chaos is because they have no creative area of maturity to motivate them. The best they can hope for is that life will be some sort of boring order. So they usually end up back in chaos.”²⁸¹

It is possible to never become spiritually mature. Scripture calls us to pursue it and attain it. However, there is no guarantee that a believer who is a spiritual baby, child, man or women will progress into the realm of spiritual maturity. Dewitt acknowledges,

But “starting,” as exciting as it is, can never accomplish “finishing.” To start a race is not the same as finishing it. Our salvation is secure because Jesus Christ finished that for us on the cross. ... When we receive Him as our God and Savior, we are secure in our eternal destination ... that’s finished. But the spiritual life just started. Our relationship with God is just started. Our path toward godliness is just started. Our life of learning to please Him has just started. If we have received Christ, heaven is certain, but maturity is not.²⁸²

The development of maturity is a lifetime pursuit. A believer must keep his or her sights set on this intention. J. Dwight Pentecost understands this necessity. He writes, “The promise we seek to have fulfilled in our lives is maturity, conformity to Christ. We will not be made like Him overnight. This life, this growth, this process demands constant cultivation day after day, week after week, year after year. There is no end to the

²⁸⁰ Ibid..

²⁸¹ Ibid., 4.

²⁸² DeWitt, *The Mature Man*, 204.

process of maturing in spiritual things.”²⁸³

In addition to this exhortation also comes a warning about failing to become a spiritually mature believer. Pentecost says it is possible for a believer to “continue as a milk-fed baby when he should be going on to maturity.”²⁸⁴ Pentecost makes it clear that a believer is accountable for his or her spiritual growth and maturity. He counsels:

A person, by falling away, cannot erase the record of his failure [to grow and mature]. His record must stand, and he must face it at the judgment seat of Christ. We must exercise care over our spiritual diet, over our spiritual growth, for it is impossible, by any means, to remove the record of failure. God has made us responsible for growth, and at the judgment seat of Christ we will be examined in reference to our growth.²⁸⁵

Pentecost concludes his remonstrance with a word of encouragement to pursue spiritual growth and maturity. “Grow in grace! That is your responsibility ... the means are provided, but you will never grow unless you diligently appropriate what God has provided. Are you growing? ... If not, you need to heed these words: “Let us ... go on to maturity.”²⁸⁶

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explain the relationship between discipleship and spiritual maturity. That relationship was delineated by two concepts. The first was *discipleship as the impetus for spiritual maturity*. That propulsion was explained by means of the provision of discipleship to spiritual maturity. It also included the progression, barrier, resolve, implication, and priority of discipleship in relation to

²⁸³ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Designed to be Like Him: Understanding God's Plan for Fellowship, Conduct, Conflict, and Maturity*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1966). 281.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 282.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 282-283.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 283.

spiritual growth and maturity.

The second relationship was *spiritual maturity as the trajectory of discipleship*.

This course was charted with an explanation of the process of spiritual maturity through discipleship. That included descriptions of aspects of spiritual maturity, the gauging of spiritual maturity, and the development of spiritual maturity in one's life. The verdict is that discipleship and spiritual maturity are intimately associated with one another.

Discipleship triggers spiritual growth, which sets the trajectory toward spiritual maturity.

CHAPTER 4

EVALUATION, STRATEGY, RESULTS AND RESPONSES TO THE RESULTS

The strategy used for the project included teaching lessons on the subject of spiritual maturity from the book of Colossians. The studies were derived from twenty-two commands made to the Colossians and based upon Paul's explanation for the purpose of his ministry. That purpose was articulated by Paul to proclaim Christ "warning every person and teaching every person with all wisdom, that we may present every person mature in Christ."²⁸⁷

The strategy also included an assessment on spiritual maturity that was taken by the participants who were part of this project. The assessment was designed to provide an appraisal of each participant's own spiritual maturity based upon the lessons and commands studied from the book of Colossians. The assessment was also designed to provide a continuous plan for the participant's future spiritual growth and maturation.

The lessons and the assessment were based on the commands given in Colossians regarding spiritual maturity. At the end of the study, the participants completed the assessment, which measured their level of spiritual maturity.

The Strategy and Evaluation of the Lessons from Colossians on Spiritual Maturity

The lessons were taught to ten men who were being discipled by the author. The men met weekly, one on one, to study the material, which was comprised of each of the commands given to the Colossians. The lessons began with an explanation of Paul's purpose for his ministry. That purpose was to strive to present believers as spiritually

²⁸⁷ Col. 1:28.

mature disciples before Jesus Christ at the believer's judgment.

The men were then taught the twenty-two commands presented to the Colossians. These commands, logical extensions of what a spiritually mature believer would become in order to be appropriately presented before Jesus Christ, were collated and grouped into seven overarching categories. The categories were identified and the corresponding commands were studied individually.

The seven categories of commands studied were: (1) discernment; (2) outlook; (3) sin; (4) godliness; (5) household relationships; (6) hierarchal relationships; and (7) practical holiness. These categories included a description of how each one pertained to spiritual maturity:

- Discernment: A spiritually mature believer is one who perceives correctly.
- Outlook: A spiritually mature believer is one who has an eternal perspective.
- Sin: A spiritually mature believer is one who is sin sensitive.
- Godliness: A spiritually mature believer is one who adopts Christ's character.
- Household Relationships: A spiritually mature believer is one who aligns roles within the family by God's design.
- Hierarchal Relationships: A spiritually mature believer is one who aligns roles with the authority structure in superior-to-subordinate relationships.
- Practical Holiness: A spiritually mature believer is one who assumes spiritual responsibility.

The Structure of the Lessons

The lessons were structured in a sequential manner consistent with the development of the commands in the book of Colossians. The lessons were divided into

several sections.

The introduction

The introduction to the entire study encompassed three lessons that included supporting verses from the book of Colossians. The lessons contained the following emphases:

- Lesson One: *Discipleship is focused upon the spiritual maturity of believers.* This lesson was comprised of material on the nature of the relationship between discipleship and spiritual maturity.
- Lesson Two: *The purpose of ministry is to produce spiritually mature believers.* This lesson was an exegesis of Colossians 1:28. This verse encapsulates the purpose of the Apostle Paul's ministry and forms the basis for discipleship. Admonishing and teaching are the central tenets of the verse's proclamation. The outcome of this enterprise is the spiritual maturity of believers.
- Lesson Three: *Producing spiritually mature believers is hard work.* This lesson was an exegesis of Colossians 1:29. Paul acknowledges that labor, which includes struggle, difficulty, and hard work, is involved in helping disciples develop into mature believers, ready to be presented to Christ. The labor can be successful because the labor of the discipler works together with the power of God to accomplish the objective of developing spiritually mature believers.

The lesson concluded with a series of applications, an assessment, and an action question for the student. The assessment asked, "What one lesson have you learned from this study?" The action asked, "What one action will you take to ensure that the lesson is

applied?” This closing segment was designed to provide the learner with practical insight as to how the material could be put to use in his or her life.

Overview of the categories and commands

This section answered the question, “What does a spiritually mature believer look like from the commands in Colossians?” A series of graphs provided an overview of these attributes, and an explanation of all of the charts was provided. This section concluded with an application from this overview. The application served to deliver principles to encourage the learners to begin considering how this material might become established in their own lives.

Discernment and spiritual maturity

The lesson on discernment included three lessons from the first three commands associated with aspects of spiritual maturity:

- Lesson One: *Spiritually mature believers conduct their lives consistent with Christ.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command: “Continue to live your lives in him.”²⁸⁸ The essence of the command was to generate a commitment to set the trajectory of one’s life in the direction of Christlikeness. The lesson concluded with the implication that Jesus Christ was the paradigm and measurement of spiritual maturity. A life lived consistent with Christ’s teaching, through the apostles, is a life that progresses toward spiritual maturity.
- Lesson Two: *Spiritually mature believers avoid the deceptive wisdom of the world.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command: “See to it no one takes you

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 2:6.

captive through philosophy and empty deception.”²⁸⁹ This was a warning about false teaching, which could rob a believer of the truth. The source of this deception was false philosophies in a plethora of garb. The implication was that deception would come in at least three ways: (1) by information that is speculative; (2) by arguments that are nonsensical; and (3) by teaching that is fabricated.

- Lesson Three: *Spiritually mature believers avoid letting others restrict their spiritual freedom.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command: “Do not let anyone judge you.”²⁹⁰ False teachers were apparently encouraging believers to place their Christian freedom under their tutelage. The correction, however, was to remember that Christ is the substance of our freedom and that allegiance to Him alone must be the focus of one’s spiritual life. The implication was that spiritual transformation was not accomplished by means of legal or religious requirements imposed upon us by others. Christ set us free from all of that.

This section concluded with the same assessment and action questions of the previous section. This closing segment was designed to provide the learner with practical insight as to how the material could be put to use in his or her life.

Outlook and spiritual maturity

This section on outlook and spiritual maturity explicated the next three commands in the book of Colossians that are associated with aspects of spiritual maturity:

²⁸⁹ Ibid., v.8.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., vv.16-17.

- Lesson One: *Spiritually mature believers avoid keeping up spiritual appearances.*

This lesson was an exegesis of the command: “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize.”²⁹¹ The danger of this false teaching was the promotion of the mere appearance of spirituality. Some of the emphases of this false teaching included self-abasement and the veneration of angels. Based in pride, this motivated believers to place value on themselves and their experiences rather than on the favor of God through faithfulness to Christ. The implication was the need for vigilance in one’s spiritual walk to evade the deception of an artificial spiritual life.

- Lesson Two: *Spiritually mature believers develop an eternal perspective about everything.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command: “Keep seeking the things above.”²⁹² A spiritually mature believer is focused on living life from an eternal vantage point. Since eternal life is our destiny, striving to apply a heavenly point of view, while living here on earth, is appropriate. Specifically, this is where Jesus Christ is, at present. The implication was that one makes deliberate choices to obey God’s Word and to view all of one’s life situations with a biblical mindset.

- Lesson Three: *Spiritually mature believers concentrate on the eternal not the temporal.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command: “Set your minds on things above.”²⁹³ A spiritually mature believer evaluates decision-making from an eternal vantage point rather than an earthly perspective. This inward disposition

²⁹¹ Ibid., v.18.

²⁹² Ibid., 3:1.

²⁹³ Ibid., v.2.

must become a dominant pattern of one's life. It is a vertically focused way of thinking not a horizontal one. The implication was that solutions to life situations must be governed by how we understand God's viewpoint as derived from His Word or from what we extrapolate about His character from scripture.

This section concluded with the same assessment and action questions of the previous sections. This closing segment was designed to provide the learner with practical insight as to how the material could be put to use in his or her life.

Sin and spiritual maturity

This section on outlook and spiritual maturity focused upon the next three commands in Colossians linked with the character of spiritual maturity:

- Lesson One: *Spiritually mature believers mortify fleshly tendencies.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command: "Consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality."²⁹⁴ Spiritually mature believers put a stop to sinful patterns of living, behavior, and attitudes. This can happen by decisive action to prevent one's body from becoming a vehicle to carry out sinful acts. These acts include impurity, passion, evil, greed and idolatry. The implication was that these sinful desires couldn't be reformed or eradicated. A believer must take decisive and preventative action to avoid succumbing to the desires of the flesh.
- Lesson Two: *Spiritually mature believers put off careless, reckless, and malicious speech.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command: "Put them all aside, anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech."²⁹⁵ A spiritually mature believer is

²⁹⁴ Ibid., v.5.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., v.8.

determined to keep his or her mouth under control. This list of vices were meant to be tossed aside like a dirty shirt needing to be laundered and no longer fit to wear. The implication was that this impertinence must never become instrumental to resolving conflict. Spiritually mature believers will not include these actions in one's arsenal.

- Lesson Three: *Spiritually mature believers are not dishonest with one another.*

This lesson was an exegesis of the command: "Do not lie to one another."²⁹⁶

Believers were commanded to speak truth to one another and not develop their old-self habit of lying. Believers live in a new realm where dishonesty is unacceptable. The implication was that these sinful patterns do not die an easy death. Living consistent with one's new position in Christ must be characterized by truth and honesty.

This section concluded with the same assessment and action questions of the previous sections. This closing segment was designed to provide the learner with practical insight as to how the material could be put to use in his or her life.

Godliness and spiritual maturity

This section on godliness and spiritual maturity explained the next three commands aligned with spiritual maturity:

- Lesson One: *Spiritually mature believers put on compassionate benevolence.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command: "Clothe yourselves with a heart of mercy."²⁹⁷ The divine side of salvation is to be chosen of God. With salvation

²⁹⁶ Ibid., v.9.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., vv.12-14.

comes the responsibility to clothe oneself with the attitudes and actions that are congruent with one's new status as a believer. Those attributes comprise mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and love. The implication was that compassionate benevolence sums up the entire spiritual archive of a spiritually mature believer and exemplifies his or her character.

- Lesson Two: *Spiritually mature believers arbitrate peaceful outcomes and are thankful.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts ... and be thankful."²⁹⁸ This peace, taught by Christ and the apostles, differs from secular peace. Christ's peace ensures that an individual can be connected relationally with God. Secular peace is global, and is associated with a relationship with people. Christ's peace arbitrates one's response to life's circumstances. Believers were called to peace as members of the body of Christ. The implication was that peace derived from tolerance or conformity to the world violates the peace of Christ, which is measured by obedience to the Word of God.
- Lesson Three: *Spiritually mature believers put out the welcome mat for the Word of God.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command: "Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you."²⁹⁹ Spiritually mature believers are receptive to the Word of God in their lives that takes up residence in one's spiritual life. Three outcomes of Christ's indwelling Word are: the wisdom to judge things correctly; a desire to honor God; and a thankful heart expressed through a grateful spirit. The implication was that the centrality of the Word of God is imperative for spiritual transformation to happen in one's life.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., v.15.

²⁹⁹ Ibid. v.16.

This section concluded with the same assessment and action questions of the previous sections. This closing segment was designed to provide the learner with practical insight as to how the material could be put to use in his or her life.

Household relationships and spiritual maturity

This section on household relationships and spiritual maturity enumerated the next five commands in Colossians on aspects of spiritual maturity:

- Lesson One: *Spiritually mature wives voluntarily submit to their husbands.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command: “Wives, be subject to your husbands.”³⁰⁰ Spiritually mature wives are willing to accept their husband’s headship in the marriage and family. Submission is obedience in areas of disagreement that do not violate the Word of God. Submitting is within the context of a wife’s spiritual responsibility before God. The implication was that being a submissive wife is her responsibility before the Lord. She is accountable to God for her submission not her husband.
- Lesson Two: *Spiritually mature husbands serve the greater good of their wives.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command: “Husbands, love your wives.”³⁰¹ Marriage comes down to one question for the husband: Is she number one in the husband’s life? Is he willing to put one woman above everything and everyone else (except God) in his life except? Husbands are not dictators or authoritarian in their role. They are servants serving their wife’s greater interests. They do so throughout their life with their wife without expecting reciprocity. The

³⁰⁰ Ibid., v.18.

³⁰¹ Ibid., v.19.

implication was that God never wants to see a wife unloved. A wife is not loved if she is merely tolerated or intimidated, patronized, or dismissed.

- Lesson Three: *Spiritually mature husbands do not treat their wives harshly.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command: “Do not be embittered against them.”³⁰² A spiritually mature husband does not hold hard feelings against his wife. He does not fight her, turn against her, or have ulterior designs toward her. Because of the differences in personalities between men and women, these differences can create friction leading to bitterness. The implication was that the husband should never take his wife for granted. God says that a husband’s bitterness toward his wife can be a problem. A spiritually mature husband is aware of this.
- Lesson Four: *Spiritually mature children allow parents to establish boundaries for them.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command: “Children, obey your parents.”³⁰³ Parenting is about setting boundaries for one’s children. Children exemplify a characteristic of spiritual maturity by not rebelling against those standards. This is an attitude that is well pleasing to the Lord. It reveals unwillingness to rebel against God and His standard of authority, which is built into the fabric of family and society. The implication was that children benefit personally, emotionally, and spiritually when they willingly submit to boundaries established for them by their parents.
- Lesson Five: *Spiritually mature fathers do not presume upon their children’s obedience.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command: “Fathers, do not provoke

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid., v.20.

your children.”³⁰⁴ Spiritually mature fathers will stop exasperating their children with unreasonable demands or unacceptable expectations. Excessive discipline and imbalanced criticism only discourages and embitters children. The implication was that fathering was not about nitpicking, perfectionism, or unnecessary restrictions. Fathers must stop irritating their children and arrange their fathering to be consistent with God’s expectations.

This section concluded with the same assessment and action questions of the previous sections. This closing segment was designed to provide the learner with practical insight as to how the material could be put to use in his or her life.

Hierarchal relationships and spiritual maturity

This section on hierarchal relationships and spiritual maturity encompasses the next three commands in Colossians on the traits of spiritual maturity:

- Lesson One: *Spiritually mature subordinates honor superiors by work performed with integrity and excellence.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command:

“Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters.”³⁰⁵ A spiritually mature subordinate willingly provides scrupulous service from a powerless position to a superior. This service is rendered from a sincere heart for the greater good of his or her superior. The fear of the Lord keeps a subordinate single-minded about this purpose. The implication was that subordinates comply with superiors obediently, even when they disagree with them about that service.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., v.21.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., v.22.

- Lesson Two: *Spiritually mature subordinates recognize the manner in which work is done is important to God.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command: “Do your work heartily.”³⁰⁶ Spiritually mature subordinates put their whole heart behind their service. A subordinate’s work must be done with the recognition that God is the employer. If the subordinate seeks to please God, then the service is rendered with enthusiasm and diligence. The implication was that God expects one’s service to be magnanimous; without a spirit of entitlement. When God’s people are subordinate in rank, they need to remember that it is the Lord Christ whom they serve.
- Lesson Three: *Spiritually mature superiors treat subordinates with justice and equity.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command: “Masters, treat your slaves with justice and fairness.”³⁰⁷ Spiritually mature superiors do not lord it over those whom they oversee. Every master is responsible to God for the treatment of those serving them in any capacity. Superiors must not take advantage of their position and impose unfair or unjust practices. The implication was that while there may be differing roles with contrasting authority, abuse and neglect of people through the administration of that authority is a violation of the will of God.

This section concluded with the same assessment and action questions of the previous sections. This closing segment was designed to provide the learner with practical insight as to how the material could be put to use in his or her life.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., vv.23-24.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 4:1.

Practical holiness and spiritual maturity

This section on practical holiness and spiritual maturity explains the final two commands in Colossians on this aspect of spiritual maturity:

- Lesson One: *Spiritually mature believers pray in the rhythm of daily life.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command: “Devote yourselves to prayer.”³⁰⁸ Spiritually mature believers practice regular and persistence prayer habits. Prayer is communicating messages to God while he is not visibly manifested. Vigilance and watchfulness are essential for a robust prayer life. Expressing thankfulness to God is a vital component of a focused and energetic prayer life. The implication was that tenacious praying exemplified the prayers of believers who comprehended its significance.
- Lesson Two: *Spiritually mature believers engage pagans so interchanges with them are personally and spiritually productive.* This lesson was an exegesis of the command: “Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders.”³⁰⁹ Spiritually mature believers evaluate circumstances and apply godly decision-making. The context for the application of wise decision-making is one’s relationship with unbelievers. Often our decisions have ramifications for others. These moments can be valuable opportunities for measured reengagement with non-believers as a testimony of grace in both word and deed. The implication is that a believer should always attempt to have an attractive witness, without compromise, in the daily affairs and happenings of his or her life. Conversation and witness with unbelievers should be stimulating and enlightening.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., v.2.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., vv.5-6.

This section concluded with the same assessment and action questions of the previous sections. This closing segment was designed to provide the learner with practical insight as to how the material could be put to use in his or her life.

The Outcome of the Lessons

The participants studied the lessons for several weeks with the author. The linchpins of the study were the commands in Colossians and their interrelationship with the characteristics of spiritual maturity. The plan was to study these traits so that the participants would be prepared to assess their knowledge and application of these attributes through the spiritual maturity assessment. The results of this procedure are included in the section about the assessments outcome.

The Strategy and Evaluation of the Assessment on Spiritual Maturity

The purpose of the assessment was to provide a way of measuring the participant's own degree of spiritual maturity compared to the traits revealed in the commands in Colossians. This appraisal was based upon the lessons taught to the participants, which focused on the commands found Colossians and their relationship to spiritual maturity.

The assessment not only measured the degree of spiritual maturity relative to the commands but also informed them of the current influence of these in their lives. Additionally, the assessment supplied them with the capability to develop a continuous evaluation of their future spiritual growth and maturation.

The assessment was designed to assist the participants in gaining knowledge of their own rate of spiritual maturation and be confident in knowing that they had an

instrument that was consistent with biblical teaching to guide them in this process.

The expectations of the assessment are: (1) they would *provide* a measurement of the level of spiritual maturity consistent with the specific traits taught and learned from Colossians; (2) they would *increase* the participants' awareness of the need for spiritual maturity in their own life and ministry; (3) they would *motivate* participants to set the trajectory of their own discipleship ministry in the direction of the spiritual maturity of their disciples; and (4) they would *allow* for the use of the studies and the assessment tool to become a part of the curriculum they use to teach others.

The Structure of the Assessment

The assessment was configured into four sections. The first section contained sixty-three questions derived from the twenty-two commands in Colossians. The second section distilled each participant's answers through two different grids. One grid scored the answers cumulatively in each of the seven categories. The other grid divided the participant's overall score from all seven categories with the sixty-three questions to determine an average score, which revealed how well they were progressing toward spiritual maturity. The third section addressed specific areas of strength and weakness related to the scoring in each category. The final section was the planning for future spiritual growth toward maturity based upon setting goals and developing an action statement for each category.

The Outcome of the Assessment

The assessment included sixty-three questions that the participants answered. These questions were divided between the seven major categories within which the

commands had been collated. Each question was scored from 1 to 5 with 1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 meaning strongly agree. The other three possible answers were 2 for disagree, 3 for neither agree nor disagree and 4 for agree.

There were nine questions in each category. The highest score available for each of the seven individual categories was 45. The highest aggregate score for all seven categories was 315. The average score for this group of participants was 243. The scores by category and total aggregate scores communicate the same message about the participant's development of spiritual maturity. This is charted in the Graph below. The collective scores in each category of maturity were compared with the total scores of each category to provide a schema for the results of the assessment.

The highest average score for each category

The Goal of ministry: and we proclaim him admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ Colossians 1:28							
41-45 Very High							
36-40 High	37.1	37.6				39.4	
31-35 Mod. High			33.3	34.2	34.2		32.4
26-30 Moderate							
21-25 Low Mod.							
16-20 Low							
9-15 Very Low							

	DISCERN and Spiritual Maturity	OUTLOOK and Spiritual Maturity	SIN and Spiritual Maturity	GODLINESS and Spiritual Maturity	HOUSEHOLD and Spiritual Maturity	HIERARCHY and Spiritual Maturity	HOLINESS and Spiritual Maturity
Score	Categories						

The participants' highest average score, which was in the high range, was in the hierarchy category that measures hierarchal relationships and spiritual maturity. A spiritually mature believer aligns with the authority structure of superior to subordinate relationships. This is the area of greatest growth toward maturity for this group.

The lowest average score for the group (scored as moderately high) was in the personal holiness category. This is the group's area of greatest need and least maturity. Believers who show spiritual maturity in personal holiness assume responsibility for their own personal and spiritual responsibility.

The following observations can be made in relation to the total scoring within each category of maturity. First, all of the participants; average score in all seven categories ranged between moderate to high. There was no scoring within the low to very low range indicating that chaos or disorder does not characterize any of the participants' spiritual lives. All participants can be generally described as ordered or well-ordered in all of the categories with some maturity evident in one or more.

Second, there are no scores in the very high range of the assessment. This indicates that there is the need for further development of maturity in each category. The participants have achieved a moderate to high range of spiritual growth but must determine to continue to pursue the kind of growth that would be consistent with spiritual maturity. This realm of growth is where a person exercises a full complement of the traits of spiritual maturity across the entire spectrum of the categories in the assessment.

Third, the participants' greatest area of spiritual growth is within the realm of authority structures between subordinates and superiors. This probably reflects the degree of comfort they experience within the authority structure of their employment. Authority structure is easier to assess and less subjective because of measurements already built into their workplace responsibilities. Their familiarity, due to the amount of time invested in this area with their role also seems to be a contributing factor to this score.

Fourth, the lowest score and greatest weakness was within the realm of personal holiness that is focused on devotion to prayer and the ability to engage non-believers with issues of faith. This low score may indicate the lack of time invested in the development of these traits or a piecemeal approach to developing these spiritual responsibilities. It is interesting that the next lowest score was in the realm of sin and spiritual maturity. This area also requires diligent commitment and spiritual investment for the participants. Both of these categories represent some of the core inner values of spiritual maturity and cannot be engaged without significant time and discipline.

Fifth, even though the scoring indicated that the participants' spiritual lives are ordered or well ordered, they should not be content with this level of growth. The teaching in Scripture is for spiritual maturity not well-ordered living. The best thing that can be said about ordered living is that chaos is avoided. However, avoiding chaos must not be the goal of one's spiritual growth. The expectation of scripture is the pursuit of and living within the realm of spiritual maturity.

Sixth, moving into the realm of spiritual maturity requires movement through the realms of spiritual babyhood, to childhood, to adulthood. Passing through these realms, by means of spiritual growth, is essential before progressing into the realm of spiritual

maturity. The movement of growth can be generally categorized as one from chaos to order to maturity. Maturity is always the goal of spiritual growth. It is the purpose of ministry. The trajectory of discipleship is spiritual maturity.

Seventh, the participants' general spiritual growth pattern has trended into a spiritually ordered life. There is evidence that in some of the categories they have gravitated toward a high level of spiritual growth. The momentum of growth has been oriented toward maturity and away from chaos or disorder. It seems that this group has been establishing a firm foundation of order as a necessary prerequisite to enter into the realm of spiritual maturity. The participants have been actively engaged with their own discipleship, which has apparently been a contributing factor to their trajectory of spiritual growth.

Conclusion

Spiritual maturity is the process of full comprehensive development into the image of Jesus Christ, which is reached through continual growth. The commands in Colossians provide a collection of attributes that display spiritual maturity in a believer's life. The lessons formulated from these commands in Colossians brought these characteristics into sharper focus. The assessment contributed to the understanding of the need for these traits to be developed and measured in one's life.

The outcome of this exercise was the realization that spiritual maturity is not only a destination to be pursued but also a process in which to be engaged. There is a realm of spiritual maturity the Bible recognizes in which a believer can enter. This realm, however, can be accessed only through continual spiritual growth that progresses in

stages from babyhood to maturity. The Scripture is clear that this is to be the goal of every believer and the purpose of all ministry.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AS A RESULT OF THIS PROJECT AND AN IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

This project has generated insights that can be applied to discipleship ministry in any context. These insights can be stated in the form of general principles that formulate some of the conclusions gained from this study. These conclusions serve to provide further instruction as to how discipleship can impact the development of spiritual maturity.

The Focus of Discipleship Ministry

The trajectory of ministry is spiritual maturity. The process en route to spiritual maturity is spiritual growth. The apparatus of spiritual growth is discipleship. Discipleship is the propulsion inducing Disciples spiritual growth, which cultivates spiritual maturity.

The specific contribution of this study was the demonstration of how spiritual maturity is fostered through discipleship. That contribution can be summarized in seven general propositions from the seven categories of commands in Colossians.

Disciples Need to Develop Discernment

Discerning believers are spiritually mature. Discernment was described as the ability to perceive correctly. These commands included warnings about false teaching, artificial spirituality, and deceptive ideas. The commands were intended to generate discernment so a believer could avoid succumbing to this type of falsehood. This required

a positive command to conduct one's life consistent with Christ. This also involved negative commands to not be taken captive by deceptive reasoning and not to be judged by the imposed restrictions of false ideas.

Discipleship ministry must engage a believer's thinking with knowledge and understanding of God's Word. The bastion for this is conducting one's life consistent with the way Christ was received. In order for disciples to discern truth from error and good from evil they must apply the instruction they are taught as it relates to Jesus Christ's person and work as well as the teachings in the New Testament. Perception is possible when one develops the ability to bring Christ's thinking to bear upon his or her particular circumstance. Discipleship is the vehicle, which makes this knowledge productive.

Disciples Need to Develop an Eternal Mindset

Fearful of the Colossians being defrauded of their eternal rewards, Paul commanded them not to become caught up in worldly religious protocol, which was based in a proud attitude. The concepts of self-abasement, the worship of angels, and non-verifiable visions, needed to be countered by an eternal and vertical mindset. A heavenly way of thinking, the way things are processed with an eternal perspective, must be determinative for a believer who is spiritually mature.

Discipleship ministry must nurture a biblically informed approach. This will instill the knowledge essential for evaluating life from an eternal point of view. This ability creates the capacity to perceive God's frame of reference and apply this to one's life. It enables one to have an eternal perspective about everything. The outcome is a

spiritually mature believer who has an eternal and not a temporal viewpoint to bring to bear upon his or her life circumstances.

Disciples Need to Develop Sin Sensitivity

The apostle makes three points with his commands regarding sin. The first was to consider the members of one's body as dead to sin. The second was to put aside all abusive speech. The third was to not be dishonest with one another. This requires becoming sensitive to these sin issues in one's life. These sin issues are expressed through attitudes, actions, perceptions, ambitions, and problem solving. A spiritually mature believer does not operate his or her life utilizing these gambits.

Discipleship ministry must prioritize the need to become aware of sin in one's life. Sin is anything that is contrary to the character of God. Sin is destructive to one's spiritual life and walk with God. Sin must be specified and identified. Sins of anger, both subtle and overt expressions, must especially be called out and never tolerated. Discipleship must not ignore sin in a believer's life. Spiritually mature believers understand the destructive nature of sin and apply daily confession and repentance as an attribute of spiritual maturity.

Disciples Need to Develop Godliness

A spiritually mature believer adopts the character of Christ. This was described as compassionate benevolence. This benevolence includes a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, forgiveness, love and peace. The governing feature with this grouping was a demeanor consistent with being chosen of God and beloved by

God. The essence of these traits was inner propulsion to extend oneself toward others in compassionate heartfelt service.

Discipleship ministry must determine to inculcate a godliness that exemplifies compassionate benevolence. The apostle commands believers to do so by letting the Word of Christ dwell within them. This is a call to ground one's inner man upon the teaching of the Word of God. A spiritually mature believer always has the welcome mat out and available to receive God's Word of instruction. The Word of God produces wisdom that generates into thanksgiving, which produces a life that honors and worships God in both attitude and action.

Disciples Need to Align Their Roles in the Family by God's Design

A spiritually mature believer operates under God's household statutes. There are five commands prescribed for four different functions. These functions include wives, husbands, children, and fathers. The wives are to voluntarily submit to their husbands. Husbands are to serve their wife's greater good and not be harsh toward her. Children are to exemplify obedience to their parents. Fathers are not to exasperate their children by presuming upon their obedience.

Discipleship ministry needs to enumerate the God-given roles of responsibility for the household. This includes instilling a biblical frame of reference to men as fathers and husbands. They are not commanded to submit by virtue of their God-given leadership in the home. That leadership, which serves the family and is not meant to be served by the family, is pleasing to God. This service is demonstrated by serving the greater good of one's wife. Harshness and presumption are not elements of the God-given expectations of

a husband and father. A male must not use his role to dominate, control, manipulate, or demand compliance in the household.

A woman who is a wife decides to voluntarily submit to her husband and not usurp the leadership role of her husband. Children must submit to their parents' responsibility to establish boundaries for them. In both cases, God is the center focus of these roles and responsibilities. The wife does what is *fitting to the Lord* when she willingly submits to her husband. Children do what is *well pleasing to the Lord* when they submit to the parental establishment of boundaries for them. Spiritually mature household members reflect God's priorities in their family life and relationships.

Disciples Need to Align with the Authority Structure in Subordinate to Superior Relationships

Spiritually mature believers align with God's hierarchal structure of relationships. This was especially noted in the relationship between slaves and masters. Slaves were responsible to perform work for superiors with integrity and excellence. This was a form of honoring their superiors. Masters were required to behave toward subordinates with justice and equity. For slaves, this was done *as for the Lord rather than men*. For masters, this was done with the knowledge that *you too have a Master in heaven*. The subordinate was not to be slothful or assume an attitude of entitlement. The superior was not to be unfair or manipulative toward those working for them in some way.

Discipleship ministry needs to lay the groundwork for the style of service that is biblically rendered for both a subordinate and a superior. Performance must not be at a surface level, as merely to please men or to get away with minimal effort. Rank does not

allow one to presume upon those performing, serving, or working. Leadership is tempered with justice and equity toward everyone who may be in a subordinate role. As in the family, so in hierarchal relationships—both are accountable to God who is watching. Spiritually mature believers recognize this dynamic and are fortified by this knowledge.

Disciples Need to Develop Personal Holiness

Spiritually mature believers assume personal and spiritual responsibility for themselves. The commands in Colossians express a twofold responsibility. The first was devotion to prayer with an attitude of thanksgiving. The second was the ability to engage non-believers with issues of faith when the opportunity was available. Devotion to prayer was a call to make prayer part of the daily rhythm of one's life. Wisdom toward outsiders was an expectation of being ready to execute the role of a witness within the daily walk of one's life.

Discipleship ministry needs to enhance the spiritual commitment of believers in prayer and witness. These two responsibilities summarize the overarching function of the spiritual life. One is the engineering of an inner transformation exemplified by communication with God in prayer. The other is an outward transformation typified by communication with non-believers in witness. Both prayer and witness, the inner and outer dynamics of the spiritually mature life, should be emboldened through discipleship ministry.

The Context of Discipleship Ministry

The process of discipleship involves giving one the personal attention needed in order to make spiritual progress in their walk with the Lord. It is possible for both new believers and people who have been believers for a long time to stop moving toward their own spiritual maturity. The purpose of discipleship ministry is to move people from where they are toward a greater degree of spiritual growth.

As a believer grows and learns, eventually there is the opportunity to duplicate this development in the lives of others. As a person is learning, growing, and passing on their discoveries, he or she moves further along into varying stages of spiritual growth and maturity. This is a lifetime pursuit, sustained through the ministry of discipleship. In order to implement a strategy of discipleship that encompasses movement in the direction of spiritual maturity, several principles need to be kept in focus.

Believers Should Be Encouraged to Imitate What They Learn

A discipler must have a reproductive attitude. People being disciplined should be encouraged to reproduce what they are learning and how they are growing. This should entail what is being learned from the Word of God, not a discipler's own opinion. God's truth is imitated and exemplified in a believer's life.

A strategy of discipleship must include this process of imitation that persuades both the discipler and the disciple to grow and pursue spiritual maturity. On one hand, it is a discipler's personal and spiritual investment in a disciple's life. On the other hand, both the discipler and disciple are motivated to learn, grow and multiply that impact in their own lives as well as the lives of other potential disciples.

Believers Should Not Separate Their Discipleship Ministry from Their Friendships

The gospel should be shared and the Word of God taught within the sphere of one's personal relationships. Friendship and discipleship are not mutually exclusive. One's disciples should be his or her friends, and their friends should be their disciples. Sharing life together at a level of friendship increases the opportunity to penetrate more deeply within the realm of spiritual growth. The possibility for openness, honesty, and vulnerability escalates the potential for transformation.

A strategy of discipleship must include ministry within the sphere of one's closest friendships. One will have peripheral relationships that may or may not become more intimate. Discipleship ministry that engenders spiritual transformation will be in the realm of one's closer and more intimate friendships. A professional approach can be influential as long as it does not promote aloofness and diminish frank and honest interaction between the discipler and the learner. However, the more intimate the relationship, the more profound the impact can potentially become.

Believers Should Be Able to Teach the Word of God to Others

In scripture, one is called to set the truth of God's Word before people. A discipler will teach disciples what he or she has learned from the Word of God. Teaching and instilling the Word of God is always with an awareness of entrusting this investment to faithful people who can teach others what they have learned. This type of reproduction is a priority for disciplers.

A strategy of discipleship ministry must include giving biblical instruction to

disciples who will in turn reproduce that by teaching others as well. A discipler will focus his or her ministry upon discovering and then teaching reproductive men and women. The combination of the Word of God and reproducible disciples is the two-fold thrust of discipleship ministry. The impact made through this discipleship strategy is one that increases the potential for spiritual growth and maturity.

Believers Should Center Their Ministry upon the Word of God

A ministry of discipleship that fosters spiritual growth proclaims the Word of God. The Word is taught whether one is open to its teaching or not. Instruction is given patiently over time. Warning and correction from God's Word is included in the undertaking. Disciplers will function as teachers who tell disciples what they need to hear not necessarily what they want to hear. The Word of God is the authority on life issues. A discipler will use it to answer questions, engage discussion, and clarify answers.

A strategy of discipleship ministry must include proclaiming the Word of God. That is not necessarily from a pulpit or in the public arena. It can be in a small gathering or one on one where the Word of God is opened and taught personally or individually. The Word of God is applied to every kind of life situation. All of the Word can be applied even though all of it may not be able to be performed. This focus on God's Word enables disciples to develop the capability to discern truth from error. A strong foundation based upon the scriptures is the basis of personal and spiritual growth. One cannot expect to advance spiritually without a life built upon that infrastructure.

Believers Should Have a Multifaceted Approach to Discipleship

A ministry of discipleship dispatches people for ministry as well as equips them for service. This dual thrust of discipleship both deepens and broadens its impact. Disciplers should view their ministry as serving people individually not in a collective group. This is a ministry that is constantly engaged in people's lives, where they are raising their families, parenting their children, and performing their work. It is a ministry determined to equip them in various life situations and then give them responsibility to be involved in ministry in different areas.

A strategy of discipleship ministry must include equipping believers so they can then apply themselves to their own ministry of discipleship. They should be given avenues of service along the path of their own journey to expose them to opportunities to teach, disciple, and serve. They can learn along the way and discern how they can make a personal contribution to the discipleship of others. Getting them involved in learning, doing, and facilitating growth in others contributes to the kind of duplication that is consistent with discipleship.

The Implementation of Discipleship Ministry

This project is the basis of a discipleship strategy designed to strengthen the possibility of disciples becoming spiritually mature. The approach is to employ the commands in the book of Colossians as the resource from which one can learn the aspects of spiritual maturity that can be measured in one's life. The implementation of this strategy includes the context in which it will take place. It also comprises the objectives to guide the implementation and the plans to execute the project.

The Context of Implementation

This project will involve teaching material that has been collated and studied that has been derived from the twenty-two commands in the book of Colossians. This will be done in association with the author's discipleship ministry. This material will be taught in one-on-one settings and in small groups by people who have already been through the material themselves. The disciplers will meet with learners once a week for an hour at a time to work through that material and engage in the learning process with them.

The sessions will take place in a variety of settings, either informal or formal, wherever it is convenient to meet and study together. To facilitate the sessions between disciplers and learners, certain guidelines will dictate how they will meet. First, a discipler will need to take the initiative. The point is to begin as soon as a potential discipler has learned the material. This means taking initiative to make personal contact with one a discipler intends to teach.

Once contact has been made and the initial process of meeting has begun, the disciple may be nervous about meeting unless it is someone the discipler has already been meeting with in previous contexts. It is important for the discipler to put the disciple at ease, being personable and taking time to share about his or her family, job and interests.

A discipler should be directive in leading the session and setting the pace for the time together. A learner may have things he or she desires to discuss, and that can happen to a certain extent. However, the purpose for meeting is to interact with the material from Colossians and engage in the implications personally from that study.

A discipler should give regular encouragement regarding the progress the

learner is making—how much has been learned and processed, and how far he or she has gotten in the study. Summarizing previous material studied at the beginning of the meeting, and then ending with a review of what was learned during the new session is all part of encouragement.

A discipler gives information in smaller pieces and then develops pieces into a larger whole. The goal is for the learner to succeed, learn, and be able to repeat it and process it. The objective is not to traverse all of the material as quickly as possible but, rather, to engage the material and allow it to penetrate the heart and mind of the disciple. On the one hand, the goal is to prepare them to teach others the material. On the other hand, the purpose is to help the learner make progress in his or her own spiritual maturity.

A discipler can recommend but not require outside work. The disciple has committed to meeting one hour a week to study this material. Focus on making that hour a quality teaching time of interacting with the commands in Colossians and their implications for your disciple's spiritual maturity. Outside work may not be legitimate in this context. However, a discipler can make recommendations, such as a reading plan for scripture or practicing teaching what has been learned with someone else, depending upon the learner's progress. If a disciple is more mature you might ask him or her to consider meeting with someone regularly, like you have been doing together, and teach the Colossian material.

A discipler should encourage questions and comments as the study continues with the disciple. A learner should be encouraged to interact with the material during each session. They should be encouraged to give their own examples, ask related questions,

and even to disagree and discuss differences of thought related to the material. The outcome of these sessions is to encourage a learner to grow in his or her knowledge of God's Word and progress toward spiritual maturity.

The Objectives of Implementation

This project envisions a number of outcomes that will hopefully result from the use of this material within a discipleship context. These outcomes appear below in the form of general statements:

- Students will learn what each of the Colossian commands means and how each one is integrated with the need to become spiritually mature. This will include a study of each of the twenty-two commands in their context. The study will be in the form of an exegetical analysis of the verses to ascertain the nuances and comprehend the case being made with each command.
- Students will understand the meaning of Colossians 1:28-29 to be the need to develop spiritually mature believers who are presentable to Christ at judgment. The nature of this ministry is hard work requiring intense labor in order to impact believers at the level of their spiritual maturity. Students will discover the difficult challenge of spiritual ministry that can transform people's lives.
- Students will be able to identify the categories of spiritual maturity, which collate the twenty-two commands into seven divisions. They will understand how spiritual maturity is dependent on discernment, outlook, sin, godliness, household relationships, hierarchal relationships, and personal holiness. Each of these

categories includes some of the commands that assist in grouping them with similar ones.

- Students will learn the relationship of the twenty-two commands to spiritual maturity as well as the meaning and application of each of them in Colossians. Each of the commands will be identified and the meaning deciphered from the text of scripture. Then students delineate a specific application for each command. That application will be in the form of a principle that can be put to use in a practical way in the believer's life. In each case the statement will encapsulate the overall emphasis of the command, which is reflective of someone who is spiritually mature.
- Students will discover implications throughout the study that are conclusions they can draw from the material as it is learned. The student will review these implications so that he or she can comprehend how this material relates to the overall purpose of enhancing the kind of ministry that produces spiritual maturity. These implications will include practical insights to consider and ramifications they may have in other ways. These implications are designed to provoke further thought about the insights gained from the study and how that information can infiltrate beyond just the immediate learning and on into other realms.
- Students will extrapolate on the seven major categories by expressing a practical application for each of them that can be applied to the believer's life. These seven categories are overarching statements about the overall trajectory of spiritual growth. They are general statements that have specific application. These

statements refer to the spiritually mature believer who is growing and being transformed by God's Word. These seven categories include a spiritually mature believer who perceives correctly, has an eternal perspective, is sin sensitive, adopts the character of Christ, aligns with roles in the family by God's design, aligns with authority structures in superior to subordinate relationships, and who assumes personal and spiritual responsibility.

- Students will periodically assess what lessons he or she has learned or is learning during the study. After each category is studied, along with its particular commands, the student will be able to take time to do an assessment by writing a one- to two-sentence response to the question: "What one lesson have you learned from this study?" Then the student will answer a second question: "What one action will you take to ensure that the lesson is applied?" Both the assessment and action questions are designed to have the student interact, at a practical level, with the material and lessons learned. The hope is that the material can provoke significant ways a student can make movement toward his or her own spiritual growth.
- Students will have the opportunity to take a spiritual maturity assessment at the end of the study. The purpose of the assessment is to measure the student's own level of spiritual growth compared to the twenty-two commands studied in the lessons from Colossians. The assessment will mirror the content of the study and include all seven categories as well as all twenty-two commands. The assessment addresses nine questions in each of the seven categories ranking answers from

Very High to Very Low. There will be a total of sixty-three questions, which will be collated into a scoring system that will measure the level of spiritual growth in relationship to the specific commands. The student will be able to graph each answer to determine where he or she is regarding spiritual maturity. The charted answers will give the student an overview of his or her spiritual maturity.

- Students will be able to address specific areas needing evaluation as shown in their assessment. After the scoring has been completed, the student can gauge his or her greatest area of spiritual growth and comment on the two greatest areas of growth accordingly. Students will be asked to provide a statement about those areas of growth and an idea as to how they plan to continue to strengthen them. Students will also be asked to gauge his or her least area of spiritual growth and comment on the two least areas of growth, according to the assessment. Students will be asked to provide a statement about those areas of growth and an idea as to how they plan to develop those areas in the future. The purpose of this exercise is to assist the student in evaluating what is happening in his or her life and to formulate a plan of action to deliberately complement the growth that is needed.
- Students will be able to formulate a plan for their own spiritual maturity in the future. They will make specific plans consistent with their current evaluation from the assessment. They will determine specific steps in each of the seven categories that will need to be taken to assure they continue to make progress in each area. They will be asked to develop a goal statement, followed by an action plan statement, for each category of spiritual maturity from the study. The goal is to be

specific, measured, and concise. The action plan should state exact steps that will be taken to ensure the outcome is possible. The purpose of this planning is to motivate the student to take identifiable action to move in the direction of his or her spiritual maturity comprehensively and in tandem with each of the seven categories of growth described in Colossians.

- The material from Colossians will be used as part of the discipleship curriculum of the author's ministry. The lessons from Colossians will be collated and copied into a formal study. Disciplers who are involved in that discipleship ministry will have access to the study material and use it in their own discipling ministry. This material will become a part of the program of study that already includes a number of studies associated with discipleship. This material will be added to the entire library of material currently available for use in one on one and small group discipleship.

The Plans for Implementation

Plans to implement this project involve specific agendas that will put this project to use in a practical way:

First, the study material will be arranged into a final format that can then be organized and copied into some type of formal study book that can be used as another tool in our discipleship ministry. This will entail further editing, formatting, and eventual printing so it can formally become an addition to the overall curriculum.

Second, the lessons and assessment will be taught to disciplers who will, in turn, use it to teach their disciples. This will usually involve the material being taught in a one-

on-one setting so that it is disseminated throughout the discipleship ministry and utilized on a personal and relational level.

Third, the assessment will also be included as part of the study curriculum. Its value will be the practical use of the material to bolster our overall commitment to participate in the spiritual maturity of discipling. The focal point of this ministry is to contribute to the spiritual vitality of men and women who desire to pursue their own spiritual growth. This curriculum is another piece to assist in this overall objective.

Fourth, the use of this curriculum will be a long-term initiative. Discipleship happens over a long period of time. People go through seasons of life during the longevity of ministry. This material can address a variety of applications that derive from various seasons of life one passes through. Since the material is procured directly from scripture, it will be applicable throughout a lifetime. The emphasis upon spiritual maturity keeps the attention of scripture at the center.

Fifth, the use of the assessment provides an additional tool to assist disciples to grow up spiritually. Our ministry is not just about teaching people material from the Bible. The objective is to invest the truth of God's Word into the very fabric of believers' lives so that they are transformed by the dynamic nature of the Word of God. The assessment forces students to own up to their level of spiritual growth. This is a good thing because it orients our ministry in the direction of their spiritual maturity. Discipleship is contributing to the spiritual growth and maturity of believers. The assessment keeps this purpose prominent in the process of disciple making.

Conclusion

This chapter has served to delineate the focus of discipleship ministry as the seven principles derived from the categories of spiritual growth from the Colossian commands. This chapter has also assisted to review the context of discipleship ministry as having to do with the role believers should take in a discipleship ministry. The chapter has also discussed the implementation and context of discipleship ministry, the objectives of discipleship ministry, and the plans for implementation of discipleship ministry related to this project. Some concluding thoughts will finalize the message this chapter attempts to convey.

First, an implementation strategy must include the Word of God as essential for spiritual growth, transformation, and maturation. Within the category of the spiritually mature is a believer whose life constantly aligns with the instruction in the Word of God. Influencing disciples in the direction of Christlikeness is the only direction consistent with an accurate comprehension and application of God's Word. Grasping the heart, mind, and will of God is possible if the scriptures are viewed as authoritative and sufficient. Collaborating with the Word of God to invoke life change produces spiritually mature believers in Christ.

Second, an implementation strategy must include the pursuit of Christlikeness within every dimension of one's life. Spiritual maturity can be equated with the character of Jesus Christ. His image is borne throughout the study and application of scripture. Christ's character is the prototype for a believer's new life. He is the standard of maturity. This lofty goal must never be lowered to accommodate one's immaturity or

sinful habits.

Third, an implementation strategy must include the eschatological goal of presenting spiritually mature believers before Christ at the judgment of believers. This serves as a strategic motivation to pursue spiritual maturity throughout one's ministry with people. This reality beckons one to stay the course in spite of barriers or calamity. People will disappoint. Circumstances will distract. The spiritual warfare will intimidate. However, a spiritually mature discipler understands these challenges, and yet continues to press on in order to present believers as spiritually mature before Christ.

Fourth, an implementation strategy must include the pursuit of spiritual maturity. Many believers will remain spiritual babies. Others will progress into spiritual childhood. Still others will become spiritual adults. The trajectory of growth passes through various dimensions. However, spiritually mature disciplers always keep their focus on the spiritual maturity of their disciples. Their teaching is enmeshed with this purpose. Their application of God's Word is targeted toward this goal. Their service is rendered with spiritual maturity as the aim. There is no deviation from this pursuit.

If an implementation strategy is going to be effective it must include the Word of God. It must include the pursuit of Christlikeness. It must include the eschatological goal of presentable spiritually mature believers. Finally, it must include the pursuit of spiritual maturity.

CHAPTER SIX

FINAL OBSERVATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A contributing factor of this project is an appreciable comprehension of the biblical process of spiritual maturity. This chapter will elucidate this process with an explanation of the components represented on the graph in Appendix C. This graph displays each of the working parts of this process in picture form and can be reviewed as this chapter is studied.

The Realms of Spiritual Growth

The chart exhibits three realms of spiritual growth. Each realm is described by its own unique characteristics. The first realm is designated as the spiritual baby and child realm. This is the first stage of spiritual growth and begins with salvation. The activity associated with spiritual growth within this realm is chaos needing control.

A new believer begins the process of adopting God's viewpoint from the scriptures. This requires learning to adapt one's life to this new orientation. This learning curve creates personal, emotional, relational, and practical dilemmas for the new believer. Over time, as the Word of God begins to foster life change, a new believer adapts to this change and could be described as a spiritual child. A believer is not inhibited at this juncture and is able to proceed in one or more areas of his or her life toward Christlikeness.

The second realm is designated as the spiritual manhood or womanhood realm of spiritual growth. This realm is one in which a believer is exerting control to establish

spiritual order in his or her life. A spiritual man or woman has progressed beyond a chaotic spiritual life and has developed spiritual stability. This is the realm of spiritual nurture and development. It is the place where one's spiritual life is established.

The danger is that a believer can mistakenly assume that this is an acceptable location to remain. The problem with this reasoning is that spiritual growth eventually becomes stilted. Believers who stay within this realm can become legalistic because the controls they have exerted did contribute to their spiritual development. Actually, those controls kept them from descending back into spiritual chaos but did not transport them into the realm of spiritual maturity. These controls are inadequate for traversing into the realm of spiritual maturity. They must move beyond having a stable spiritual life to one that is growing and vibrant and self-discovering.

A spiritually-ordered life, one that has sustained itself and built upon the spiritual childhood where it began, is essential for producing the type of growth necessary to develop greater degrees of spiritual transformation. However, a well-ordered spiritual life can degenerate into religious rule keeping and legalistic codes—the kind of thing Paul warned the Colossians about in their need to pursue spiritual maturity.

The third realm is described as the realm of spiritual maturity. This is the ultimate destination God expects for all believers. This is the realm where order is eclipsed by creativity or maturity. This is the place where believers who have developed well-ordered spiritual lives could move beyond that order without violating it. They can bring their spiritual order into new realms of potential spiritual growth. The spiritual order created a platform of growth that could be applied to even newer and more potent spiritual growth.

A spiritual baby or child could never expect to traverse into this realm. Until they have passed into the man or woman realm of spiritual growth, there is essentially no possibility of them becoming spiritually mature. This is the realm where believers can live and serve and grow and expect to be presentable to Christ at the rewards judgment. The purpose of ministry is so that believers can traverse into this realm. Discipleship nurtures this outcome.

Traversing through Spiritual Growth

Each of the three categories of spiritual growth is traversed in different stages. There are at least three phases of growth that are indispensable for this journey within each realm.

In the baby or child realm the journey begins by accumulating a nascent understanding of the Word of God. This incipient knowledge permits a believer to exert some controls over his or her spiritual and personal life. The chaos of one's old sinful mindset and the upheaval associated with the new biblical concepts being applied to it eventually corral some of this disorder. At this stage a spiritual baby begins to move into spiritual childhood. He or she is expanding control over the initial chaos. The outcome of this process of growth is the realization of one's spiritual growth potential. This initial growth encourages further spiritual growth.

In the spiritual manhood and womanhood realm, the spiritual journey continues by cultivating an accelerated knowledge and understanding of the Word of God. This enables a believer to establish control to preserve the spiritual order already created in one's life. This amplification strengthens spiritual order and promotes further growth that

was not possible for a spiritual baby or child. This results in one's spiritual growth potential being harnessed. As this spiritual growth potential is mobilized the Word of God is increasingly employed and applied into additional dimensions of a believers life. This constructs the foundation upon which one can possibly and eventually traverse into the realm of spiritual maturity.

In the realm of spiritual maturity the spiritual journey innovates into new capacities of spiritual growth that can be labeled as being spiritually mature. Within this realm the specific commands in Colossians are exemplified in a believer's life. The expressions of spiritual maturity all throughout scripture are a dominant characteristic of a believer living within this realm. A spiritually mature believer is employing innovativeness to the spiritual life to amplify his or her spiritual maturity. It is within this realm that one's spiritual potential is realized. This is the realm where the heart and mind of God, discerned from a thorough knowledge of the Word of God, is applied.

The engine for the spiritual baby or child realm is control. The generator for the manhood and womanhood realm is order. The mechanism for the spiritually mature realm is innovation. A spiritual baby or child must exert control over his or her spiritual life. A spiritual man or woman must establish order to preserve his or her spiritual life. A spiritually mature believer can apply innovation to amplify his or her spiritual life.

Discipleship's Influence upon Spiritual Growth

The ministry that enables spiritual growth is discipleship. Discipleship is the act of one person intentionally impacting the life of another person in the direction of Christlikeness. The trajectory of discipleship is spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity is the

process of full comprehensive development into the image of Jesus Christ, which is reached through continual growth. The measurement of one's maturity is based upon his or her discipleship. This spiritual measurement is what believers will take with them when they stand before Christ.

Discipleship is the constant companion of spiritual growth. Discipleship is the God-given mechanism to enable a believer to traverse through the realms of spiritual growth. If one's discipleship is hindered in the realm of their spiritual babyhood or childhood they are in danger of experiencing a control flat line. This means a believer has stalled in his or her spiritual development and could remain flat-lined indefinitely. The outcome is the continual need to process expansion of control over order. This is where constant spiritual control mechanisms are applied so that initial spiritual awakening is not diminished. This may mean the persistent need for rule keeping, loyalty, laws, and conformity. None of these mechanisms can produce a spiritually mature believer.

If one's discipleship is hindered within the realm of manhood or womanhood there is the danger of order flat-lining. This means a believer's spiritual growth has become interrupted or obstructed or even hampered for some reason. If one's discipleship is unable to dislodge this then a believer's spiritual progress can be interfered with indefinitely. Instead of stalling, as it does for a spiritual baby or child, it stagnates and a spiritual man or woman becomes spiritually sluggish in his or her spiritual development. The outcome is the constant need to preserve order from degenerating into legalism or spiritual politeness. Eventually a believer who flat-lines in the realm of order will slow down the rate of his or her spiritual transformation. Fear and guilt will persuade one in

this or that direction spiritually instead of positive reinforcement that comes from spiritual maturity.

If one's discipleship is unhindered, he or she could possibly traverse into the realm of spiritual maturity. Discipleship equips a believer to pursue this realm and then reside within its potentialities. Discipleship introduces newness as an essential component of continued growth in one's spiritual maturity. There is no flat line of growth within the realm of the spiritually mature. Newness continues to launch one into greater degrees of spiritual growth. This is the function of new knowledge applied in new ways to life situations. The beginning of the Christian introduced the concept of newness. One is addressed as a new creature in Christ when he or she initially comes to Christ. God makes us new people so we are capable of receiving the newness God has for us in our walk with Him.

Putting out the welcome mat to receive the Word of Christ requires new thinking. A believer who is sin sensitive requires new awareness about sin and its consequences and the need to apply repentance. Assuming spiritual responsibility necessitates new understanding of the priorities of life. Aligning with God's household roles means assuming new stances in our roles in the family. Aligning with hierarchal expectations from God's Word demands new comprehension of subordinate or superior expectations. Adopting the character of Christ means new adjustments in a believers attitudes, ambitions, actions, and values. Applying discernment obliges a believer to make new calculations about what is true and what is false—what is good and what is evil. Spiritual growth requires newness. Spiritual maturity is sustained by newness.

Discipleship nurtures a believer along the path of spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is a process. It is full of spiritual ups and downs. It takes time to traverse the realms of growth. Spiritual growth can be impeded all along the way. Believers can become stuck indefinitely on the path of their spiritual development. The reality of spiritual chaos and the need to establish spiritual order can entrap a believer from increasing his or her spiritual development.

The scriptures are clear about the responsibility a believer has to participate in and assume responsibility for his or her spiritual development. Jesus does not do it for you. The gospel is the only way into the realm of eternal life. There is no other means other than the work of Christ procured on the cross. A believer's heart is changed at conversion. Now he or she can actively pursue the righteous life. The commands in Colossians are an example of the responsibility a believer has in order to conform to the righteous standard of Christlikeness.

Eventually, every believer will be accountable for his or her discipleship. A believer will take his or her discipleship—spiritual growth and maturity—with him or her at death. A believer does not take his or her salvation with him because that was already given and received as a gift. Our discipleship is not a gift but hard work. Paul claims that his entire ministry is designed to procure spiritually mature believers who are presentable as such at their judgment. The product of one's discipleship is secured in the temporal realm, where we live, serve, obey and grow.

The Thresholds of Spiritual Growth

The graph reveals two thresholds a believer passes through as he or she grows

spiritually. A spiritual child enters into the first threshold. Eventually, over time, a spiritual baby grows into childhood and the momentum of spiritual growth brings him or her to the doorway of spiritual manhood or womanhood. This process is borne along as one continues to add knowledge and understanding to his or her life. Learning and applying truth from God's Word finally allows one to emerge into the realm of spiritual manhood or womanhood. This is a process that takes time.

The graph divulges another threshold for a spiritual man or woman to enter. This threshold emerges into the realm of spiritual maturity. A spiritually ordered believer gathers more knowledge of the Word of God and applies this knowledge specifically and deliberately. Eventually there is a level of growth that exerts its influence in such a way that a believer progresses through the threshold of order into the realm of maturity. This is where the preponderance of evidence displays one as spiritually mature. Both thresholds are reference points that mark one's journey into the realm of spiritual maturity.

The reality of these thresholds is that spiritual progress is not automatic. It does not happen all at once but must pass through all of the spiritual growth realms, each of which contribute uniquely to the spiritual growth process. As a believer traverses these realms he or she expands that growth and incorporates provisions that equip him or her for spiritual transformation.

The Need to Grow Spiritually

The trajectory of the chart is always progression toward spiritual maturity. Aggregate growth is growth consistent with spiritual maturity. The trend of spiritual

growth should always be upward and never flat-lined or downward. Aggregate growth plus time is the formula for one's growth toward Christlikeness. Discipleship fosters this trajectory of growth. The Christian life is to be a life of growth, development, and transformation within the realm of spiritual maturity. Ministry to spiritual children or spiritual men or women should always be focused on their movement toward the realm of spiritual maturity. This should be the philosophy of ministry within any context. Discipleship engages believers where they are at spiritually in any given moment understanding that there are varying rates of growth and determinative circumstances that can complicate the process. This is not a deterrent to service that contributes to one's spiritual growth toward maturity.

There may be the need to disciple someone who must either expand or establish control over his or her spiritual life. This is legitimate discipleship ministry since it engages the responsibility to manage chaos and order as necessary prerequisites for increasing spiritual growth. This is not the ultimate purpose for discipling someone but may be an immediate motivation for doing so.

There may also be the need to disciple someone who is prepared to emerge within the realm of spiritual maturity. This too is legitimate discipleship ministry as it nurtures a believer's growth in the direction of his or her own spiritual maturity. This is the ultimate stage of growth, which is the goal of discipleship.

Both the discipleship of spiritual children and adults will require ministry that manages chaos and order. The discipleship ministry associated with spiritual men or women who traverse into maturity will require innovating upon the order already gained.

In either case, the trajectory of growth is always upward. It is one step at a time working through issues and concerns until eventually the next step is taken along the continuum of spiritual development.

The Dynamics of Spiritual Growth

The dynamic of both spiritual childhood and spiritual adulthood is order. Spiritual childhood needs to expand order over personal and spiritual chaos. Spiritual adulthood needs to establish that order to ensure there is no slippage back into chaos. In both cases, control is essential to develop and maintain order in one's spiritual life. This order is eventually established making it possible to avoid chaos while simultaneously providing the spiritual foundation essential for further spiritual development and potential maturity.

The dynamic of spiritual maturity is newness. Newness is the perpetual introduction of the unknown. Newness allows one to innovate and expand upon the spiritual order that has been established in one's life. A spiritually mature believer is able to be creative, apply ingenuity, and extrapolate upon new opportunities, new challenges, and new circumstances. Newness threatens the order of spiritual children and pressures the control established by spiritual adults. However, newness is essential for spiritually mature believers who go beyond order into new realms of growth without violating that order in chaotic ways.

Conclusion

This chapter has enunciated the dynamics of the biblical process of spiritual

maturity. The realms of spiritual growth include the spiritual child, spiritual adult, and spiritually mature. Traversing this spiritual growth landscape means passing through these three realms into the next stage of growth. The influence of discipleship is decisive in this transformative process. Discipleship positions the trajectory of this growth toward the realm of spiritual maturity. Spiritual growth traverses two thresholds: one from spiritual childhood to adulthood and the other from spiritual adulthood into spiritual maturity. Spiritual growth is always upward. Its target is spiritual maturity. The purpose of ministry is the spiritual maturity of every individual believer.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LESSONS ON ASPECTS OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY FROM THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS

Introduction

Lesson One: *Discipleship is focused upon the spiritual maturity of believers.*

Discipleship has generally been understood as a way of instilling biblical knowledge through teaching and mentoring. These are essential components of discipleship, but just passing on knowledge through formal or informal means does not fulfill the purpose of either Paul's discipleship ministry or the teaching about it in the New Testament. Paul's discipleship ministry focuses on the process of learning, growing, and maturing so that one can be confident of being presented *complete* in Christ (Colossians 1:28).

Cultivating maturity in believers encompasses the biblical scope of discipleship. *Maturity* is a process that leads to full development, which is reached through continual growth. *Spiritual maturity* is a process of full comprehensive development into the image of Jesus Christ, which is reached through continual growth. This perspective brings discipleship to a deeper level than just implanting biblical knowledge.

Helping believers attain spiritual maturity is consistent with scripture that commands and expects God's people to grow and mature as disciples of Jesus Christ:

"Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a *mature man*, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13, emphasis mine).

"But solid food is for the *mature*, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14, emphasis mine).

"Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ let us press on to *maturity*, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God" (Hebrews 6:1, emphasis mine).

"But *grow* in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity" (2 Peter 3:18, emphasis mine).

Colossians adds a vital component to the disciple-making ministry. Discipleship is specifically for the purpose of making an impact that contributes to one's actual spiritual transformation and maturity. To assist one in targeting this outcome, Paul indicates that

the trajectory of his entire ministry is presenting every person mature in Christ (Colossians 1:28). He indicates that this is why he was *suffering* on their behalf (v.24). This forms the essence of his *teaching and admonishing* believers (v.28). This further drives him to *labor and strive* with God's power (1:29; 2:1). This includes *protracted intercessory prayer* on behalf of his disciples (1:3, 9; 4:12). These are things Paul, as a discipler, did in order to contribute to the spiritual maturity of his disciples. Therefore, disciplers must incorporate these essential components into their disciple-making ministry.

There are a number of specific aspects of spiritual maturity Paul strove to see exemplified in all believers' lives. These aspects are in the form of commands in the book of Colossians.

Implication

The trajectory of one's spiritual growth is directly associated with one's biblical discipleship. The closer spiritual growth is connected to biblical discipleship the greater the trajectory of that spiritual growth.

Lesson Two: *The purpose of ministry is producing spiritually mature believers.*

Colossians 1:28-29 summarizes the goal and purpose of ministry. These verses articulate the basic ideas related to this purpose.

We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete [mature] in Christ (Colossians 1:28, emphasis mine).

This verse declares that the goal of ministry is service that contributes to every believer's spiritual maturity.

We proclaim Christ: Proclamation occurs in the context of the life and teaching of Christ as revelation from God. James Samra says, "The term 'Christlike' 'describe[s] Paul's conception of a mature believer [and] suggests that Paul viewed Christ as a standard toward which the attitudes and actions of believers were to be oriented, and a norm against which they were to be measured.'" ¹ This kind of proclamation can take place in both formal and informal settings. It is not the announcement of a social, political, environmental, or sexual equality message, but instead, it is a spiritual one encompassing all that is related to Jesus Christ.

¹ James Samra. *Being Conformed to Christ in Community: A Study of Maturity, Maturation and the Local Church in the Undisputed Pauline Epistles*, (London: T&T Clark, 2006) 72.

Every man (repeated three times): This emphatically states that Paul admonished every believer. So every single individual believer is to be admonished and instructed for the purpose of his or her spiritual maturity. The church is called a body. A body is something in which every individual part is essential. The church is not a collective group community but a collection of individuals, such as a body or household where every individual person is significant. A community mentality is what is good for the group is good for the individual. A body mentality is what is good for the individual is good for the body.

Admonishing every man: Paul admonished—warned and instructed—the Colossians believers. Therefore, a ministry whose goal is to promote spiritual maturity is one that warns of sin and false teaching.

Teaching every man: We are to give instruction. A skillful teacher is able to impart personal and practical knowledge to the disciple. These dual thrusts of warning and instructing; correcting and teaching incorporate the essence of proclamation thus making both concepts necessary components for discipleship.

With all wisdom: Admonishing and teaching are characterized by practical instruction for living an ordered life. The maturation process includes establishing order in one's life by the skillful application of knowledge. This knowledge is of Christ, about Christ, and from Christ.

That we might present every man: To be presented before God as spiritually mature is the motivation for our ministry to one another. This presentation is eschatological in nature and most likely refers to the Bema Seat referred to in 1 Corinthians 3:13, where believers will be judged and evaluated.

Mature in Christ: The desired state for believers is to be presented whole, complete, and mature. John MacArthur states, "The goal of the ministry is the maturity of the saints. ... Our aim is not merely to win people to Christ, but to bring them to spiritual maturity."² R. Kent Hughes adds, "Paul's goal is nothing short of presenting to Christ complete, mature, full-grown Christians. He was not into the 'I'll save 'em, you raise 'em!' type of thinking."³

Complete: Refers to the end result of our ministry. The goal of our discipling ministry is to influence every individual believer to be mature, perfect, and complete in Christ. Every ministry should be committed to building every individual believer into mature, Christlike disciples. To be presented before God as spiritually mature should be the

² John MacArthur, Jr. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Colossians and Philemon* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992) 80.

³ R. Kent Hughes. *Colossians and Philemon: The Supremacy of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1989) 48.

motivation of our ministry to one another.

Implication

The trajectory of biblically based ministry is toward producing spiritually mature disciples who are presentable as mature before Christ.

Lesson Three: *Producing spiritually mature believers is hard work.*

For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me (Colossians 1:29).

For this purpose also I labor: This means to work to the point of exhaustion. Success in serving the Lord demands our maximum effort. Labor requires both effort and toil. One labors to bring every individual believer into God's presence as mature. The entire process of proclamation, both admonition and teaching, contributes to a disciple's spiritual maturity. Paul says he *labors*, which includes physical exertion and personal, emotional, and spiritual care and concern on behalf of the people of God. The labor encompasses all kinds of effort in all kinds of ways.

Striving: This word defines the degree to which he travailed in his labor. To strive is to agonize, struggle, or fight. The Bible Knowledge Commentary says, "Developing maturity in believers took great labor or [wearisome] toil ... even struggling or agonizing like an athlete in an arena."⁴

According to His power: The key to Paul's labor is the power of God. Paul labored, but so did God. Success is due to the energy of the eternal God. Moving people to maturity is hard work, but while one struggles to do this, that effort is according to God's powerful working in him or her.

Which mightily works within me: With activity or labor there is striving. With the energy there is a powerful force at work in it. Both the labor and the striving reflect commitment to the task by the discipler. Both the energy supplied and the powerful force at work in and through it comes from God. O'Brien comments, "If one asks the question: 'Where is God powerfully at work?' then in this context the answer would be: 'Where Paul toils energetically'."⁵ Seeing people move forward from babes in Christ to spiritually mature believers is a difficult task requiring God's power at work in us.

⁴ Norman L. Geisler. *Colossians, The Bible Knowledge Commentary: The New Testament Edition*, eds., John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983) 676.

⁵ Peter T. O'Brien. *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 44: gen. eds., David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, (Waco: Word Books, 1982) 91.

Implication

1. The trajectory of our ministry should be in the direction of producing spiritually mature believers. The goal of ministry is service that contributes to every person's spiritual maturity.
2. Warning and instructing are basic components of the discipleship process, which produces spiritually mature believers.
3. Developing maturity in believers is hard work full of strife. It takes time and effort to develop spiritually mature believers.
4. The fruit of a spiritually mature ministry happens because of a combination of our efforts and the operation of God's power.
5. The outcome of these efforts is the production of spiritually mature believers whose spiritual capacity has increased and marks them as mature when presented before Christ for evaluation.
6. Notice the emphasis on individual believers. Today we want to emphasize believers in a community. The New Testament emphasized believers as a body where each individual believer is significant. The church is never defined as a community in the New Testament. The church is a collection of individuals networked together throughout the community, both locally and globally.

Assessment: What one lesson have you learned from this study?

Action: What one action will you take to ensure that the lesson is applied?

Spiritual Maturity: Categories and Commands in Colossians—An Overview

What does Spiritual Maturity Look Like?

While the Bible directs us to pursue *spiritual maturity*, not everyone displays it in the same way. Some don't display it at all. Spiritually, some are babes, others are children and still others are mature adults. There seems to be something different in those who are

spiritually mature. Using the commands found in Colossians, this study attempts to explain what a spiritually mature believer looks like.

Characteristics of Maturing Believers

There are commands in Colossians relating to being presented complete in Christ as spiritually mature. Paul's passion is to present every individual believer as mature in Christ. What that looks like is encapsulated within a series of commands Paul gave to the Colossians.

Spiritual Maturity in a Colossian Nutshell

There are *twenty-two commands* that relate to the Colossians' need to become spiritually mature. These twenty-two commands can be organized into *seven major categories*, each of which contains some of these commands.

An Overview of the Categories of Spiritual Maturity in Colossians: The Seven Categories of Spiritual Maturity

<i>The Goal of Ministry: and we proclaim him admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom that we may present every man mature in Christ Colossians 1:28</i>	
CATEGORY	SPIRITUAL MATURITY LOOKS LIKE
Discernment and Spiritual Maturity	A believer who perceives correctly
Outlook and Spiritual Maturity	A believer who has an eternal perspective
Sin and Spiritual Maturity	A believer who is sin sensitive
Godliness and Spiritual Maturity	A believer who adopts Christ's character
Household Relationships and Spiritual Maturity	A believer who aligns roles in the family by God's design
Hierarchal Relationships and Spiritual Maturity	A believer who aligns with the authority structure in superior to subordinate relationships
Practical Holiness and Spiritual Maturity	A believer who assumes spiritual responsibility

Each of these seven categories expresses a major aspect of spiritual maturity that represents an *overarching character quality* of someone who is mature spiritually. Those who are spiritual infants or children (regardless of their chronological age), should be working toward developing these character qualities that include both an *inward attitude* of the heart (discernment, eternal outlook, sin sensitivity, and godliness) and an *outward expression* of maturity (in family relationships, hierarchal relationships, and practical holiness) in one's life and relationships.

An Explanation of the Categories of Spiritual Maturity in Colossians:

Discernment and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Perceives Correctly

2:6	Command: you walk in Him...	<i>As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in Him 2:6</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers conduct their lives consistent with Christ</i>	
2:8	Command: see none deceitfully captivate you...	<i>See to it that no one takes you captive through <u>philosophy</u> and <u>empty deception</u>, according to the <u>traditions of men</u>, according to the <u>elementary principles of the world</u>, and not according to <u>Christ 2:8</u></i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers avoid the deceptive wisdom of the world</i>	
2:16	Command: do not let another judge you...	<i>Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day 2:16</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers avoid letting others restrict their spiritual freedom</i>	

Outlook and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Has an Eternal Perspective

2:18	Command: let none defraud you...	<i>Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by <u>delighting in self-abasement</u> and the <u>worship of the angel</u>, taking <u>his stand on visions</u> he has seen, <u>inflated without cause</u> by his fleshly mind 2:18</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers avoid keeping up spiritual appearances</i>	
3:1	Command: keep seeking things above...	<i>If then you have been raised up with Christ keep seeking the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God 3:1</i> <i>Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth 3:2</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers develop an eternal perspective about everything</i>	
3:2	Command: set your mind on things above...	
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers concentrate on the eternal not the temporal</i>	

Sin and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer
Is Sin Sensitive

3:5	Command: consider members of your body dead to sin...	<i>Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry...3:5</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers mortify fleshly tendencies</i>	
3:8	Command: put aside abusive speech...	<i>But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth...3:8</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers put off careless and malicious speech</i>	
3:9	Command: do not lie to one another...	<i>Do not lie to one another...3:9</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers are not dishonest with one another</i>	

Godliness and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer
Adopts Christ's Character

3:12	Command: put on a heart of compassion...	<i>...as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience bearing with one another, and forgiving each other...and beyond all these things love...3:12-14</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers put on compassionate benevolence</i>	
3:15	Command: and let the peace of Christ rule...	<i>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...3:15</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers arbitrate peaceful outcomes and are thankful</i>	
3:16	Command: let the word of Christ dwell...	<i>Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing with thankfulness...3:16</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers put out the welcome mat for the Word of God</i>	

Household Relationships and Spiritual Maturity: Spiritually Mature Believer Aligns
Roles in the Family by God's Design

3:18	Command: wives be subject to your husbands...	<i>Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord...3:18</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature wives voluntarily submit to their husbands</i>	
3:19	Command: husbands love your wives...	<i>Husbands, love your wives...3:19</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature husbands serve the greater good of their wives</i>	
3:19	Command: husbands do not be embittered against your wives...	<i>And do not be embittered against them...3:19</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature husbands do not treat their wives harshly</i>	
3:20	Command: Children obey your parents...	<i>Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord...3:20</i>
	Application: <i>Children exemplify spiritual maturity by permitting parents to establish boundaries</i>	
3:21	Command: Fathers do not exasperate your children...	<i>Fathers do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart...3:21</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature fathers do not presume upon their children's obedience</i>	

Hierarchal Relationships and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Aligns
with the Authority Structure
Within Superior to Subordinate Relationships

3:22	Command: slaves in all things obey Your masters...	<i>Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men...3:22</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature subordinates honor superiors by work performed with integrity and excellence</i>	
3:23	Command: do your work heartily as unto the Lord...	<i>Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men ...3:23</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature subordinates recognize the manner in which work is done is important to God</i>	
4:1	Command: masters treat your slaves with justice...	<i>Masters, grant to your slaves justice</i>

	Application: <i>Spiritually mature superiors treat subordinates with justice and equity</i>	<i>and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven...4:1</i>
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Practical Holiness and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Assumes Personal Spiritual Responsibility

4:2	Command: devote yourselves to prayer...	<i>Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving...4:2</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually Mature believers pray in the rhythm of daily life</i>	<i>Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person...4:5</i>
4:5	Command: conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders...	
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers engage pagans so interchanges are personally and spiritually productive</i>	

Implication

1. If spiritual maturity is the goal of our ministry to one another, it requires that we also pursue spiritual maturity ourselves.
2. Spiritual maturity is essential for one to be prepared to encounter Christ at the Bema Seat for his or her spiritual evaluation.
3. Spiritual maturity is obviously the desire of God the Father's heart for all of His children.
4. Spiritual maturity is an understanding, which requires spiritual discipline and moral excellence as preparation for eternity.
5. Spiritual maturity's eternal focus on more than just going to heaven. It is also on a time of extreme personal evaluation by Christ that will determine one's spiritual situation after they arrive.
6. Spiritual maturity is not only about having eternal life but also about doing something now with the eternal life one has been given.
7. Spiritual maturity is nuanced through discipleship ministry, which is a hands-on, from-the-ground-up type of growth that is rigorous, challenging, and transforming on this side of the grave.
8. Spiritual maturity focuses upon one's value to God, avoiding any conflicts that would violate the character of God in one's life. The goal is aligning one's life with the character of God.
9. Spiritual maturity takes time. Maturity is walking with God over time.

Commands to Becoming Spiritually Mature in Colossians

The commands in Colossians logically flow from what Paul has just told them about his ministry and their response to the gospel in chapter one. If Paul's (and in fact God's) purpose is that they should be mature, then it is reasonable that Paul would urge them forward in that direction.

He does so by using a series of commands, in chapters two to four of Colossians, which they must fulfill and which should characterize one's attitudes and behavior. What follows are commands to be obeyed that are consistent with one being presented mature or complete in Christ. This study will delineate each of these commands and explain their function in a believer who is spiritually mature.

Discernment and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Perceives Correctly

Lesson One: Spiritually mature believers conduct their lives consistent with Christ.

Colossians 2:6: *Therefore, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him.*

Spiritual maturity is consistent with a determination not to deviate from Christ. This is a command that is foundational to all of the others. Based upon this command one can then pursue the character of a spiritually mature person.

Therefore: Indicates that based on the Colossian's secure faith in Christ, they are to continue to walk in the life Christ lived.

Just as you received Christ: The form in which they received Christ is the basis upon which they must conduct their lives. That is, the content of teaching—the entire gospel. They had received this as the truth—the gospel message about the person and work of Christ. So this tells us something about the nature of faith, namely, that biblical faith trusts the evidence revealed to us in scripture.

In the Bible, faith is not a blind leap. Faith is a rational decision, which extends beyond what is personally observed but not in contradiction to it. It is going out on a limb but not going in some direction other than that of the limb. The content of their faith, then, is everything they had learned about the person and work of Jesus Christ. They had received or welcomed that revelation into their lives.

Christ Jesus as Lord: The Colossians had received the apostolic gospel centering on the Person of Christ. Faith had laid hold, not merely of tradition, but on a Person. It was Christ, the only begotten Son of God, whom they had received. The order of the title here

underscores the constant emphasis of Colossians on the divine nature of the Son. He is first *Christ*; with faith in *Jesus* the Savior; *Lord* lays stress on the person of Christ as sovereign Lord, creator and head of the church, described throughout Colossians.

Continue to live: The verb is used to refer to a person “walking” and here used metaphorically to refer to the way a person lives his or her life. So in faith the Colossians accepted Christ Jesus, so in the same way they should live their lives in Him.

In Him: The emphatic position of *in Him* stresses the fact that He is the sphere that is to occupy one’s walk. The term *walk* is vivid in that it portrays the steady progress of one’s life taken one step at a time. With each step a believer makes decisions to move in a godly direction with the desire to obey the commandments of Christ.

Implication

Spiritual transformation is a progressive type of growth into Christlikeness. It happens over time as one attempts to apply the life of Christ in every life situation. Spiritual maturity is an investment in the direction of Christlikeness. This is the primary designation of a mature believer. Christ is the paradigm and to be mature is to be like Christ.

Being in Christ implies that He is the measurement of maturity defining the standard of what it means to be mature. That meaning is embedded within the proclamation Paul made, which included admonition and instruction, and together deliverers the image of Christ to be incorporated within our own lives.

Lesson Two: Spiritually mature believers avoid the deceptive wisdom of the world.

Colossians 2:8: *See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.*

These are warnings to guard against false teaching that would lead one away from simple devotion to Jesus Christ, and replace that with various false paths to Christian maturity. Human philosophy is contrary to Christianity.

See to it: We are to watch out because of the dangers lurking at every corner due to Satan’s many deceptive devices through his world system. These devices, usually perpetrated through false teachers, often appear as angels of light and are actually agents of darkness.

That no one takes you captive: Figuratively taken captive is carrying someone away from the freedom that comes from the truth in Christ into the bondage of error. The false

teachers are seeking to claim believers as their booty and so rob them of the fullness of Christ's life.

Through empty, deceitful philosophy: It is deceitful and enticing because, in man's spiritual blindness, it appears attractive. There is no appeal if the philosophy is not attractive. Maybe this is why people want teachers who 'tickle their ears.'

Source: (1) it is drawn from human traditions, (2) it is inspired by the elemental spirits of the world, but (3) it is not according to (it ignores) the person and work of Christ. False philosophies come in all sorts, sizes, shapes, and colors and we are in no short supply of them today. And regardless of their attractive nature, they only have a negative impact for believers. Christ is the center of truth.

Implication

It is possible for a believer to be deceived in at least three ways. First, one can be deceived by information that is speculative. Second, one can be deceived by arguments that are nonsensical. Third, one can be deceived by teaching, which is fabricated. Though the information, arguments, and teaching may seem attractive, a spiritually mature believer discerns the error and pursues the truth.

Lesson Three: Spiritually mature believers avoid letting others restrict their spiritual freedom.

Colossians 2:16-17: *Therefore do not let anyone judge you with respect to food or drink, or in the matter of a feast, new moon, or Sabbath days---things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.*

False teachers were encouraging the Colossians to place their Christian freedom under their control. They wanted to limit it by prohibiting certain perfectly legitimate activities.

Let not anyone of you be judge: We should not listen to anyone who would want to criticize us based on his or her religious standards. We should not let them judge us, that is, we should not believe them when they tell us our spiritual life is defective because we are not eating or drinking appropriately, or because we are not practicing their religious calendar.

Food, drink, feast, new moon, Sabbath days: People who want to control the dispensing of the grace of God in one's life will have religious lists that they have determined make one spiritual. These are areas of legalism. The restrictions on food and drink are prohibitions to heighten spiritual sensibilities. The feast could be a Jewish feast though this is not specified. The new moon is associated with events relating to the lunar calendar. Sabbath day would be practices aligned with this weekly day of rest.

Spiritual transformation is not attained by attempts to subject the appetite of our physical bodies. Imposing religious restrictions on our bodies as a means of expressing our spiritual maturity is also unacceptable.

Things that are a mere shadow of what is to come: This is the weakness of religious regulations imposed as a standard of spiritual maturity. Shadows are not substance. Shadows are significant only as pointers toward some substantial object. They are insignificant in and of themselves. So are religious regulations that bind one to submit instead of freedom to live and serve.

The substance belongs to Christ: The genuine substance is that which belongs to Jesus Christ. The term 'body' or 'substance' is used in contrast to 'shadow'. This reality is Christ. He is the substance and thus He is (His will, His teaching, His commands) the focus of our spiritual lives.

Implication

Spiritually mature believers do not listen to anyone who wants to judge them when they are told that their spiritual life is defective because they are not following religious protocols. Spiritual transformation is not attained by attempts to subject one's physical bodies. Since Christ has released us from legal requirements one does not rely on artificial and merely ritual preferences as the means of spiritual transformation. MacArthur counsels, "We, like the Colossians, must not be intimidated by those who would make something other than knowing Christ through His Word a requirement for spiritual maturity."⁶

Assessment: What one lesson have you learned from this study?

Action: What one action will you take to ensure that the lesson is applied?

Outlook and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Has an Eternal Perspective

⁶ John MacArthur, Jr. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Colossians & Philemon*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992) 122.

Lesson One: Spiritually mature believers avoid keeping up spiritual appearances.

Colossians 2:18: *Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind.*

Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize: That is, in regards to be defrauded by contrary views of spiritual growth or the requirements of the spiritual life. Gromacki notes, "Believers should stop anyone from giving an official judgment against their rejection of legalism."⁷ The prize, which is possibly lost, is the reward of faithfully following Christ and attendant favor associate with that.

Delighting in self-abasement: The evidence of man-made religion is the appearance of humility. Outward religious display is used to promote the spiritual devotion of someone. Using this to exemplify humility is actually a display of pride.

Delighting in the worship of angels: The Bible is clear that angels are not to be worshipped or given special recognition that is only due to God (Rev 22:8-9).

Taking his stand on visions he has seen: Here are claims to spiritual superiority validated by claims of higher religious experience through mysticism. It is interesting that Paul came to Christ through a vision and here warns against entering into visions.

Inflated without cause by his fleshly mind: The basis of this artificial spirituality is in a human way of thinking or from only a worldly perspective. The basic idea is pride. Pride is value independent from God. The transforming process is constantly under attack with alternatives, suggestions, and deviations, all pointing away from Christ. This is the basis of world religions.

So to sum up, the false teachers are attempting to pull the believers away from God by placing value in appearances, mixing Christianity with pagan cultural practices, validating their faith through mystical experiences and seeing value in themselves apart from God. Spiritual transformation does not come by compliance with fanciful ritualistic notions of human origin, which are only a shadow, but by connection with the life in Christ.

Implication

We should be vigilant enough not to be deceived by alternatives that seem to assist believers spiritually. This deception in reality just draws believers into legalism, mysticism or asceticism. We should encourage believers to discipline themselves rather than determine

⁷ Robert Gromacki. *Philippians and Colossians: Joy and Completeness in Christ*, (Chattanooga: Tyndale Theological Seminary, 2003) 187.

legalistic measures to do so. The command in scripture is to deny yourself not legalize others.

Lesson Two: *Spiritually mature believers develop an eternal perspective about everything.*

Colossians 3:1: Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

A spiritually mature believer is giving attention to living of life from eternity's vantage point.

Therefore if you: Paul has just explained the deception, frustration, and futility of trying to live the spiritual life in reliance on legalistic, ascetic or mystic guidance. It did not work before we were saved and it will not work after we are saved.

Have been raised up with Christ: Not only have we died with Christ but we have also been raised with Christ. This is also in the passive voice, which signifies the power to bring about our resurrection was from outside of us, specifically from God. Clearly His infinite, inexhaustible resurrection power is available to all believers!

Keep Seeking the Things Above: We are to set our hearts on these things now. This phrase is placed first in the sentence for emphasis and to contrast with the earthly things the false teachers were propagating. In addition Paul repeats this phrase 'the things above' in the next verse, Colossians 3:2. Clearly, he wants believers to view all of life from a heavenly perspective rather than earthly perspective. The direction of life moves from horizontal to vertical.

Keep seeking means to seek after and strive for earnestly, to strive to find something, to devote serious effort to realize one's desire or objective, to aim at, to try to obtain some state or condition. Practically to seek the things above involves giving your attention to Jesus, giving Him first place in everything, giving Him priority, desiring Him above anything on earth, continually making a deliberate choice to follow Him and to obey Him.

Where Christ is seated at the right hand of God: Both verbs *is* and *seated* are present tense, indicating that this is Christ's continual position, the position of supreme privilege and authority. Christ is at God's right hand, the place of honor and eventually judgment.

Implication

In a practical way, to seek the things above involves giving one's attention to Jesus, giving Him first place in everything, giving Him priority, desiring Him above anything

on earth, continually making a deliberate choice to follow Him, to obey Him, to think about Him, and to meditate on His life giving Word. MacArthur states it this way, “[Paul] desires that the Colossians’ preoccupation with heaven govern their earthly responses. To be preoccupied with heaven is to be preoccupied with the One who reigns there and His purposes, plans, provisions, and power. It is also to view the things, people, and events of this world through His eyes and with an eternal perspective.”⁸

Lesson Three: Spiritually mature believers concentrate on the eternal not the temporal.

Colossians 3:2: *Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.*

A spiritually mature believer is evaluating decision-making from an eternal vantage point rather than an earthly one. The two commands differ in that the first emphasizes the more practical pursuits of life whereas the second stresses the whole bent of the life. The first is outward and the second inward.

Set your mind: ‘Set’ refers to the basic orientation, bent, and thought patterns of the mind, referring more to one’s inner impulse or disposition than intellect. Verse one marks a practical pursuit or striving after. Both are to be upward focused. A sure safeguard to impede seeking the things below is a continual setting of our mind upon the things above!

On the things above: The most authentic Christian lives come from minds that are fixed on a heavenly point of view. This person takes into account God’s view of the world. Believers who have an eternal perspective fix their minds on the special revelation of God in His Word. Spiritual transformation requires concentration on the eternal not temporal.

Not on the Things on the Earth: The expression, ‘things on the earth,’ takes in a wide scope. It includes every dimension of human existence. So we must avoid the moral perspective of worldly wisdom.

Implication

A spiritually mature believer is not determining temporal or horizontal solutions to life situations nor does he or she plan to prevail by taking advantage of the world’s wisdom. One needs to approach each task, challenge, triumph and tragedy from a heavenly point of view. That means employing God’s view of the world collaborating with the Word of God to invoke life decisions and change.

Assessment: What one lesson have you learned from this study?

⁸ John MacArthur, Jr. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, 128.

Action: What one action will you take to ensure that the lesson is applied?

Sin and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer
Is Sin Sensitive

Lesson One: *Spiritually mature believers mortify fleshly tendencies.*

Colossians 3:5: *Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amount to idolatry.*

Spiritually mature believers are putting a stop to sinful patterns of living and behavior

Therefore: points to Colossians 3:1-4 where Paul reiterates the believer's identification with the risen and enthroned Christ. Knowing this is true about us, we understand that we can and should put to death the things in our life that are contrary to our identity with Jesus.

Consider the members of your earthly body as dead to sin: So here is a command to act decisively and put away that old life springing from our earthly nature. The 'members, which are on the earth' are the "vehicles" to carry out the desires of the body. So apparently we still have a sin nature and the body is an instrument through which it is displayed. To 'consider' is to take decisive action to kill the sin.

Immorality: Excessive behavior or lack of restraint often associated with sexual excess and indulgence.

Impurity: Describes something that is unclean.

Passion: A drive or force that does not rest until satisfied.

Evil: A lust for evil. Here Paul qualifies desire but not passion.

Greed: a strong desire to acquire more.

Idolatry: Here it is attached to 'greed'. Coupled together it is the desire to get things here on earth seeking satisfaction in them or by them. It is attributing worth or placing value in earthly things. Apparently anything we lust after or covet can be a god we worship.

Implication

Sin in the life of a believer is not to be tolerated. An aspect of spiritual maturity is the decisive nature by which sinful urges related to sexuality are sequestered. Those sinful tendencies cannot be reformed but they can be managed by decisive acts of estrangement. A spiritually mature believer pursues personal and spiritual integrity and sexual purity.

Lesson Two: Spiritually mature believers put off careless and malicious speech.

Colossians 3:8: *But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.*

But now: Indicates a fundamental shift or change of emphasis from instruction about a list of vices related to sexual sins to another list of vices related to sins of wrath and anger. In the first they are to mortify them. In the second they are put them off. This phrase signifies a contrast, something like you were walking one direction but now you are to walk another direction spiritually speaking. Truth demands a response.

You put them all aside: Cease doing what one is accustomed to doing. Stop doing it. "Throw" it off. Be done with it. The idea is "do this now!" Put these habits of the old life away. Lay them aside like you would filthy, smelly, dirty clothes. They do not fit or suit believers. All of these prohibitions pertain to sin that surround anger.

- Anger: A chronic attitude of smoldering hatred.
- Wrath: Outbursts of anger, rage, and indignation.
- Malice: A mean-spirited or vicious attitude or disposition.
- Slander: Uttering false misrepresentations, which defame, belittle or damage another's reputation.
- Abusive speech: To be foul-mouthed derived from filthy speech considered in poor taste and obscene.

Implication

Put these habits of the old life away. Lay them aside like you would filthy, smelly, dirty clothes. A spiritually mature believer does not justify resolving conflict by intimidating others with abusive speech. Anger, wrath and malice are sinful urges that are used to injure people. The pursuit of spiritual maturity will never include these attitudes in one's arsenal.

Lesson Three: Spiritually mature believers are not dishonest with one another.

Colossians 3:9: *Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices.*

Stop Lying: the present tense indicates that we are not to go on telling lies. Just like the other vices this kind of activity compromises our relationship with others. It means to communicate what is false, with the evident purpose of misleading. The command is stop lying or do not develop the habit.

To one another: One reason why one should adhere to the truth is that he or she is related to one another. Dishonesty characterized the former life and would damage relationships between them.

Since you have laid aside: A believer's life must be characteristic of and consistent with his or her new position. The Colossian believers are to remember that because of the new birth, they have wholly put off the old self. They have stripped him clean like a dirty garment. It is important to note that the sinful nature of the old self is not yet eradicated, but remains with the believer until death.

The old self: Is the worn out, useless, and unconverted sinful nature. The Old Self describes all that a person is before conversion. The Old Self is the unregenerate person that was in Adam and was spiritually dead.

With its evil practices: These practices are the way in which one used to behave--what one customarily did--all the activities, which belong to the old nature, the former self. The old self conducted itself in a way, which led to the accomplishment of evil deeds. So a believer's life must be characteristic of and consistent with his or her new position. The old self was discarded at salvation.

Implication

The habits of language are in need of constant and deliberate supervision since they are associated with the old nature. These patterns will not die swiftly nor dislodge without regular skirmishes. A spiritually mature believer is engaged in this struggle so that his or her life is characterized as honest and truthful.

Assessment: What one lesson have you learned from this study?

Action: What one action will you take to ensure that the lesson is applied?

Godliness and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Adopts the Character of Christ

Lesson One: *Spiritually mature believers put on compassionate benevolence.*

Colossians 3:12-14: *And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these love which is the perfect bond of unity.*

There are at least *four attitudes* that encompass the lifestyle of a believer who is exemplifying those characteristics making him or her complete in Christ. These characteristics reflect the ones consistent with the character and attitudes of Jesus Christ. A spiritually mature believer is putting on godly character.

And so Chosen of God: This is the divine side of salvation. One cannot save himself or herself but God does so through the provision of His Son's payment for our sin. That salvation we receive identifies us as chosen of God. 'Holy' describes sinners who have been supernaturally set apart and separated from the profane, common, unholy world. 'Saints' are in a sense now distinctive "trophy" of God's amazing mercy and grace. 'Beloved' means to be loved unconditionally as God the Father loves the Son.

Clothe yourselves: So spiritual transformation is decisive action to clothe oneself with appropriate attitudes and actions. It means to put on attitudes like a garment to clothe oneself. The imperative calls for immediate, even urgent, effective action. All believers are to do this now! In other words do not put off putting on!

The heart of mercy: A deep, internal caring comparable to the modern expressions like being "broken-hearted" or "gut-wrenching". The words are plural - not just one act of mercy but throughout the day! The phrase "I feel it in the pit of my stomach" is a modern parallel.

Kindness: is action that reveals compassion, action that arises out of a sense of sympathy. It can take many different forms---a smile, a kind word, a pat on the shoulder, an

invitation to lunch, an offer of help. We are to put on compassion and kindness as we start our day and throughout the day.

Humility: It means an unassuming perspective of one's place in life. Humility is the root of all virtue. What is the ultimate source of life? Pride says, "Man." Humility says, "God." Pride in independence from God. Humility is recognition of dependence upon God.

Gentleness: It describes the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance. It is a person who has been tamed by the grace of God.

Patience: It is self-restraint. It describes a state of emotional calm or quietness in the face of provocation, misfortune or unfavorable circumstances.

Bearing with one another: Is making allowance for each other. It is to hold out in spite of persecution, threats, injury, indifference, or complaints and not retaliate. The idea is of supporting one another.

Forgiveness: The act of violating justice by accepting upon ourselves the hurtful consequences of someone's action. So if we hope for justice, seek revenge, harbor bitterness, or maintain hatred, we have not forgiven. Specifically, this forgiveness is to be applied toward whatever grievances or complaints we may have against others. How? By forgiving them as the Lord forgave us—that is, graciously, freely, generously.

Love: The idea is beyond all these things or literally upon all these things as if love was the capstone of this moral edifice overarching all of the other Biblical standards of moral and ethical behavior. The idea is that what follows is the chief or best. Love is the outer garment, which has a binding effect upon the others, keeping them in their places.

Love is the most important moral quality in the believer's life. It is the very glue that produces unity in the body. Believers will never enjoy mutual fellowship through compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, or patience and they will not bear with each other or forgive each other *unless they love one another*.

Perfect: This describes the state of completeness, perfection, and complete maturity. One is full-grown and in good working order personally and spiritually.

Bond of Unity: Ironically it conveys the idea of a prison chain, which is described as leading to Christian maturity. In other words, the love produced by Christ constrains, restricts, or forces Christians to love and serve one another. The bond of perfection is the power, which unites and holds together all those graces and virtues, which make up perfection.

Implication

Grudges are not domicile in a spiritually mature believer's life. An unforgiving ethos is inconsistent with spiritually mature transformation. Love is the bedrock upon which all Christian virtue is based. It is the essential ingredient for the exhibition of godly character. Compassionate benevolence sums up this entire archive of spiritual virtue.

Lesson Two: *Spiritually mature believers arbitrate peaceful outcomes and are thankful.*

Colossians 3:15: *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body and be thankful.*

Let the peace of Christ: The peace taught by Christ and the apostles differs from secular peace. Christ's peace is individual and connected to a relationship with God. Secular peace is global and tied to a relationship with people. That individual peace with God then leads to peace within the body of Christ. So peace should rule or arbitrate every debate or circumstance.

Rule in your hearts: In this context the heart describes the home and the throne of the peace of Christ. Our heart is like our "control center", a good place to have the peace of Christ ruling. It should arbitrate our disposition toward being peaceful and not provocative.

To which indeed you were called in one body: We are called to one body, and our relationship in that body must be one of harmony and peace. The unity of the body of Christ is a strong reason for peace among the members, and the peace of Christ enables the body to retain its oneness. The phrase in one body emphasizes the manner in which the believers were called, not the goal of their calling, and focuses upon their unity. Truth is the foundation for unity and peace.

Implication

Peace should rule or arbitrate every debate or circumstance. However, it is the peace of Christ, specifically, that constitutes this peace. It is not peace that comes from tolerance or conformity. That peace violates the peace of Christ. The standard of this peace is compromise and toleration. The measurement of the peace of Christ is whatever is consistent with the Word of God and God's view of the world. Inevitably, the peace of Christ and the peace of the world will conflict.

Lesson Three: *Spiritually mature believers put out the welcome mat for the Word of God.*

Colossians 3:16: *Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

Let the word of Christ: God won't force His Word upon someone. One must make the volitional choice to allow it entry and not just a crack in the door. Open widely the door to your heart and mind. In Colossae were leaders touting man-made traditions, religious rules, and human philosophies. They tried to harmonize God's Word with their teachings, but they could not succeed. God's Word always magnifies Jesus Christ. It was not the word of false teachers that brought salvation to the Colossians. It was the Word of the truth of the Gospel.

Dwell within: It means to take up residence, and make one's home in or among one. The idea of being at home defines the depth and extent to which faith becomes a vital and integral part of one's life. What is the point? The idea is the Word would not make just a short stay or an occasional visit, but that it would take up residence and be given the run of the house. Christ's teachings are to embody a believer.

There are *three outcomes* that follow from Christ's word indwelling us. Each starts with the word *with*:

A. *With all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another:* Wisdom is the ability to judge correctly and to follow the best course of action, based on knowledge on how things usually work. Wisdom is a skill for living life with an understanding of how things usually work out. Teaching means to provide instruction in a formal or informal setting.

Inherent in teaching is the intent to influence the understanding of a person with the aim of shaping the will of one taught. 'Admonishing' describes the exertion of influence by warning, cautioning, or exhorting. It means to place in the mind so as to warn or give notice to one beforehand especially of danger or evil. Wisdom brings stability. Wisdom brings order.

B. *With psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, and singing:* Psalms describes a set piece of music, or sacred ode expressing deliverance and/or praise. A hymn is a song or hymn in honor of God. Whereas a psalm is the story of man's deliverance or a commemoration of mercies received, a hymn is a declaration of how great someone or something is. A hymn is a direct address of praise and glory to God. A spiritual song is sung in praise or honor of someone.

C. *With thankfulness in your hearts to God:* Thankfulness means thanksgiving, and indicates a grateful spirit. It may also indicate that our singing is from the heart and not just with the lips. It should be noted that the singing is to be "in your hearts," as well as to God.

Implication

The scriptures are essential for spiritual transformation. Biblical discipleship employs God's Word in the task of teaching, instructing, and correcting. Grasping the will, heart and mind of God through instruction that is accurate and evocative is the basis upon which spiritual maturity is possible. The dialogue of discipleship, admonishing and teaching, arousing praise and worship, is collaboration with the Word of God to invoke life change.

Assessment: What one lesson have you learned from this study?

Action: What one action will you take to ensure that the lesson is applied?

**Household Relationships and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer
Aligns Roles in the Family by God's Design**

Lesson One: *Spiritually mature wives voluntarily submit to their husbands.*

Colossians 3:18: *Wives, be subject to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord.*

Wives be subject: Wives should accept the headship of their husbands. They submit in the context of their scriptural responsibility. The idea of submission is that of a voluntary attitude and action based upon a wife's recognition of God's sovereign, ordained order.

To your husbands: This means to place under or to line up in hierarchical order. The idea is to consent to an authority and remain in one's place. The command is that wives voluntarily accept the headship of their husbands. Submitting, then, is in the context of their scriptural responsibility. Submission of the wife is based upon her recognition of God's sovereign, ordained creative order.

As is fitting in the Lord: The idea of a wife's submission is that it's voluntary and not forced upon her by a demanding husband against her will. It is not the husband's job to make a wife submissive. It is her responsibility before the Lord. It is proper, in the context of marriage, for a wife willingly submit to her husband because she is morally obligate to do so.

Implication

Submission for a wife is in the context of her scriptural responsibility; however, submitting herself to physical and emotional abuse or slavery, or having her life threatened is not fitting and proper either to her husband or to the Lord. Submission is obedience in areas of disagreement that do not violate the character of God. Spiritually mature wives are willing to be in submission to their husbands.

Lesson Two: Spiritually mature husbands serve the greater good of their wives.

Colossians 3:19: *Husbands, love your wives.*

Husbands, love your wives: The word “husbands” appears first for emphasis. Marriage is not fifty-fifty. It’s one hundred percent a husband being a husband and one hundred percent a wife being a wife. That’s the same commitment Christ made to us. He committed Himself to an imperfect church. That’s high risk. God seems to be a risk-taker.

For the husband, marriage comes down to one question: Is she first in my life? In other words, am I willing to put one woman above everything and everybody else in my life, except God, but including my children and parents? Will I spend the rest of my life being worthy of her submission?

Love: Husbands exercise headship as servants not dictators. Husbands do not demand submission or assume an authoritarian position but shepherd their wives who are, first of all, their sister in Christ and not their personal property. A spiritually mature husband serves the greater good of his wife throughout his life without expecting reciprocity.

Implication

God does not envisage wives to be unloved. God intends wives to be regarded with ardor. A wife is not tolerated, intimidated, patronized or dismissed by a loving husband. A spiritually mature husband savors his wife, helps her achieve her greatest good in life and giving whatever is required without counting the cost. God never wants to see a wife unloved.

Lesson Three: Spiritually mature husbands do not treat their wives harshly.

Colossians 3:19: *And do not be embittered against them.*

Do not be embittered: Don’t hold hard feelings against one’s wife. It is too easy to become angry with one’s wife, to turn against her and take her for granted. Because of the differences between the personalities and capabilities of men and women, it is easy to

become embittered over differences that are built in by design. Those differences should be understood and appreciated. A husband will spend a lifetime with his wife learning all about her.

Against them: So husbands should not fight against themselves by hindering their wife's development or by depreciating the differences between them. To be angry with her is to be angry with oneself. To smother her is to suffocate oneself.

Implication

God tells husbands that bitterness toward their wives can become a problem. A husband who becomes angry with his wife, turns against her and takes her for granted violates God's designed intent for the relationship. Therefore, a husband must not be embittered against his wife. He cannot be harsh toward her. He is not resentful of her. A husband must love his wife. She is not a husband's personal property. She is his life partner.

Lesson Four: *Spiritually mature children allow parents to establish boundaries.*

Colossians 3:20: *Children, obey your parents in all things for this is well pleasing to the Lord.*

Children, obey your parents: Children whose parents set boundaries must not rebel against that authority. Once children reach adulthood boundary setting is replaced with discipleship. Parent-adult child relationship continues but in a different way—one where the parent helps foster spiritual growth. Obeying and not rebelling against parents pleases God because it reflects the order he established in the home.

For this is well pleasing to the Lord: What is the motive? That one might please the Lord Jesus. The way children obey their parents' authority reflects their obedience to Jesus, and ultimately it represents submission and acceptance of God's design for order. God's will is well pleasing because one cannot add anything to the will of God or in any way improve it.

Implication

Whenever one reads something that is said to be pleasing to the Lord, it should be noted. Children who exemplify spiritual maturity will obey their parents. God is pleased when the God-given priorities within the family unit are honored. Still declares, "Children, at least ideally, benefit from the physical, emotional, and financial expenditures of their parents. ... Parents are to be responsible *for* children; children are to be responsible *to*

parents. Both parties are ultimately accountable to Christ.”⁹

Children are parented through boundary setting, and they should not rebel against that authority. Parenting is replaced with discipleship when adult children no longer need parents to set boundaries. Obeying and not rebelling against parents pleases God because it reflects the order he established in the home.

Lesson Five: *Spiritually mature fathers do not presume upon their children's obedience.*

Colossians 3:21: *Fathers, do not provoke your children that they may not lose heart.*

Fathers do not provoke your children: To not provoke means to stop exasperating your children to the point that they become bitter and resentful. Stop nagging your kids; stop irritating your kids to the point that it produces resentment. This assumes the father is the head and chief disciplinarian in the home.

Provoke means to become disheartened to the point of losing motivation, or to be dispirited or to be broken in spirit so that one feels like giving up or fighting back. Provoking can result from any of the following:

- Overprotection--not allowing them any liberty; strict rules about everything.
- Showing favoritism, often unwittingly.
- Depreciating their worth. One way to decrease worth is by not listening. An ignored child may give up trying to communicate and become discouraged, shy, and withdrawn.
- Setting unrealistic goals—that can never be realized or rewarded. Sending the message that nothing they do can ever be enough—they can never earn full approval.
- Trying to make them into a person they are not.
- Failing to show affection (verbally and physically).
- Neglect. David was indifferent to Absalom. He failed to discipline Adonijah (see 1 Kings 1:6) who was put to death by his younger brother Solomon for probable treason.
- Excessive discipline. Never discipline in anger.

That they may not lose heart: Children should not be fathered in such a way that they are provoked or constantly agitated by incessant criticism or unreasonable demands or expectations. This type of parenting produces discouragement and bitterness.

⁹ Todd D. Still, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary revised Edition: Ephesians ~ Philemon*. Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, gen. eds., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006) 339.

Job and his children: *Lessons on parenting adult children.*

We get another interesting glimpse of Job's pre-suffering life when we read about his children. Each of Job's seven sons had the habit of throwing a party—each one on his day (probably his birthday), and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them (Job 1:4). Job did not attempt to prohibit their parties but when the feasting was over, Job would "[rise] up early in the morning and [offer] burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, 'Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts'" (v.5).

Job, as the family patriarch, functioned as a priest, and offered animal sacrifices—as did Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Genesis 12:7-8; 26:25; 35:1-7) and Noah (Genesis 8:20). Actually, the tradition went all the way back to Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:4).

DeWitt informs us that what is interesting here is Job's concern for his adult children and what he did about it. *We can notice three things:*

1. He did not attempt to govern their non-sinful activities. Job does not appear to me to be a partygoer himself, and apparently he and his wife were not invited to these parties. These were activities for young people. And apparently they were not committing any overt sins that Job was aware of, because Job's sacrifices were for sins of the *heart*.
2. He continued to act as a patriarch for them even though they were living on their own. His sacrifice for them was coming to God on their behalf. His thought was, "What can I do for my children?"
3. The fact that Job sacrifice for his children, indicates that he wanted to spare his children from the wrath of God (if they had sinned). Therefore, Job believed the same as his friends did, namely that sin would result in God's judgment and God's judgment would result in suffering.¹⁰

Implication

When fathers and parents are nitpicking, unrealistically strict, demanding or perfectionistic they are often projecting their own personal, psychological or spiritual issues upon their children. Fathers must stop nagging and irritating their children. Parenting children is a responsibility to be fulfilled according to God's priority arrangement for the family. Children are not an inconvenience to be controlled.

Assessment: What one lesson have you learned from this study?

¹⁰ David A. DeWitt, "Job", Unpublished Study Notes (Grand Rapids: Relational Concepts Inc) 2013.

Action: What one action will you take to ensure that the lesson is applied?

**Hierarchal Relationships and Spiritual Maturity:
A Spiritually Mature Believer Aligns with the Authority Structure
In Superior to Subordinate Relationships**

Lesson One: *Spiritually mature subordinates honor superiors by work performed with integrity and excellence.*

Colossians 3:22: Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth not with external service as those who please men but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

Some initial observations about slavery and subordinates in the New Testament:

1. Subordinates are clearly members of the church and treated as morally responsible individuals within that spiritual brotherhood. They are not second-class citizens.
2. The amount of instruction given to slaves in comparison to masters indicates that believing slaves have the greater weight of responsibility placed upon them in the subordinate-superior relationship.
3. The nature of a slave's relationship with his/her master was one of subordination and powerlessness, and it is within this context that the slave is instructed to live out the Christian ethic.
4. The New Testament does not condemn slavery but provides a framework of justice that positively governs that relationship based on spiritual equality (masters and slaves are called brothers).
5. At the same time, the New Testament asserts that Jesus came to set the oppressed free (Luke 4:18); encourage slaves to acquire their freedom whenever possible (1 Corinthians 7:20-22); and condemn mistreatment of slaves (Ephesians 6:9).

Slaves in all things obey: Those who are slaves are instructed to perform their duties well. The slave's responsibility is to do the will of another. They are to serve those who have authority over them. Even though the masters are on earth, they are to be obeyed. This signifies a slave's powerlessness as a subordinate in the relationship, but forms the context within which godliness can be revealed.

Not with external service: The manner in which the work is to be done clarifies the nature of the obedience. There are two ways to perform work. First, it can be done as merely an external service, with minimal effort—just enough to superficially please men. The second way involves working conscientiously—performing the task with sincerity of heart, as if the work order came from the Lord Himself. There is a strong contrast between the two ways. The first way of obedience should never characterize a believer's work. The second should always characterize how a believer works. The second way shows singleness of purpose that is at the center of one's motivation to work—which is pleasing God.

Fearing the Lord: The primary motivation for this single-minded obedience is living one's life before the Lord. Again, the overarching motive is one's fear of the Lord. When it is all said and done, this motivation factor is the key to governing our obedience. Change needs to take place from the inside out not from imposing change through social structures.

Implication

The apostles never prohibited slavery or ridiculed superior-to-subordinate relationships. They saw all classes of believers as brothers in Christ, and that view dominated their social relationships. For subordinates, submission to superiors is required. Agreement is not submission. Submission begins with disagreement. Obedience is only credible when a subordinate complies even when he or she disagrees with a superior. Spiritually mature subordinates will obey.

Lesson Two: Spiritually mature subordinates recognize that the manner in which work is done is important to God.

Colossians 3:23-24: *Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men. ... It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.*

Whatever you do, do your work heartily: "Whatever" expresses the commitment of the subordinate to go above and beyond his or her basic responsibility. The imperative "do" encompasses the idea of every assigned responsibility he or she has been given to accomplish. The work is to be done "heartily," a word that conveys putting your whole heart behind the effort. These descriptions communicate the inner commitment and outward passion to perform one's service as a subordinate.

As for the Lord rather than for men: The exhortation to work enthusiastically is sustained by the motivation to do all the work as if it had been assigned by the Lord, even though it is being done for human masters. This is an extrapolation of the previous command to not work merely to please men. One's work as a subordinate is to be done with the

recognition that it is being done on behalf of the Lord. All Christian endeavors ought to be characterized by an enthusiasm, confidence, and diligence.

It is the Lord Christ whom you serve: A subordinate's work is to be done with integrity and productivity as if the lord is the employer. Ultimately, focusing on the eternal is the way one can consistently pursue unselfish obedience for the one for whom he or she works. It is God we seek to please and Him alone.

Notice the repetition throughout the section emphasizing the motivation for a subordinate to pursue excellent work. It is done in the context of fearing the Lord; done with passion as for the Lord with the understanding that one will receive reward from the Lord, since it is the Lord Christ whom you serve. The Christian work ethic is sustained by this understanding.

Implication

Spiritually mature subordinates serve with magnanimity and without expectation of recognition. They never serve superiors with a spirit of entitlement. All work done by believers, whether it is building an orphanage or building a for-profit corporation should be done "as for the Lord rather than for man." That is the proper perspective for all labor, including a subordinate who is toiling for his or her master.

Lesson Three: Spiritually mature superiors treat subordinates with justice and equity.

Colossians 4:1: *Masters, treat your slaves with justice and fairness knowing that you too have a master in heaven.*

Masters, treat your slaves with justice and fairness: There are two things a master is exhorted to give his subordinates. The first is justice. The concern seems to be ensuring that the one in authority does not abuse his or her subordinates but that justice is served. Justice is in the hands of the strong; abuse of that authority is prohibited.

The second admonition is equality or fairness. The addition of this admonition means that defrauding subordinates, cheating them, threatening them, mistreating them, or showing favoritism among them is unacceptable. Possessing some type of power over someone does not give a master the right to treat a subordinate unfairly.

Knowing that you too have a master in heaven: As slaves serve their masters so masters also have a Master in heaven who is watching and to whom they are accountable. Justice will certainly be given in that judgment, and masters should be warned so that justice and equity is a mark of their relationship with subordinates in their lives.

In fact the slave and the master (the subordinate and the authority or the employee and the employer) are both responsible to God and will be accountable for the manner in which they treat one another. Paul warned that he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality (Colossians 3:25).

Implication

Spiritually mature superiors will not defraud subordinates by cheating them, threatening or mistreating them, or by showing favoritism among them. Power or authority over someone must be dispensed with reflection and deliberation. Slave masters or superiors have the same responsibility as their slaves and subordinates. Superiors are simply assigned a different role in life, but they serve the same Master in heaven and will be judged by One who is not partial to masters or to slaves, but to those obedient to Him.

Assessment: What one lesson have you learned from this study?

Action: What one action will you take to ensure that the lesson is applied?

Practical Holiness and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Assumes Personal Spiritual Responsibility

Lesson One: *Spiritually mature believers pray in the rhythm of daily life.*

Colossians 4:2: *Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving.*

A definition of prayer: Biblical prayer is communicating a message to God when He is not specifically manifested. *A spiritually mature believer is devoted to prayer.*

Devote yourselves to prayer: Prayer has been an important concern throughout the book of Colossians (1:3, 9-12; 4:2-4, 12-13). There are three basic aspects associated with prayer of which the first is persistence in praying. It means to devote one's time and attention to prayer. So a characteristic of spiritual maturity is the preoccupation with

prayer. It includes prayer offered on behalf of oneself as well as intercession (1: 3-4). This is tenacious praying that persists as a constant pattern in one's life.

Keeping alert in it: There is a vigilance and watchfulness that exemplifies this kind of praying. The metaphors convey prayer as an essential and endearing component in the life of a growing and maturing believer. Being alert while praying means that our prayers are about specific things, specific needs, and specific requests.

It is much easier to be alert about specifics than about concerns that are just general observations. Paul specifically asked them to pray that God would give him and his companion's opportunities for evangelism and edification. He also asked that when these came he would be able to present the gospel clearly.

With thanksgiving: Praying should be accompanied by a spirit of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving suggests that the spiritually mature believer has documented the past faithfulness of God in his or her life, and based on that reality can actually offer prayers about the future thankfully.

If God's past record has proven faithful, there is every reason to interject a thankful spirit while praying about concerns yet to be addressed by God. Thankfulness keeps fear and anxiety at bay while strengthening confidence and assurance that God's ability and resources are available to meet others' or ours needs.

Implication

A spiritually mature believer devotes time and attention to prayer. A characteristic of spiritual maturity is preoccupation with prayer. This is tenacious praying that persists as a constant pattern in one's life. Thomas L. Constable believes "that we should add watchfulness to our prayers, as an essential ingredient in a recipe. Along with praying we need to remain watchful to what is going on around us. ... [With] thanksgiving ... we should pray, and keep alert when we pray, and keep alert because we pray."¹¹ The most consequential practice to perpetuate in relation to God is prayer.

Lesson Two: Spiritually mature believers engage pagans so interchanges are personally and spiritually productive.

Colossians 4:5-6: Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

¹¹ Thomas L. Constable. *Talking to God: What the Bible says about Prayer*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995) 66.

Conduct yourselves with wisdom: Conducting one's life is a common idiom for one's lifestyle or behavior in life. In the context, it is an exhortation for the manner of conduct for a believer at work in the marketplace. A believer should evaluate circumstances and apply godly decision-making in the process. This involves living life in the light of God's revelation and then applying this knowledge to specific situations. Wise living exemplifies a spiritually mature believer's life.

Toward outsiders: The context for the application of wisdom is one's relationship with unbelievers. There is a witnessing aspect that should concern one as he or she lives among unbelievers. The possibility is that one's faith can be maligned and the gospel hindered because of unwise conduct. A spiritually mature believer will understand this need and adjust to circumstances in such a way that a valid witness is maintained and the best possible conditions are established for an effective witness.

Making the most of the opportunity: Try to gain the time that would otherwise be lost through a lack of pragmatic wisdom. A lack of wisdom could prolong useless or unwise consequences that entangle one's life. This entanglement can use up one's time that could otherwise be economized for more benefit and usefulness. Time is a precious commodity that should be managed for maximum output so no opportunity is lost to invest it wisely.

Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt: Continuing with the manner of our witness to outsiders, believers are commanded to ensure that their speech should always be with grace, as seasoned with salt. Our words should be gracious in nature and appropriate for the moment. They are seasoned with salt making our speech attractive, interesting, and easily engaged with by others. Our speech should be thought through rather than simply regurgitated.

So that you will know how you should respond to each person: Interchanges with unbelievers can naturally provide opportunities to bear witness on behalf of one's Christian witness. If the opportunity arises for a more specific interchange of this nature, then a believer should know how to respond to each person.

The expectation is that a believer's faith should be so entrenched within him or her, that given specific opportunities to witness with specific people, a rational, robust, and attractive response can be provided in conversations that may arise. A believer's life is to be so integrated within his or her world that whether in the marketplace or the neighborhood one's faith becomes a relevant witness for anyone who inquires.

Implication

Spiritually mature believers employ opportunities to engage unbelievers with the gospel. Robert Gromacki explains, "All have the same amount of time; the clock is no respecter of person. The child of God, however, must buy out ... opportunities to reach the lost

with an effective witness.”¹² Conversation with unbelievers about things pertaining to the gospel should be with grace not law. The interaction should be motivational and interesting (flavored with salt). The dialogue should be tailored to each individual not just a memorized approach. Conversation and witness with unbelievers should be stimulating.

Assessment: What one lesson have you learned from this study?

Action: What one action will you take to ensure that the lesson is applied?

Conclusion

1. Spiritual transformation is the goal of ministry.
2. Spiritual transformation is the desire of God’s heart for His people.
3. Spiritual transformation is based on Christ’s work on the cross.
4. Spiritual transformation is essential to our eternal rewards.

The challenge, then, is to not look at the needs of people as the basis of ministry. When we do that we will tolerate sin, justify sin, and allow the sin to remain in their lives—all in the name of ministry to them. Instead our ministry must be God-centered, Word-centered, and Christ-centered from whom our ministry is governed and directed. Then we can give people what is truth that will impact their lives in a way pleasing to God and for their eternal welfare.

¹² Robert Gromacki. *Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series: The Books of Philippians and Colossians: Joy and Completeness in Christ*. gen eds., Mal Couch and Ed Hindson (Chattanooga: Tyndale Theological Seminary, 2003) 215.

APPENDIX B

SPIRITUAL MATURITY ASSESSMENT FROM COLOSSIANS A Tool to Assess the Application of Aspects of Spiritual Maturity

The purpose of this tool is to assist you in discovering the level of your own spiritual maturity in comparison to the traits you studied from Colossians. Use the scale below to respond to questions about each spiritual maturity trait.

As you complete this spiritual maturity assessment, *honestly evaluate yourself* according to the statements provided. The objective is to gain insight into your own assessment of spiritual maturity and its development in your own life.

Please answer all the questions. If a section may not apply to you, please answer the questions according to your best knowledge at the time.¹

Spiritual Maturity Assessment

Spiritual Maturity Assessment	Response
DISCERNMENT AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY A spiritually mature believer perceives correctly	
<i>A spiritually mature believer conducts his or her life consistent with Christ</i> Colossians 2:6	
1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neither agree nor disagree 4 Agree 5 Strongly Agree	
1. The teaching of Jesus Christ in Scripture is the focus of my own discipleship.	
2. I live a life consistent with the teaching of Jesus Christ.	
3. My relationship with Jesus Christ shapes the way I manage each dimension of my life.	
<i>A spiritually mature believer avoids the deceptive wisdom of the world</i> Colossians 2:8	
4. I can discern false arguments that are unbiblical.	
5. I can discern mere philosophical speculation versus what is accurate sound biblical teaching.	

¹ The assessment was used with a group of men. The questions in the household section reflect this dynamic. The questions in this section can be rewritten when the assessment is used as a measurement for the spiritual maturity of a woman and/or wife.

6. I can discern what are religious traditions versus God's expectations.	
<i>A spiritually mature believer avoids letting others restrict his or her spiritual freedom</i> Colossians 2:16	
7. I can evaluate between mere religious ritual practices versus genuine freedom of the spiritual life.	
8. I am not intimidated by others who may not agree with the expression of my freedom in Christ.	
9. I avoid keeping religious rules that attempt to measure my level of spiritual growth.	
Total	
<p align="center">OUTLOOK AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY A spiritually mature believer has an eternal perspective</p>	
<i>A spiritually mature believer avoids keeping up spiritual appearances</i> Colossians 2:18	
1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neither agree nor disagree 4 Agree 5 Strongly Agree	
10. Humility is a virtue in my life.	
11. I avoid living a life that pretends to be godly.	
12. I can discern when pagan cultural practices are mixed with genuine biblical spirituality.	
<i>A spiritually mature believer develops an eternal perspective about everything</i> Colossians 3:1	
13. I manage my life circumstances by applying eternal values to them.	
14. My decision-making is influenced by its impact upon my eternal welfare.	
15. God's outlook determines how I manage my life situations.	
<i>A spiritually mature believer concentrates on the eternal not the temporal</i> Colossians 3:2	
16. I consider the basic orientation of my life to be eternal in nature.	
17. I concentrate on the Word of God so I can develop an eternal mindset.	
18. My reasoning is determined by the Word of God.	
Total	
<p align="center">SIN AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY A spiritually mature believer is sin sensitive</p>	
<i>A spiritually mature believer mortifies fleshly tendencies</i> Colossians 3:5	

1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neither agree nor disagree 4 Agree 5 Strongly Agree	
19. I am sensitive to the presence of sin in my life.	
20. I confront sin in my life.	
21. I have a track record of repenting of sin.	
<i>A spiritually mature believer puts off careless and malicious speech</i> Colossians 3:8	
22. It is easy for me to change my sinful habits.	
23. I keep anger under control in my life.	
24. I avoid making derogatory remarks when speaking of others.	
<i>A spiritually mature believer is not dishonest with others</i> Colossians 3:9	
25. I demonstrate honesty in my conversation.	
26. I avoid embellishing my speech in conversations.	
27. I avoid misleading people.	
Total	
<p align="center">GODLINESS AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY A spiritually mature believer adopts Christ's Character</p>	
<i>A spiritually mature believer puts on compassionate benevolence</i> Colossians 3:12	
1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neither agree nor disagree 4 Agree 5 Strongly Agree	
28. I am a compassionate, gentle person.	
29. I make allowances for others shortcomings.	
30. I avoid bitterness to seek revenge toward those who wrong me.	
<i>A spiritually mature believer arbitrates peaceful outcomes and is thankful</i> Colossians 3:15	
31. I avoid being anxious when making significant decisions.	
32. A peaceful spirit characterizes me when facing conflict.	
33. I have the habit of expressing thankfulness to God.	
<i>A spiritually mature believer puts out the welcome mat for the Word of God</i> Colossians 3:16	
34. I have internalized the word of God so that it dictates how I live my life.	
35. The commands of Christ are the major influence upon the priorities for my life.	
36. I know the Scriptures well enough to provide its insight for others.	
Total	

HOUSEHOLD RELATIONSHIPS AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY
A Spiritually Mature Believer aligns roles in the family by God's design

A spiritually mature husband serves the greater good of his wife and avoids treating her harshly Colossians 3:19

1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neither agree nor disagree 4 Agree 5 Strongly Agree

37. I do not expect my wife to submit to me.	
38. I have no responsibility for my wife's role in our marriage.	
39. My wife's submission is not a priority for me in my marriage.	
40. I consider myself a husband that my wife finds worthy of submission.	
41. I consider my wife to be the #1 relationship in my life.	
42. My relationship with my wife is free from insensitivity.	
<i>A spiritually mature father does not presume upon his children's obedience Colossians 3:20-21</i>	
43. I am engaged in my children's lives.	
44. My children would not consider me to be an irritating father.	
45. My fathering is free from unreasonable demands.	
Total	

HIERARCHAL RELATIONSHIPS AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY
A spiritually mature believer aligns with authority structure of superior to subordinate

A spiritually mature subordinate honors superiors by labor performed with integrity and excellence Colossians 3:22

1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neither agree nor disagree 4 Agree 5 Strongly Agree

46. As a subordinate I am conscientious about my work done for my superiors.	
47. I go above and beyond the expectations of tasks assigned to me by my superiors.	
48. My superiors are pleased with the quality of my labor.	
<i>A spiritually mature subordinate recognizes that the manner in which work is done is important to God Colossians 3:23</i>	
49. My labor for superiors is performed with excellence.	
50. I am able to perform service for superiors honorably even if I receive no recognition for it.	
51. I esteem those in authority over me as a subordinate.	

<i>A spiritually mature superior treats subordinates with justice and equity</i> Colossians 4:1	
52. I ensure subordinates are treated with respect.	
53. I ensure subordinates are treated without favoritism.	
54. I am sensitive about how I apply my authority over subordinates.	
Total	
PRACTICAL HOLINESS AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY A spiritually mature believer assumes personal spiritual responsibility	
<i>A spiritually mature believer prays in the rhythm of daily life</i> Colossians 4:2	
1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Neither agree nor disagree 4 Agree 5 Strongly Agree	
55. Protracted diligent prayer is a consistent pattern of my life.	
56. I am attentive while specifically engaged in prayer about specific matters.	
57. I concentrate time to pray with an attitude of thanksgiving	
<i>A spiritually mature believer engages pagans so interchanges are personally and spiritually productive</i> Colossians 4:5	
58. I can adjust to circumstances so that I maintain a valid witness amongst unbelievers.	
59. My conversation with unbelievers is gracious engaging them so that they find me interesting to talk to.	
60. I have the ability to explain what I believe and why I believe it to those who ask me.	
61. I am actively engaged in the discipleship of others.	
62. I serve others with the goal of their spiritual maturity in mind.	
63. I would consider myself to be spiritually mature.	
Total	
Overall Total Score	

Evaluating your Spiritual Maturity Assessment

You will plot your score with two kinds of matrix. The first matrix will score your assessment by sections. The second matrix will assess your overall total score.

Score by Sections

Plot your totals to the statements from each section of the assessment in the chart below and then doing the following:

1. Determine your total score for each category and place that score in the appropriate box.
2. Shade in each boxed area up to the score you have in each category.
3. Draw a line from each shaded box connecting them together in a continuous line to graph the overall development of your own spiritual maturity according to the commands in Colossians.
4. The shaded areas in the resulting graph will reveal by category where you are presently in your own spiritual growth toward spiritual maturity.
5. The areas not shaded represent the amount of growth still possible in your development of spiritual maturity in that dimension of your life compared to the traits from Colossians.

The Goal of ministry: <i>and we proclaim him admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ Colossians 1:28</i>							
41-45							
36-40							
31-35							
26-30							
21-25							
16-20							
9-15							
	DISCERNMENT and Spiritual Maturity	OUTLOOK and Spiritual Maturity	SIN and Spiritual Maturity	GODLINESS and Spiritual Maturity	HOUSEHOLD RELATIONSHIPS and Spiritual Maturity	HIERARCHIAL RELATIONSHIPS and Spiritual Maturity	PRACTICAL HOLINESS and Spiritual Maturity
Score	Categories						

Overall Score

Add the score of each section together for a total score. Take the total score and divide it by the number of questions answered (in this case if you answered all of the questions the total score would be divided by 63). You can compare that score with the scale below for further data relative to your level of spiritual maturity.

Place your score here: _____

- 4.1 - 5.0 Very high: Doing exceptionally well.
- 3.6 - 4.0 High: Doing well.
- 3.1 - 3.5 Moderate: Some areas doing well and others need work.
- 2.6 - 3.0 Low: Probably need to work on several areas.
- 2.5 or less Very low: Really need to develop spiritual maturity.

Addressing your Spiritual Maturity Assessment

You can gauge the outcome of your spiritual maturity assessment by generally considering three questions as you evaluate your own spiritual growth.

First, *what are the areas of greatest growth?*

Second, *what are the areas of least growth?*

Third, *what do I need to do to continue to grow?*

The following will assist you in addressing these questions and provide further direction for spiritual growth toward maturity.

After evaluating your spiritual maturity in the “scores by section” you will discover one or more shaded areas that represent your *greatest level of growth*. In your top two categories describe in a sentence what you believe are your greatest spiritual strengths in those areas.

Discernment: _____

Outlook: _____

Sin: _____

Godliness: _____

Household Relationships: _____

Hierarchal Relationships: _____

Practical Holiness: _____

After evaluating your spiritual maturity in the “scores by section” you will discover one or more shaded areas that indicate areas of *least growth*. In your lowest two categories describe in a sentence what you believe are your spiritual weaknesses in those areas.

Discernment: _____

Outlook: _____

Sin: _____

Godliness: _____

Household Relationships: _____

Hierarchal Relationships: _____

Practical Holiness: _____

Planning for your Spiritual Maturity

It is important that you make specific plans consistent with your current evaluation of spiritual growth so that you can continue to pursue your own spiritual maturity.

Determine what specific step(s) you can take to strengthen your current assessment in each area. Develop a goal statement followed by an action plan statement for each category of spiritual maturity.

Objective: *Discernment and Spiritual Maturity*

Goal: I will determine to

Action Plan: Specifically, I will

Objective: *Outlook and Spiritual Maturity*

Goal: I will determine to

Action Plan: Specifically, I will

Objective: *Sin and Spiritual Maturity*

Goal: I will determine to

Action Plan: Specifically, I will

Objective: *Godliness and Spiritual Maturity*

Goal: I will determine to

Action Plan: Specifically, I will

Objective: *Household Relationships and Spiritual Maturity*

Goal: I will determine to

Action Plan: Specifically, I will

Objective: *Hierarchal Relationships and Spiritual Maturity*

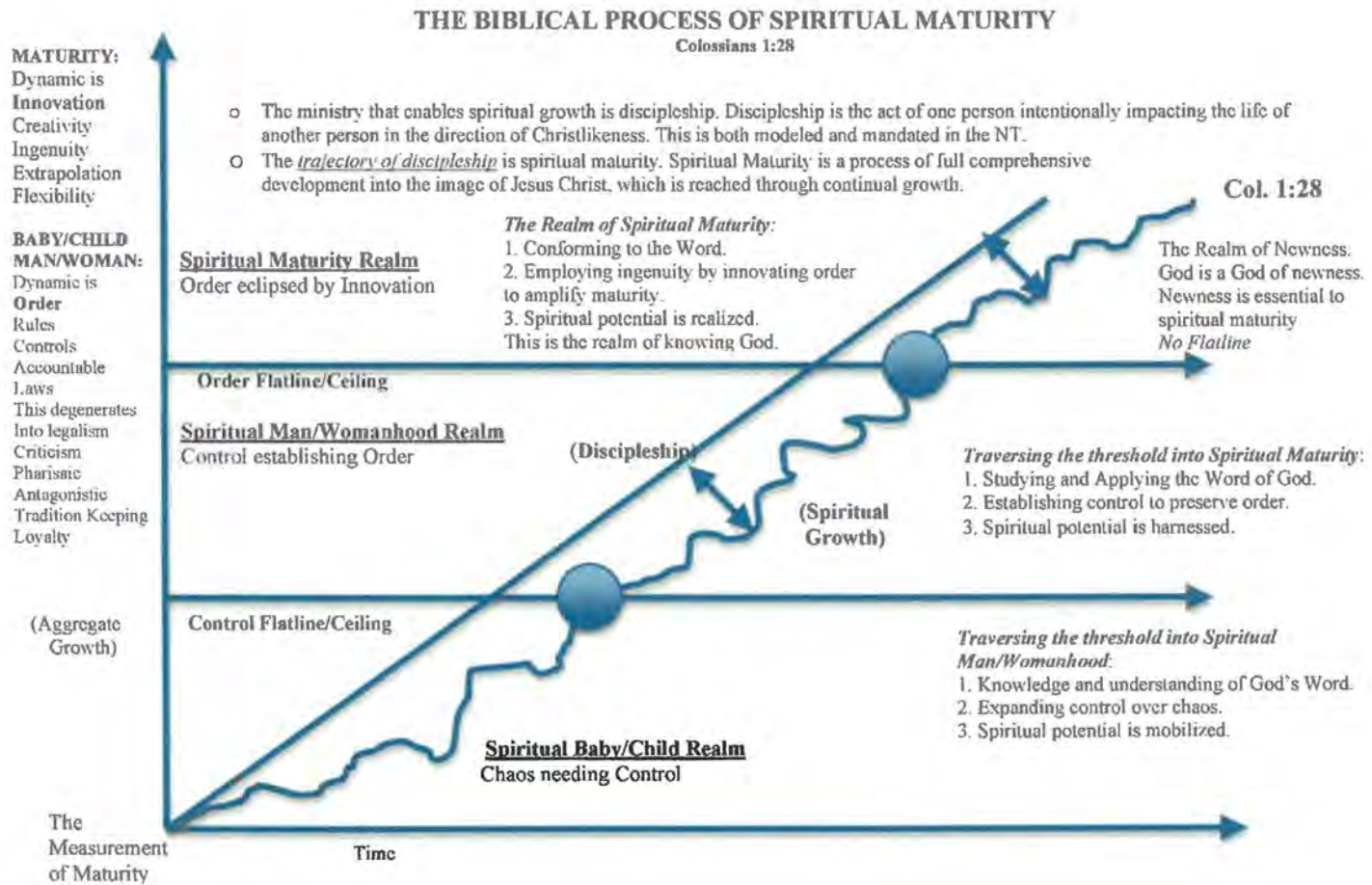
Goal: I will determine to

Action Plan: Specifically, I will

Objective: *Practical Holiness and Spiritual Maturity*

Goal: I will determine to

Action Plan: Specifically, I will



APPENDIX D

COLOSSIAN SPIRITUAL MATURITY GRAPHS

Discernment and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer
Perceives Correctly

2:6	Command: You walk in Him.	<i>As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in Him.</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers conduct their lives consistent with Christ.</i>	
2:8	Command: See that none deceitfully captivate you.	<i>See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the traditions of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, and not according to Christ.</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers avoid the deceptive wisdom of the world.</i>	
2:16	Command: Do not let another judge you.	<i>Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day.</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers avoid letting others restrict their spiritual freedom.</i>	

Outlook and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Has an Eternal Perspective

2:18	Command: Let none defraud you.	<i>Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angel, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind.</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers avoid keeping up spiritual appearances.</i>	
3:1	Command: Keep seeking things above.	<i>If then you have been raised up with Christ keep seeking the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers develop an eternal perspective about everything.</i>	
3:2	Command: Set your mind on things above.	<i>Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth.</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers concentrate on the eternal not the temporal.</i>	

Sin and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer Is Sin Sensitive

3:5	Command: Consider members of your body dead to sin.	<i>Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers mortify fleshly tendencies.</i>	
3:8	Command: Put aside abusive speech.	<i>But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers put off careless and malicious speech.</i>	
3:9	Command: Do not lie to one another.	<i>Do not lie to one another.</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers are not dishonest with one another.</i>	

**Godliness and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer
Adopts Christ's Character**

3:12-14	Command: Put on a heart of compassion.	<i>As those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience bearing with one another, and forgiving each other... and beyond all these things love.</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers put on compassionate benevolence.</i>	
3:15	Command: and let the peace of Christ rule.	<i>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers arbitrate peaceful outcomes and are thankful.</i>	
3:16	Command: Let the word of Christ dwell.	<i>Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing with thankfulness.</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers put out the welcome mat for the Word of God.</i>	

**Household Relationships and Spiritual Maturity: Spiritually Mature Believer
Aligns Roles in the Family by God's Design**

3:18	Command: Wives, be subject to your husbands.	<i>Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature wives voluntarily submit to their husbands.</i>	
3:19	Command: Husbands, love your wives.	<i>Husbands love your wives.</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature husbands serve the greater good of their wives.</i>	
3:19	Command: Husbands, do not be embittered against your wives.	<i>And do not be embittered against them.</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature husbands do not treat their wives harshly.</i>	
3:20	Command: Children, obey your parents.	<i>Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.</i>
	Application: <i>Children exemplify spiritual maturity by permitting parents to establish boundaries.</i>	
3:21	Command: Fathers, do not exasperate your children.	<i>Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart.</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature fathers do not presume upon their children's obedience.</i>	

**Hierarchal Relationships and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer
Aligns with the Authority Structure within Superior to Subordinate Relationships**

3:22	Command: slaves in all things obey Your masters...	<i>Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men...3:22</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature subordinates honor superiors by work performed with integrity and excellence</i>	
3:23	Command: do your work heartily as unto the Lord...	<i>Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men ...3:23</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature subordinates recognize the manner in which work is done is important to God</i>	
4:1	Command: masters treat your slaves with justice...	<i>Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven...4:1</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature superiors treat subordinates with justice and equity</i>	

**Practical Holiness and Spiritual Maturity: A Spiritually Mature Believer
Assumes Personal Spiritual Responsibility**

4:2	Command: Devote yourselves to prayer.	<i>Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers pray in the rhythm of daily life.</i>	
4:5	Command: Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders.	<i>Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.</i>
	Application: <i>Spiritually mature believers engage pagans so interchanges are personally and spiritually productive.</i>	

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