

Marks of Spiritual Maturity

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Introduction

If the apostle Paul were to visit one of our “successful” churches, and the church leaders met with him to point out proudly the areas in which their church is successful, what would they be telling him? How would Paul respond?

When his turn comes, what probing questions would *he* ask about the church? What about the members would he be most interested? Fortunately we don't have to guess.

The answer is right there in Paul's letters to the churches. Obviously, what he emphasized as important must be important for us too.

Three virtues to look for

(Col. 1:3-5; 1 Thes.1:2-3; Eph. 1:15,18; 1 Cor. 13:13)

These are:

_____.

Most important: (1 Cor. 13:13; Rev. 2:4; 2 Pet 1:7; Matt 22:37-39; John 21:15)

_____ (agape).

How love is related to spiritual maturity: (Heb. 6:1, 10:22-24, Ch.11-13)

Heb. 6:1 “Let us press on to_____.”

Heb. 10:22-24 Picks up the theme again and mentions the 3 marks of maturity (“let us... let us... let us...”).

Heb.11, 12, 13 Elaborates Faith, Hope, Love

So, these virtues are marks of spiritual_____!

A Brief Look at these Virtues

FAITH: Our _____ relationship with God and _____ His promises.

Has _____ and _____ aspects.

God gives us the _____ for belief. We must respond in _____.

HOPE: Certainty of _____ (eternal) _____ for us that far surpasses all _____ good.

Shown in our rejection of _____ “goods” and _____ in trials without _____ up _____ in God.

LOVE: _____ kind of love - (1 Cor.13:4-8)

- unconditional
- unselfish
- sacrificial
- other-centered
- commitment to others' _____ and interest in _____ with them.
- Act of _____ (A moral choice)
- (Fruit of the Spirit, as we abide in God's love)

(Remember: Paul, Peter, and John as symbols of Faith, Hope, Love, as highlighted in their epistles. Romans - Justification by *Faith*; 1 Peter - Living with *Hope* in Trials; 1 John - *Love*, the main mark of a Christian).

The Importance Of These Virtues For Spiritual Victory (1 Thess 5:8)

Importance of these virtues: Our spiritual _____ against three areas of _____.
1 John 2:16

Faith: Victory over lust of the eye (craving for possessions to build _____).
2 Cor. 5:7; Gen. 13:10

Hope: Victory over pride of _____. Hope beyond the _____ better than this life.
James 4:15,16

Love: Way of conquering lust of the _____. Lust is impersonal, selfish.

We must grow and mature in these. Phil. 1:9; 1 Thes. 4:9,10; 1 Pet. 1:21-22

Marks of Immaturity and Carnality

Examples: Corinthian Church; Believers addressed in Hebrews

Paul did not praise them for any of the three virtues. (He could only point to God's grace and the spiritual gifts they had).

- They are Babes.
- They can only take _____.
- They cannot take God's Word as _____ food. (Solid food needs "chewing," that is, the ability to understand and apply. 1 Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:12)
- They glory in their _____, as status symbols, as sign of spirituality. 1 Cor. 14:40
- They are _____. 1 Cor. 11:22
- They envy and quarrel, judge and take brothers to _____. 1 Cor. 3:3; 4:5; 6:1
- They are still in diapers, not having _____ control! (lacking self control)

- ❑ They indulge in _____ worship of leaders and are divided based on allegiance to _____ 1 Cor. 3:4
- ❑ They have a _____ of low moral standards and practices. 1 Cor. 5:2
- ❑ They are _____ to strange doctrines. Eph. 4:14
- ❑ They had a wrong view of _____ and _____ in marriage. 1 Cor. 7:2,5
- ❑ They lacked discernment with regard to what is really _____ and valuable. Heb. 5:14
- ❑ They are _____, following human rules as if those make them _____ 1 Cor 10:27.
- ❑ They do not use Christian _____ properly to _____ up others. 1 Cor. 8:9
- ❑ They are boastful and _____. 1 Cor. 4:18

Why Love is the most important mark of maturity 1 Cor 13:1-8

The Corinthians' immaturity and carnality were signs of not having _____, the main Fruit of the Spirit.

Love is the very opposite of what they were exhibiting.

By describing the qualities of love negatively, Paul was indicating that if they had love, they would not have those carnal qualities.

In other words, what they needed was love. Without love, gifts are in danger of being used selfishly.

“The greatest of these is love.” 1 Cor. 13:8

How Faith, Hope, Love are related

Faith: The vital _____ we have with God (like the Branch abiding in the Vine)

Love: The _____ of Faith (Fruit of the Spirit as we abide) that is key to abundant life.

Hope: the _____ Blessings promised by God that we hold on to because of Faith in Him

Love should always be the fruit of our Faith. In times of crisis, however, Hope is an additional shining sign of our Faith's strength. We should build our Hope now before crisis hits!

The Challenge: Press On To Maturity! Heb. 6:1

Satan's number one goal for Christians is to keep them ineffective as baby Christians.

The church's primary goal should be the maturity of the believers in their knowledge and character.

That is why discipling is so vital. Don't stop growing to maturity! 1 Cor. 14:20; Eph. 4:13; Heb. 6:1.

The author of Hebrews tries to point out that, in order to grow to maturity, we should go beyond the elementary level and gain a deeper understanding of God's truths. See Heb. 5:10 - 6:2.

Profile Of A Maturing Christian

1. The primary mark of a developing maturity is growth in personal and experiential knowledge of God. Exod.33:13
 2. The maturing Christian has as a life objective the securing of the glory of God. John 17:4
 3. To the mature Christian holiness be more attractive than mere happiness. Heb. 1:9
 4. The maturing Christian becomes dissatisfied with the “milk” of the Word and craves “solid food.” Heb. 5:13-14
 5. The maturing Christian also has a growing discernment that helps him to discriminate between truth and error, good and evil. Heb. 5:14
 6. Like the Master, the maturing Christian prefers serving others to being served by others. Luke 22:27
 7. The life of the maturing Christian will be characterized by giving rather than receiving. Acts 20:35; Mark 10:45
 8. The mature Christian will be fruitful, not barren. John 15:16
 9. The mature Christian will be dynamic rather than static. Ps. 23:3b
 10. The maturing believer will accept rather than resent or rebel against the disciplines God in His wisdom allows to come into his or her life. Heb.12:11
 11. The mature Christian will be willing to accept responsibility in the work of the kingdom. (Exod.3:10; Acts 26:16).
 12. The mature Christian will demonstrate a growing love for God and others. 2 Thes.1:3
- (Taken from *In Pursuit of Maturity* by J. Oswald Sanders. Zondervan Publishing Co. 1986)

Application

1. Do you see the signs of immaturity and carnality in your life?
2. Do you recognize your need for abiding in Christ to kindle love in you?
3. Is your joy more in temporal blessings than in eternal things?
4. Will your joy be shaken if the temporal elements of happiness are gone because of trials or crisis?
5. Are you satisfied with the spiritual level you have reached, or do you desire for growing in faith, hope, and love?
6. Are you a babe in your knowledge of God's truths and satisfied with it, or do you desire to grow in this area so that you can go on to maturity?