

33. Understanding How Christ Matures Us

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to be effective in their ministry and service for the Lord. We saw that the Lord has called every Christian to offer a new kind of sacrifice. We are called to continually offer a sacrifice of praise by the words that we speak, the actions that we do and the submissive attitude that we show to godly Christian leaders. In our topic today, on the final verses of the book of Hebrews, we are going to see how Christ matures us.

In Hebrews 13:18-19, we read, “Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably. But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.” We see that the writer of Hebrews and those with him asked for other Christians to pray for them. Here, we see that one thing that helps us to grow to spiritual maturity is learning to pray for others. 1 Timothy 2:1-2 says, “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.” In these verses, we see that Paul encouraged Timothy to pray for three groups. He was to pray for all people. He was to pray for those who were leaders of countries. He was to pray for any person that was in a position of leadership.

We also see that the writer of Hebrews tells the result of growing to maturity in his own spiritual life. We see that he said that he was confident that he had a good conscience before God. The word translated “good” means *to be excellent in its nature and characteristics*. The word translated “conscience” means *that part of the spirit which distinguishes between what is morally good and what is evil and causes us to do what is good and avoid what is evil*. 1 Timothy 1:5 says, “Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith.” Here, we see that result of learning to practice good doctrine is that we learn how to have a pure heart, a good conscience and a genuine faith. The writer of Hebrews wanted the Jewish Christians to pray for him so that he would continue to have a good conscience.

We see that the desire of the writer of Hebrews was to live honorably. The word translated “honorably” means to live in such a way that there would be nothing that would give others opportunity to accuse or blame. Here we see a goal that we want to have for our own lives as we provide an example for our children to follow. James 2:8-9 says, “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.” Here, the word is translated well. If we love our neighbor as we love ourselves, we will be living honorably but if we show partiality we are committing sin which is not living honorably. We see that the writer also wanted the Jewish Christians to pray that he would be able to come and see them again quickly.

Hebrews 13:20-22 says, “Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight,

through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” Here, we see the prayer of the writer of Hebrews for the Jewish Christians to whom he was writing. He wanted to see God work through the lives of the Jewish Christians to bring them to maturity so that they were able to carry out the will of God.

We see that the writer described God as the God of peace. Philippians 4:9 says, “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.” Then, 1 Thessalonians 5:23 adds, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In these two verses, we see that God is with us and that He is the One who sanctifies us completely. He is also the One who raised Christ from the dead.

Christ is called that great Shepherd of the sheep. Ezekiel 34:15-16a describe several of the ministries of Christ as our Great Shepherd when those verses say, “I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down,” says the Lord God. I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick...” In addition, the most important ministry of Christ, as our Shepherd, was giving His life for the sheep. In John 10:11, Christ said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.” His blood was for the New Covenant and was an everlasting covenant that gives us eternal life.

We also see that while we are here on this earth that Christ makes us complete so that we can carry out His will. In Luke 6:40, Christ said, “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.” Paul showed by his example that we also can have a part in helping other Christians become complete as we pray for them. In 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10, we read, “For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?” We want to pray for our physical and spiritual children and then show them how to apply the Word of God in their daily lives. This will equip them to do good works and carry out the will of God.

God says that it is well pleasing to Him when Christians allow Christ to work in their lives so that the things that we do are well pleasing in the sight of God. We are only able to do this through the strength that Christ provides. Christ said, in John 15:5, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” Then, Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” We can do nothing of eternal value in our own strength but Christ gives us the strength to do all things as we learn to yield to Him. That is why He is the One to whom all glory belongs forever and ever.

Hebrews 13:22-25 goes on to say, “And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words. Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly. Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. Grace be with you all. Amen.” In these last few verses, we see that the writer appeals to the Jewish Christians to bear with this word of exhortation. The word translated “bear with” means *to endure or to stand firm*. This is an important appeal because

2 Timothy 4:3-4 says, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” The writer also wanted the Jews to accept the teachings in this book and not close their ears to the truth.

The phrase “word of exhortation” is only used two times in the New Testament. The other place this phrase is used is in Acts 13:15, where we read, “And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, ‘Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.’” Here, we see that Paul and Barnabas were invited to give a word of exhortation to the people in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia. A word of exhortation is a call for people to carry out a certain action. In Acts 13, Paul concluded his sermon by saying in Acts 13:38-39, “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Here, we see that Paul concluded his word of exhortation by encouraging the people to come to Christ for the forgiveness of sins because the law given through Moses could never justify them.

Throughout the book of Hebrews, we have seen that the writer encouraged the people to act. In Hebrews 3:13, the writer said, “But exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” In this verse, we see that the writer wanted the Jewish Christians to encourage each other every day so that their hearts would not become hard because of the deceitfulness of sin. Then, Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” Here, we see that the writer wanted them to stir up love and good works by getting together and then encouraging one another as they waited for the coming of the Lord.

The writer gave some final greetings as he concluded the book of Hebrews. First, he let them know that Timothy had been released from prison. The writer also told the Jewish Christians that he and Timothy would see them if Timothy came in the near future. This is one reason why some people think that Paul or one of his traveling companions may have been the one who wrote the book of Hebrews. Mention is also made of the saints in Italy. The writer also sent greetings to the leaders of the Jewish Christians as well as sending greetings to all of the Christians. Here, we see that it is important to send greetings to one another because that is one of the ways that we can encourage other Christians especially during times of suffering. We also want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to be an encouragement to Christians that live in other areas. Our children will share this desire with us if we have helped them to grow and mature in their spiritual lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to understand how Christ matures us in our spiritual lives.