

Hearts of Love

Tom & Debbie Tillman "to touch the world for Jesus Christ"

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Hearts of Love is a non-profit ministry, dedicated to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ whenever and wherever we find open doors. Our first priority is to glorify God and lead whomever possible to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Please pray for us faithfully. We need your prayer, and we appreciate it more than we could ever say. Please consider us an extension of your ministry in this world, and support us with your prayer as such.

***May God richly
bless you!***

Tom & Debbie

Christian Maturity

Recently a man, Jeff, called our Sunday night radio ministry. He had called some years before to ask for prayer because of his drinking. We prayed with him after I tried to explain to him the things that motivated me to quit drinking. Now, fifteen years later, he called and was obviously drunk, really drunk, kind of 'teary,' wanting prayer so he could quit drinking. Again we prayed, but after I explained again the things I've learned.

In a situation like that, I try to never judge the person or speak sternly because I remember that part of my life: drinking to drunkenness, ashamed and hopeless, believing there is no future but waiting to die and then to stand before the Lord and explain why I had wasted so much time, talent and ability, throwing it away for the brief relief of oblivion only to wake the next morning, feeling lost, ashamed, hopeless, heading out to the liquor store to start it all again.

But that was the point; that was what caused me to wake up and begin to climb out of the deep pit I had dug for myself. I began to clearly understand that I was going to stand before the Lord Jesus Christ and that, even at 38 years old, I was not too old to completely start over. Even if I did not get my family back, I could allow God to change me as I began to make good and right decisions. I could do it and I was ready to do it.

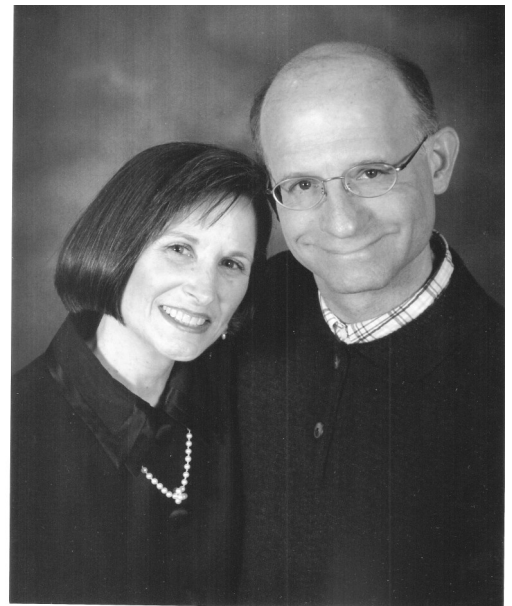
As Jeff's call was ending, I heard the clear sound of a car door opening with the ding ding ding of having forgotten his keys in the ignition, followed by the door slam.

I admonished him that he must stop drinking, at best, and especially, drunk driving; he could have or cause an accident and he could have or cause death which would land him in prison.

It was the next night, in bed, that I thought, for hours, over these things; I could not sleep.

31 years ago I was at my worst or, rather, just beginning to wake up and walk like a believer.

What does it mean to walk like a believer, to be a



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***He has committed to
us the word of
Reconciliation.***

***Therefore, we are
Ambassadors for Christ.***

2 Corinthians 5:19,20

mature Christian?

We all struggle with various weaknesses of the flesh but 'struggling' does not mean regularly giving in to sin. We hear that often, on the radio, 'I'm struggling with xyz.' What the person usually means is, 'I keep giving in to sin because, really, that is what I want to do.' It's only when a person can honestly say, 'I don't want to continue this way,' that he or she can begin the long trek out of habitual sin and on to maturity.

What is Christian maturity?

Is it memorizing large chunks of Scripture? Is it speaking in tongues, having what is called 'a prayer language?' Is it giving X % or my income to ministry? Is it observing the Sabbath, whether Saturday or Sunday? Is it becoming a Sunday School teacher? Is it proven by the fact that our house didn't have any storm damage? How about age... is a mature Christian one who is in their 70's or 80's? We're only 68, still young.

How about having 'spiritual gifts?' Doesn't the Holy Spirit reserve those for the best Christians, the really, really mature ones?

None of those things denote Christian maturity. Some of them accompany Christian maturity; A mature, or maturing, Christian may do some of those things while a mature Christian may be marked by not doing some of those things because they have nothing to do with maturity.

I've memorized Scripture, I give X % plus some, I teach a SS class; our house didn't

have storm damage; I even have spiritual gift(s)... but none of that equals Christian maturity... none of it!

A mature Christian might be young or old; he may teach but he is always learning; he may be rich or poor by the World's standards; he may be erudite or he may be completely illiterate; he may be dull or he may be droll but one thing always shines forth in one who is maturing: he seeks and intimately knows the Lord; he is a child of God and a friend of God.

This is what shines forth in a maturing Christian and the best place to find our definition of maturity is in God's Word.

The first thing we should notice is that righteousness and holiness is not a sign of maturity. Every believer has been clothed in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; every one of us are seen, by God, the Father, only in the Righteousness and Holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

'I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness,' Isa 61:10

'But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.' Rom 3:21

'For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.' Gal 3:27

Now, obviously, in ourselves, we are anything but holy: 'You are indeed angry, for we have sinned— In these ways we continue; And we need to be saved. But we are all like an unclean *thing*, And all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags' Isa 64:5

Too many think that the work of maturity is something we, ourselves, do, a work from the outside in, that we do the works of righteousness and our heart, our inner man, will somehow catch up and be changed but God's Word tells us that it is God Who does the work of changing us from the inside out: 'Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.' Phpp 2:12

Our salvation, our righteousness, our forgiveness and eternal life are all God's work; we have nothing to do in it. It is God Who chose and elected us before the foundation of the World; it is God Who called us to Himself and revealed Himself to us and our eternal salvation, our assurance and security in Him are also all His work. However, our sanctification, which is also the work of the Holy Spirit, is something that, for which, we, too, are responsible.

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2Cor 3

'...walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy,' Col 1:10

Even though it is God who works in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure, He also tells us to walk pleasing Him: 'I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, **bearing with one another in love...**' Eph 4:1

Here we see our first clue as to what really proves Christian maturity. We are told to love one another, to **always** love each other.

In 1 Cor 13, Paul tells us what love, God's real love, actually is: 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift

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of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;⁵ does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails.¹ 1 Cor 13

This is Christian maturity: that we sacrificially love each other, other believers, all other believers. God is not talking about *'loving and serving our city.'* He is not talking about feeding the poor and doing all manner of social gospel works. Those are easy: in and out and back home again, feeling oh so good about myself. He is commanding us to love each other within the body, to love other Christians, especially those we find it the hardest to even 'put up with,' let alone *love*... it's easy to love our list of favorite believers, the ones who think and talk and act like me... but putting up with those 'others,' that's what He means by, love suffers long; love *'puts up with'* long. Admit it... some people are really difficult to love. Those are the ones that God means. 'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a Bond-servant, and coming in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found

in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross.'⁹ Phpp 2:5 Our command is to sacrificially love each other, all other Christians, choosing to serve, with a servant's heart.

Another aspect of Christian maturity is that we forget the past, in that, we do not dwell on our past glories or failures but that we set our hearts and minds on the Lord Jesus Christ and eternal things: 'If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.³ For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who *is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.' Col 3:1 '...one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.' Phpp 3:13

Finally, a mature Christian is one who believes God's Word that the Lord Jesus Christ will come for His Church at any moment and so walks as to please Him.

'Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'³ **And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself**, just as He is pure. '1 John 3:2 As we watch for and expect Him, knowing that we will stand before Him at any moment, we will be careful to 'purify ourselves,' to walk in a manner worthy of our calling.

'For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.'⁹ Phpp 3:20

'I go to prepare a place for you.³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also.'⁹ Jn 14:2

He is coming soon!

Watch, wait and set your mind on Him!

Want more of Tom's teaching?

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