

## Striving for Perfection

### Philippians 3:15

Online Sermon: [http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page\\_id=3567](http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567)

#### “All of us then who are mature”

God’s expectation for His children is that we might be righteous, holy and true to His Word and will. While we know this cannot be accomplished while we remain mere infants in Christ, spiritual maturity is something that for many Christians is either illusive or beyond their grasp to attain. Part of problem lies in our “worldly” thoughts, words and deeds portray that while the power of sin to rule over us has been crucified with Christ, we have chosen to allow our “old nature” to continue to be our master. But even if one could clearly see and confess the “planks” in one’s eyes this still leaves one with an even bigger problem: how does one define and strive to become spiritually mature in Christ Jesus? If one is able to become a living sacrifice, think with the mind of Christ, reject the ways of this world and obey His word while at the same time carrying the burdens of others; does this mean one has attained spiritual maturity? Even if this list were comprehensive whom amongst us could ever attain God’s overarching standard of holiness? The following sermon is going to examine Philippians 3:15 and in doing show that spiritual maturity is possible for those who deny self and relentlessly pursue He who is the definer and source of all holiness!

#### Pray for Divine Aid

Any discussion of spiritual maturity should begin with acknowledging that such a lofty



goal is simply unattainable without the power of God almighty! In his book *The Pursuit of God: The Human Thirst for the Divine* A. W. Tozer states that “before a man can seek God, God must first have sought the man.”<sup>1</sup> In John 6:44a Jesus said that “no one can come to Me unless the Father who sent me draws them.” Since no one is righteous and incapable of sinning (Romans 7) it is impossible without God’s grace and power to have a relationship with God who is sinless and pure light (1 John 1:5). It is “by grace you have been saved

through faith and this is not of yourselves but a gift of God, not by works, so that no one can

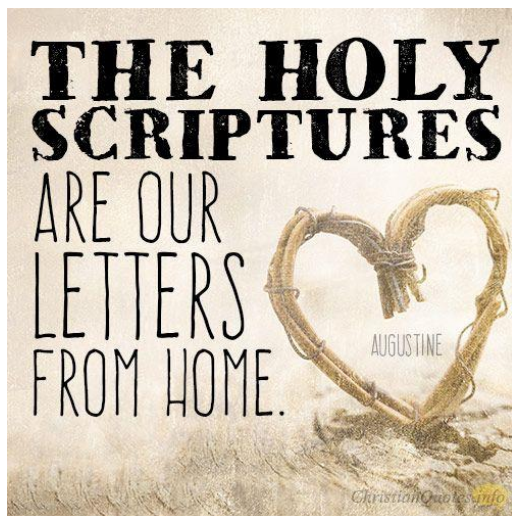
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<sup>1</sup> A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread, 2006), 11.

boast” (Ephesians 1:9). Not only is our salvation dependent on God but so is our sanctification. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that the evil desires of our hearts (James 1:14-15) are subdued and cleansed so that one might fulfill the command to be holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:15). The part the believer plays in attaining spiritual maturity is to draw nearer to God and when He draws nearer (James 4:8) to obey His good and perfect will (Romans 12:2)! So, the first step in becoming spiritual mature is to pray continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17) to God that He might mold and shape one into His holy image.

## **Know and Obey God’s Holy Love Letter**

Before one can truly draw nearer to God one must first understand the benchmarks of holiness. Since God wishes none to perish (2 Peter 3:9) He has written an amazing love letter to



humanity defining what one must do to be holy. It is through the word of God that one learns how to define both sin and holiness (Romans 7:1). In his letter to Timothy Paul wrote “all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (3:16). The commands God has given us are not burdensome but when meditated upon day and night (Psalms 1:1-3), written upon our hearts (Deuteronomy 6:6), obeyed (James 1:22) and accompanied with love for Him, they differentiate us from this world (1 John 5:1-5) that is not our home (1 Peter 2:11). Even though all of creation testifies to the eternal power and divine nature of God (Romans 1:20) it is in His personal love letter that we learn of the infinite value of dethroning self and letting God reign

supreme in our lives<sup>2</sup> so that the masterpieces of God’s grace might receive every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3). It is precisely through mediation, illumination and faith that “believers acquire a living and relational knowledge of God”<sup>3</sup> that is the backbone of spiritual maturity.

## **Hope: An Impossible but Possible Task**

Even though God’s love letter to us clearly defines holiness whom amongst us can truly say we have attained such a lofty goal? Apostle Peter tells us that obedience to God means throwing off the evil desires we once had before we got saved (1 Peter 1:14-16). For Apostle Paul it meant no longer conforming to the patterns of this world (Romans 12:1-2). Can any of us Christians truly say we fit either of these conditions of holiness? For instance, whom amongst us can honestly say we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:3)? Whom amongst us truly dream more about being with God in heaven than seeking pleasure in

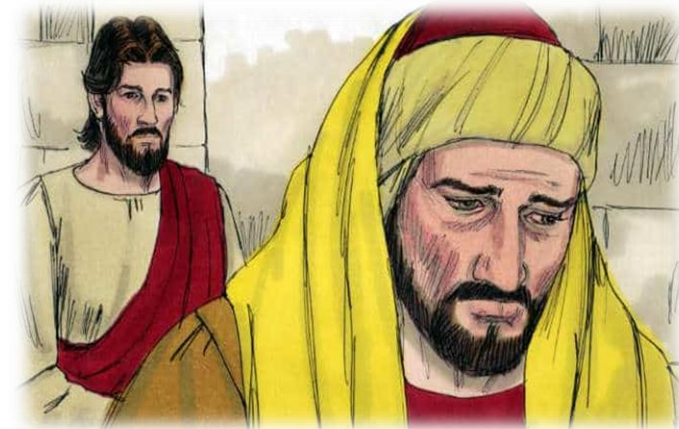
<sup>2</sup> A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God: The Human Thirst for the Divine*. Camp Hill, PA: Wing Spread Publishers, 29.

<sup>3</sup> Tomas Torrance, I believe I got this from his book *Reality and Evangelical Theology: The Realism of Christian Revelation* on page 9.



the foreign land in which we live? Can any of us say we always think about whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable (Philippians 4:8)? If God replayed a video of our last 30 days would there not be evidence of our gossiping, slandering, arrogance, defiance and overall lack of love and mercy, just like the depraved of this world (Romans 12:28-32)? If we were present when the teachers of the law and Pharisees wanted to stone the woman caught in adultery would we even dare think about looking at a stone much less picking it up and casting it (John 8:2-11)?

Since in many respects' holiness is impossible then why does Apostle Paul state believers are to become spiritually mature? Let me tell you a story of the rich ruler (Mark 10:17-27; Matthew 19:16-30; Luke 18:18-30). One day a man ran up to Jesus, fell on his knees and asked Him, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus replied that he needed to follow the



commandments as found in Scripture to which the man replied, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." Even if this were true and like Apostle Paul he was righteous and externally blameless according to the law (Philippians 3:6),<sup>4</sup> what was lacking in his life according to Jesus was an inner attitude of obedience and complete surrender of his will to God.<sup>5</sup> When Jesus asked the man to give up the true ruler of his heart, money, he went away very sad for this he simply would not do!

Because wealth was a sign of God's blessing in the Old Testament<sup>6</sup> the disciples wondered if anyone could ever become part of the kingdom of God? Jesus states salvation is totally the work of God and apart from Him one can do nothing.<sup>7</sup> From the rich ruler we learn that spiritual maturity or holiness is possible only for those who surrender their will to He who is the only one who can mold and shape that person into His image!

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<sup>4</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 311.

<sup>5</sup> Walter W. Wessel, "[Mark](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 715.

<sup>6</sup> Walter W. Wessel, "[Mark](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 716.

<sup>7</sup> Walter W. Wessel, "[Mark](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 716.

## Surrender to God is the Key

The key to spiritual maturity for Paul is the complete surrender of one's will to God. When Paul states in Romans 12:1-2 "in view of God's mercy we are to offer our body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" this does not mean just external obedience but also the



daily "renewal of our minds" to surrender to the will of God. To the church of Galatia Paul wrote: "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). The primary focus in life for Paul was to get to know and become like Jesus.<sup>8</sup> Despite the suffering he was told he would have to endure (Acts 9:15), Paul chose joyfully to sell off his "self" interests "for the buried treasure and pearl" of the kingdom (Matthew 13:44-45) which for him was of infinite value.<sup>9</sup> Within his soul contained

such a yearning to gain Christ that all of his former accomplishments in life were worthless in comparison to knowing and being in a right relationship with God.<sup>10</sup> Intimate union with Christ begins upon conversion but is meant to grow and be the source of joy in one's life!<sup>11</sup>

Surrendering our will to God is the key to spiritual growth because as we draw nearer to God He draws nearer to us and renews our minds to thirst and seek first His kingdom.

## Spiritual Maturity Does Not Mean Sinless



Even though Paul had the life goal of knowing the power of Christ's resurrection and to participate in His sufferings this does not mean that had already attained this goal. If spiritual maturity is to be defined as sinlessness, then by Paul's own declaration in Romans 7 he had missed the mark! Despite his failures Paul stated "he presses on to take hold of Christ Jesus who took hold of him." Even though the power of sin has been crucified with Christ this does not

<sup>8</sup> John Piper, *Sermons from John Piper (1980–1989)* (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> John Piper, *Sermons from John Piper (1980–1989)* (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007).

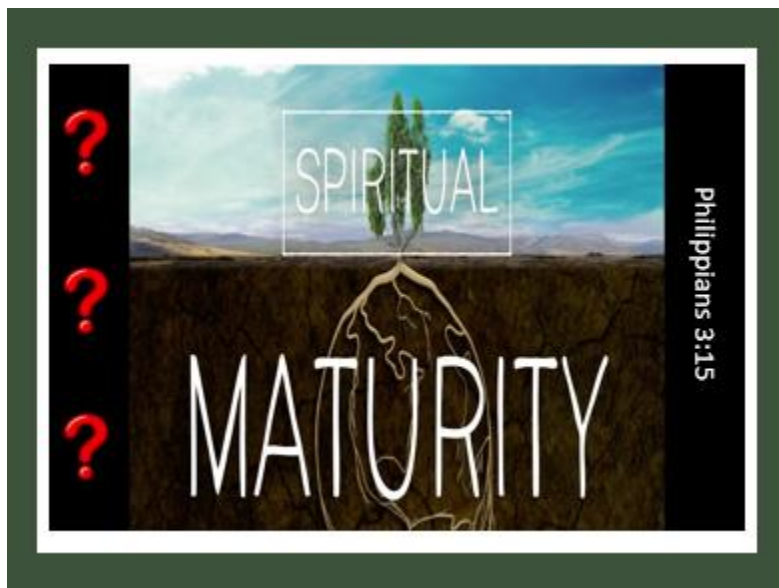
<sup>10</sup> G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 233–234.

<sup>11</sup> Homer A. Kent Jr., "Philippians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebel, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 141.

mean that the desire or ability to sin no longer exists. When we fall short of God’s glory, we are to confess our sins, forget and put them behind us and continue to strive to know Jesus better.<sup>12</sup> Spiritual maturity is not about being sinless but about being “integrated around a single, unifying” desire to know and obey God’s will. No success, failure, triumph or misery<sup>13</sup> would ever keep Paul from “winning the prize of which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

## Conclusion

God’s expectation for His children is that we might be righteous, holy and true to His word and will. While sinlessness and becoming fully like Christ while on this earth is fully



beyond our grasp this fact does not mean that spiritual maturity is unattainable. God knows we are incapable of always doing what is right in His sight, hence the reason He gave mercy, confession and forgiveness. Since spiritual maturity is only obtainable from God each of us are to pray for His help and from His love letter learn of His expectations for our lives. The key to spiritual maturity is not trying harder, albeit our effort is necessary, but denial of self and worldly goals so that one might

fully submit to God’s good, perfect and pleasing will. In view of God’s mercy, the goal of spiritual maturity is to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, ones that are fully focused on growing in our knowledge and blessings of our Lord, Jesus Christ!

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<sup>12</sup> Roger Ellsworth, *Opening up Philippians*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2004), 66.

<sup>13</sup> Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 160.