

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Growing Up In Christ

by Dan Trygg

“...that I may present every person mature/fully-grown in Christ”

Colossians 1:28

There is a Greek word, *telos*, which means “goal, end-point, fulfillment, completion, maturity”. The verbal form means “to bring to fulfillment, to complete, to mature”. Let’s look at some places this word occurs.

In John 4:34; 5:36 and 17:4, *telos* describes how **Jesus was sent to accomplish the works the Father had prepared for Him to do**. This is a rather poor translation, because it sounds like Jesus was just *doing* the works, but **the thrust of *telos* is that there was a design, plan or intent behind these works, and He fulfilled that design**. The NT usage of *telos* also suggests that **God may have a larger program or plan for us to fulfill**.

In Matt. 5:43-48, Jesus contrasted the religious teachings of His day, and the radically gracious heart of God, ...who tells us to *love* our enemies, ...who causes His rain to fall on the evil *as well as* the good, ...and **He expects us to become as gracious as He is!** Jesus concludes with, “Therefore you shall be *perfect* as your heavenly Father is *perfect*.” The word translated as “perfect” is *telos*. Thus, what Jesus was really saying is “**You shall be mature as your heavenly Father is mature.**” This puts an entirely different spin on understanding this verse! “Perfection” is clearly out of reach for us on this side of eternity, but “**maturity**” implies a process of growth that has an end point, a “fully-grown” character. **God expects us to “grow up”** and become *mature* (fully-developed), just like He is. Also, it is clear that a mature *man* and a mature *God* are *not* the same. **The Bible tells us that God made us in His image, so that His likeness would be seen and expressed through our lives** (Gen. 1:26,27). *Telos* is not “perfection”, but “completion”. **We are to grow up into the human design and potential that is built into us**, just as God already embodies and expresses the fullness of what He Himself is.

In I Cor. 14:20, we see Paul contrasting *mature understanding* with immature, or *childish, thinking*. The idea, again, is that **mature (*telos*) understanding is more developed, more complete, ...embodying and expressing a fuller view of reality than is possible for the infant or child**.

Reading in Phil. 3:7-15, we see that whatever things Paul had counted as gain (beneficial or profitable), he chose to set aside for the surpassing value of knowing God, and having Christ. In verse 12, when he speaks of becoming “perfect”, the word is a verbal form of *telos*. Thus, **what Paul was saying was that, although he was not fully mature, or complete, he did press on after God’s purpose in his life** (vs. 12). While he admittedly wasn’t “there yet”, he chose to *forget the past* things of his life and *stretch forth toward what God yet had for him to do and experience*. He was in *hot pursuit* of the envisioned-goal of the prize of the upward calling of God (vss. 13,14). We tend to hear this as “going to heaven”, but it can refer to being “upwardly focused”, instead of “earthly focused”. In other words, **Paul was living life for the Kingdom, pursuing the growth, the equipping, the maturity, and seizing the opportunities, to fulfill the job God intended for him to do**. In order to do this, he had to have a mature mind, ...a determination to put aside all distractions or past hurts, and go after God’s plan for his life, no matter what. This is reminiscent of Prov. 29:18, “Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained (lit. ‘undisciplined’).” Paul says that **the mature person develops a mindset of vision and purpose, and then adjusts his or her life to fulfill that purpose**. Phil. 3:15 says, “Let us, therefore, **as many as are mature (*teleios*), have this mindset**; and if in anything you have a different mindset, God will reveal that also to you.” [Training to compete as a serious athlete illustrates the need to be goal-oriented in your approach to life. To succeed, you would have to make major adjustments in your life. Not only would you have to add training and practice times to your schedule, but you would also have to adjust your diet to get into shape. You would have to adjust your sleep schedule, and be diligent to get enough rest to allow your body to recover from its new activity level. You would have to cut out a lot of things you are probably doing right now. You would have to cut way back on entertainment. It may affect your social life, as well. Not only would you not be able to hang out with people who stay up late, but you would probably find people who are also in training for the same event you are, and begin to work out and strategize with them. **If you are serious about the goal, it will affect the way you live your life!**] **We are in training to become like Jesus, and do the will of the Father!**

I Cor. 2:6 says that **there is a “wisdom for the mature”**, and Heb. 5:14 indicates that **“solid food is for the mature”**, those who are “*accustomed to* the word of righteousness” and who “*by use* (practice) have trained their faculties of discernment to differentiate between what is healthy-good and what is sick-evil”. Clearly, the “mature” in these passages are those who have progressed in their development, by habitual exposure to and training by the word of God. **Those who are mature become capable of things which immature people are not**.

In Eph. 4:13, **the goal of church interaction is to produce mature people**. Paul says that it should be the purpose of every single church to bring about this “full-grown-ness” of moral character and spiritual intimacy with

God, in the lives of *every believer* in the group. It happens as *we* live and speak the truth to *one another* in love, expressing the leading of the Holy Spirit operating in our midst. *Everyone* has a role and responsibility toward that end (vss. 15,16; cf. Heb. 10:24,25). In Col. 1:28,29, Paul shares that *this* was the focus of his ministry, "...that we might present *every person* mature (fully-grown) in Christ." This also was the passion that Paul's co-worker, Epaphras, had for these people (4:12), "...always laboring for you in his prayers, that you may stand complete (fully-grown) and fully assured in all the will of God."

Clearly, **there was a sense of purpose and urgency in the early church toward moving *all* believers toward maturity.** There was no "cafeteria style" approach to Christianity, where people come to church gatherings and select what they like, and leave what they don't (as if they were in a buffet line). No. There was a sense of responsibility that the group felt toward those believers within their sphere of influence to push and prod, exhort and encourage, support and admonish one another toward maturity. **This responsibility was felt by *both* the leaders and other members of the Body. All were encouraged to be actively, personally involved in one another's lives in such a way as to help each other become what they were designed to become,** both in regard to their walk with God, their character, and their calling to serve the King. Some people feel it is meddling when others try to confront them about their walk. They say, "My life is none of your business." According to the NT, this is *exactly* what the church's business is *supposed* to be.

What does maturity look like? It looks like *Jesus*. In character and in the treatment of others, a mature person in Christ will act as Jesus did (Eph. 4:13; Rom. 8:29; I Jn. 2:6). A **"fully-grown" person is able to control *both* tongue and body.** James 3:2 says, "If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect (lit. 'mature, fully-grown') person, able to bridle the whole body as well." If we hear this as referring to a "perfect" person, we tend to think of this as an unattainable thing. When we see that the Greek word here is *teleios* (mature, fully-grown), then we see that this is not only *attainable*, but *expected*. It is the natural outcome of "growing up" spiritually.

Maturity is also accompanied by confidence and an appropriate fearless boldness toward God and man. This fearlessness is not only a by-product of our growth in God, but also the result of God's love maturing in us. "By this, love (*agapē*) is fully-grown in us, so that we might have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but fully-grown love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not having been matured in love" (I Jn. 4:17,18). In other words, when we really understand the extent of God's love for us, we will no longer fear Him. We will be confident that He only wants our good. Even if there is discipline which we must face, because of foolish choices, we will not fear Him, because we know His benevolent heart.

Another mark of maturity is that the inworking, maturing love of God will produce obedience in our lives. Consistent obedience comes when God's love has become fully-grown in us (I Jn. 2:4-6). Notice that the Bible clearly teaches that **obedience is a *by-product of a healthy spiritual life***, not a *condition for acceptance with God*. We all are sinners, ...broken, wounded, guilty, messed up. God knows that. He does *not* simply accept us, however. He is not OK with us continuing with our sinful lives, like we always have (cf. Gal. 6:7; Heb. 10:26-31; 12:25-29; e.g., I Cor. 11:27-32). He *does* reach out to accept us where we are, ...*but* He has a plan to transform us (cf. Deut. 10:12,13; Mic. 6:8). **If we are willing to pursue Him and His ways, He will give us the power to change.** If we reject His offer of grace and life, He promises that He will judge us. You can't con God. He is not playing with us. This is serious business to Him, ...serious enough for Him to leave the comforts and safety of heaven to come live among us, suffer in our place, and die to make it possible for us to find freedom. To Him, this is *very* serious. He *is* willing to take us in, wherever we are, no matter how "messed up", *IF* we are willing to yield to Him and His ways. **He knows we can't become mature without His life filling and empowering us, ...so He offers to us all that *He is* to work inside of us.** That is awesome! Once we *grasp* His love, once we get *infected* by His love, we cannot *help* but love Him in return. **The more that we walk with Him, the more we will love Him. The more that we love Him, the more we will do what it takes to be with Him and get to know Him better.** We find ourselves putting things aside that we know are displeasing to Him, because we love Him. We will find Him to be the most loving, faithful and precious person we could ever know. We will see that He and His ways are good and right, and we will find ourselves *wanting* to live in His ways. The more we do that, and yearn for Him, the more He will disclose Himself to us. He loves us; we love Him; and soon, we find our hearts changed by His Spirit. We find ourselves *wanting* to obey Him.

Finally, the outstanding mark of maturity is that *mature disciples of Jesus will love one another*. Jesus said *this* would be *the definitive sign that we are His* (Jn. 13:34,35). Paul said that love was the goal (*telos*), the end point, of all that he taught (I Tim. 1:5). Love is "the more excellent way", far above knowledge, spiritual gifts, works of power, or even courageous acts of self-sacrifice (I Cor. 8:1; 12:31-13:3). John tells us that **the ability to love (*agapē*) comes only from God.** It is only possible for those who know Him to love in this manner (I Jn. 4:7,8,19). **When we truly do love one another, it is evidence that (1.) God is dwelling in us; and, (2.) that His love has matured in us.**