

Building Mature Churches

Mature individuals

Colossians 1

28 Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Philippians 3

8-15 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ (9) and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— (10) that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, (11) that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (12) Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. (13) Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, (14) I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (15) Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.

Mature Churches

Romans 12

Rom 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Rom 12:4-5 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, (5) so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

1 Corinthians 12 - 14

1Co 12:12-18 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. (13) For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (14) For the body does not consist of one member but of many. (15) If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. (16) And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. (17) If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? (18) But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

13:7-13

(7-8) Faith, Hope, Remaining, Love

(9) For we know in part

(10) When the Perfect comes, the partial will be set aside

(11a) When I was a child I spoke, thought and reasoned like a child

(11b) When I became a man I set aside childish ways

(12) For I know in part

(13) Remain, Faith, Hope, Love

1Co 14:4 The one who speaks in a tongue **builds up** himself, the one who prophesies **builds up** the church.

1Co 14:5 The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be **built up**.

1Co 14:12 So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in **building up the church**.

1Co 14:17 For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person **is not being built up**.

1Co 14:19-20 Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue. (20) Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be **mature**.

Ephesians 4

Eph 4:1-16 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, (2) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, (3) eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (4) There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— (5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism, (6) one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (7) But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift....

(11) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, (12) to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, (13) until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, (14) so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. (15) Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, (16) from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Hebrews and the problem of Immaturity

Heb 5:11-6:2 About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. (12) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, (13) for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. (14) But solid food is for the **mature**, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. (6:1) Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to **maturity**, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, (2) and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

Threats to churches growing towards maturity

- ❑ You have become dull of hearing
- ❑ You need someone to teach you again
- ❑ You need milk, not solid food
- ❑ Unskilled in the word of righteousness
- ❑ Cannot distinguish good from evil
- ❑ Practicing “dead works”
- ❑ Neglecting basic doctrine

The “perfecting” of Christ in Hebrews

“Perfection” is a major theme in Hebrews, with the word is used 14 times in verb, noun and adjectival forms. In the passage used above it is used twice, the adjective *teleios* (mature) in 5:14 and the noun *teleiotes* (maturity) in 6:1. But almost invisible to the English speaking eye is the fact that the verb form of the word (τελειόω) was also used in 5:9, where it was translated as “made perfect”, in reference to Christ.

Heb 5:8-10 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. (9) And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, (10) being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

You can see the challenge facing the translator in our passage. From the context, “mature” is clearly the best way to understand the adjective in verse 14, as the writer of Hebrews has just told his readers that they are infants still in need of milk. How then do you translate the verb in verse 9? Christ was made mature through what he suffered? Complete? Fulfilled? Finished? The translators of the ESV have determined that “perfect” is the best word to use here. But note that by translating the verb in this way the impact of the repetition in the Greek, which creates a contrast between Christ, who was made complete/perfect/mature through what he suffered, and the church of the Hebrews, who are still incomplete/imperfect/immature, has been entirely lost in the English.

What does it mean for Christ to be made perfect?

- ❑ LXX: fit to serve as high priest
- ❑ Philo: the educated, able to teach others
- ❑ Morally perfect
- ❑ Qumran: wise and virtuous
- ❑ Consecration that leads to moral perfection
- ❑ Morally proved through suffering
- ❑ All of the above

If the writer of Hebrews is using the word in the same way we have seen in the other NT writers, defined as Faith, Hope and Love, then for Christ to be made perfect means that through his suffering his life came to the fullest expression of love, and as such, he is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint God’s nature (1:3) who *is Love* (1 John 4:8).

Is there any evidence to suggest the writer of Hebrews is using the word in this way?

Heb 6:4-12 For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. (7) For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. (8) But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

(9) Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. (10) For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the **love** that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. (11) And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of **hope** until the end, (12) so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through **faith** and patience inherit the promises.

Heb 10:19-31 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, (20) by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, (21) and since we have a great priest over the house of God, (22) let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of **faith**, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (23) Let us hold fast the confession of our **hope** without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. (24) And let us consider how to stir up one another to **love** and good works, (25) not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

(26) For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (27) but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. (28) Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. (29) How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? (30) For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." (31) It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

WARNING 1 (2:1-3) "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. "

WARNING 2 (3:12) "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any (one) of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God."

WARNING 3 (6:4-8)

Love (6:10)

Hope (6:11)

Faith (6:12)



The basis for our faith in Jesus (perfect 7 times: 7:11, 7:19, 7:28, 9:9, 9:11, 10:1, 10:14)



Faith (10:22)

Hope (10:23)

Love (10:24)

WARNING 4 (10:26-31)

WARNING 5 (12:15-17) "See to it that... no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled"

WARNING 6 (13:9) "Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings"

The threats to maturity

Warnings 1 and 6, Apathy

(2:1-3) “Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. “

(13:9) “Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings”

Warnings 2 and 5, The unbelieving individual

(3:12) “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any (one) of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.”

(12:15-17) “See to it that... no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled”

Deu 29:18-28 Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, (19) one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, ‘I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.’ This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. (20) The LORD will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the LORD and his jealousy will smoke against that man, and the curses written in this book will settle upon him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven. (21) And the LORD will single him out from all the tribes of Israel for calamity, in accordance with all the curses of the covenant written in this Book of the Law. (22) And the next generation, your children who rise up after you, and the foreigner who comes from a far land, will say, when they see the afflictions of that land and the sicknesses with which the LORD has made it sick— (23) the whole land burned out with brimstone and salt, nothing sown and nothing growing, where no plant can sprout, an overthrow like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger and wrath— (24) all the nations will say, ‘Why has the LORD done thus to this land? What caused the heat of this great anger?’ (25) Then people will say, ‘It is because they abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt, (26) and went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they had not known and whom he had not allotted to them. (27) Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against this land, bringing upon it all the curses written in this book, (28) and the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger and fury and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as they are this day.’

Warning 3 and 4, Corporate sin

Heb 6:4-12 For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. (7) For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. (8) But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

(26) For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (27) but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. (28) Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on

the evidence of two or three witnesses. (29) How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? (30) For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." (31) It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

1Co 5:6-11 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? (7) Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. (8) Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (9) I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— (10) not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. (11) But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.

1Co 6:15-20 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! (16) Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." (17) But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. (18) Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. (19) Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, (20) for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Building Mature Churches

The firm foundation:

1Co 3:9-17 For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. (10) According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. (11) For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (12) Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— (13) each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. (14) If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. (15) If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (16) Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? (17) If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Building up the body:

Eph 4:11-16 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, (12) to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, (13) until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, (14) so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. (15) Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, (16) from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.