

Moving Beyond Adolescent Christianity

We all know we need to press on to spiritual maturity. However, I'm beginning to wonder if I've fully understood what spiritual maturity really is. For most of my life, I've thought spiritual maturity was all about the ability to address doctrinal matters correctly. Certainly, maturity includes that, but I don't think that is the sum total of the matter. I think it is merely one aspect, and perhaps not the most important.

The other day I was thinking about maturity in general and what it means. It occurred to me that our spiritual journey of maturity mirrors our life journey of maturity. In life we are born totally dependent. We spend the next 15 to 20 years breaking away from that dependence. But the most mature among us do not stop at independence. Rather, they move on to interdependence. That is, having broken away and gotten on their own they come to grips with how much they need others (cf. **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**).

Adolescence is that period of trying to establish independence and is marked, I think, by two very strong emotional attitudes. 1) *Thinking I've got it all figured out on my own*. That is, I know only a little but think I know it all. 2) *Total embarrassment by my parents who don't have it all figured out*. Bill Cosby talked about that second attitude when he explained that he went away to college for four years and when he got back home was amazed at how much his parents had learned.

As I was thinking about this, it hit me that our own spiritual maturity goes through this process as well. Spiritual adolescence is marked by these two things as well. 1) *Thinking I've got it all figured out*. How many Christians hit this phase where they have figured out all the answers to all the questions? Sometimes they are defending the majority view and sometimes they are departing from it. But either way, they see themselves as the ones who have it all figured out. Why won't everyone else just listen? 2) *Total embarrassment by God or God's other children, especially those who don't have it figured out*. Sure, right after we became Christians we were on fire for the Lord. We told everyone about our change. But after a while things cooled down. We hit real life, and for some of us our relationship with God began to be a bit embarrassing. We want to talk to God in the privacy of our prayer closets, but we don't want Him holding our hands or asking for a hug in front of our friends. We don't want to say a prayer in a restaurant because that would attract attention to God who is sitting with us. Or we don't want to be seen with that older Christian family who seems to be locked in the 50s, 60s, or 70s. They are so out-of-date. Others just wouldn't understand their version of Christianity.

What then does maturity look like? It looks like humility. We don't have everything figured out yet. While we ought always to boldly stand on our Bible-based convictions, we need to mimic Apollos who was willing to accept challenges and corrections to what he was saying (**Acts 18:24-28**). It means being able to say, "I don't know," to questions we really don't know the answer to instead of trying to bluster and bluff our way through because we ought to have it all together. It means being unashamed of the Lord and of the Lord's people (**II Timothy 1:8**). It means being willing to express my love for God and letting others see God's love for me. It means not shying away from the odd though faithful brothers and sisters, but rather recognizing how much we need each other.

Sure, it may seem like attaining spiritual independence is maturity. It may seem like maturity means knowing everything there is to know about the Bible and not needing anyone else to teach us anything. But not really. That isn't maturity in any walk of life. Maturity is having seen that the independence we worked so hard to attain isn't the end of the road. Interdependence with God's children and dependence upon God is maturity.

How mature are you in your Christianity?

--Edwin L. Crozier