

Who We Want to Be, part 3: A Teaching Community
August 11, 2013

This series of sermons is about who we want to be as Emmanuel Baptist Church. One thing we want to be is mature Christians. We want to grow up in our faith. We want this because we know Jesus wants this.

There is a mistaken assumption by some people that once you make the choice to become a Christian and are baptized, that there is nothing left to do. Just live your life and wait for heaven. They think that there isn't anything that Jesus wants us to do. But they are wrong.

Jesus has the goal that we grow up in our faith, that we mature. When you become a Christian you are a baby Christian, an immature Christian, no matter what your physical age is. As a Christian you have a lot of growing to do.

Even those who have been in church for years before conversion start off as baby Christians. Growing up in the church does not make them spiritually mature. They may start the Christian life with a lot of Bible knowledge, and knowledge of church history, but they are still baby Christians. There are many aspects to being a Christian that you cannot understand until you actually are a Christian. There are aspects of being a Christian you learn only by experience.

When anyone becomes a Christian there is lots of growing up that needs to take place. We at Emmanuel Baptist Church, believe that Jesus' goal is for EVERY Christian to grow to Christian maturity, with a mature Christian understanding of salvation, sin, prayer, the Bible, the church, evangelism, worship, service, and obedience.

This goal is seen in our church objectives. Let's read this third objective aloud together.

Under God, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and in the name of Jesus, the Christ; we commit ourselves... IN EDUCATION... To provide instruction and insight from the Bible, God's Word, nurturing the student so that he may be enabled to grow towards Christian maturity.

The overall goal here is Christian maturity. While the word in caps is education, the goal is Christian maturity.

What does Christian maturity look like? Let me give you just a few of the many things that should be included in a description of Christian maturity.

Christian maturity includes transformation of our character, becoming like Jesus.

Some of the character qualities that a mature Christian exhibits are compassion, courage, honesty, faithfulness, and humility.

For example, the mature Christian exhibits the humility of Jesus. The mature Christian replaces pride with humility. The immature Christian thinks about self like the world does. "I deserve this." "I should be treated with respect." "I accomplished that." The mature Christian understands that as sinners we deserve nothing good. And we accomplish

nothing without God's help. Therefore there is no place for pride in us. We replace pride with humility and our attitude towards God is gratitude.

The mature Christian acts towards others with the love of Jesus. No matter who Jesus met, He treated them with kindness, even His enemies. People need to see Christ's love before they can understand it. They need to see Christ's love lived out through our actions. The mature Christian knows his future is secure and can adopt this same attitude toward others that Jesus did.

The mature Christian strives for consistent obedience to Christ's commands.

Jesus told His first followers that if they truly loved Him, they would obey Him. That holds for us too. What Jesus is looking for as an expression of your love for Him is obedience. Jesus doesn't want a greeting card from you. Your offerings help with the work of evangelism. Your prayers may move mountains. Your worship attendance may be above average. But, what really says to Jesus, "I love you," is obedience. Obedience speaks to the heart of Jesus.

Paul, an early Christian missionary, explains one of the benefits of Christian maturity:

Ephesians 4:14 (NIV) Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

People who reject the truth, any truth, keep inventing their own truth, something they want to believe in, even if it isn't reality. Many people reject the claims of Jesus. They don't want to believe He is the Son of God. They don't want to believe that He died for their sins. They don't want to believe that God raised Him from the dead and made Him Lord. They don't want to bow down to Jesus. So they have invented the idea that Jesus isn't important. They have invented the idea that as long as they are seeking God, sincerely, in their own way, they can ignore Jesus.

Our world is full of man-invented ideas. In fact there are more today than ever before. There was a time, not many years ago, when it was harder to get your ideas heard. You could write a letter to the newspaper editor and maybe get your ideas read. You might try to get an essay published in a magazine. You might even try to get a book of ideas published. But in any of these you were very dependent on other people to get your voice heard.

The internet has changed all that. You can post something on Facebook today and it will be read by all of your friends, and it isn't hard to build a list of hundreds of friends. If they like what you write, and share it with all their friends, your new idea could go viral by tomorrow. Despite what some believe, no one controls the internet. No one is making sure that anything on the internet is true. There is a lot that is false, sinful, evil, deceptive and fraudulent on the internet. If you don't believe that you will probably live to regret it.

The truth we are most concerned about is the truth about God and how to relate rightly to Him. The mature Christian has learned to divest truth about God from untruth.

So the goal of our objective is Christian maturity. But note that the primary tool for getting us there involves the Bible. That is why this objective for our church is focusing on teaching, on education from the Bible.

Teaching the Bible has always been important to God's people. We believe the Bible is the self-revelation of God, and therefore it is true.

2 Timothy 3:16 (NIV) All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

We believe the Bible is the self-revelation of God. That is what God-breathed means. We believe that the Bible is God's revelation of Himself to us. It reveals how to rightly relate to God. Therefore it is of absolute importance that we be students of the Bible and the church be teaching the Bible. The mature Christian understands this and is living a devotion to learning, understanding, and applying the Bible.

It is true that when you become a Christian you have already learned some basic truths. Otherwise you could not be a Christian. You had to accept that you were a sinner in need of a Savior. You had to learn and understand that Jesus was the Savior you needed, that He died in your place, that God raised Him from the dead, that He returned to heaven and is due to come back for us according to God's own plan. You had to accept the fact of your sin and deserved punishment and turn away from your sins, putting your life into the hands of Jesus. All of this you had to learn and understand and accept in order to become a follower of Jesus. These are basic truths.

In order to grow to Christian maturity you must learn, understand, and apply advanced truth. There are also advanced truths for us to learn that will bring great benefit. Another benefit of Christian maturity is based on learning, understanding, and applying these advanced spiritual truths. We see this in the letter of Hebrews.

Hebrews 5:14 (NIV) But solid food (*advanced spiritual truth*) is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Earlier we saw that the mature Christian is able to discern between spiritual truth and error. The mature Christian is also able to distinguish good from evil. The line between good and evil is not always easy to see in our world with so many ideas being put out there.

See that we must learn this solid food, these advanced spiritual truths. We must learn them, understand them, and use them in order to learn to distinguish good from evil.

This is a growth process. No one is automatically a mature Christian. Christian maturity involves learning spiritual truth, understanding it, and applying it to one's daily life. Note the word "use" in the Hebrews passage above.

Christian maturity won't come about without a continuing and thorough study of the Bible and living out what you are learning. For that reason we are teaching the Bible as a church. Teaching the truth as God has revealed it has always been a mark of those who know Him.

God revealed Himself to Abraham, forming a relationship with him that included promises of blessing upon Abraham's descendants. Therefore it was important for those descendants to know of these promises and what their own responsibilities were in this relationship with God. So Abraham had to teach these things to his son Isaac. Isaac had to pass it on to his sons Esau and Jacob. Jacob had to pass it on to his 12 sons. One of those sons, Joseph, had to pass on to his brothers and sons what he had learned of God's providence. Moses passed on what he had been taught from God. The priests, Levites, and Israelite parents were to teach the commands of God to the Israelite people. The prophets taught the Israelites how to repent of their sins and get right with God.

In the New Testament, we see that Jesus taught His disciples spiritual truth. He also commanded His followers to teach after His departure. The last part of the Great Commission has this command.

Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV) "... go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.** "

We see the apostles of Jesus fulfilling those words in that first church in the book of Acts.

Acts 2:42 (NIV) They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching...

Our church too is devoted to learning, understanding, and applying spiritual truth from God. We teach the Bible in small groups that meet on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, and at other times. At the beginning of the Prayer Service on Wednesday nights I read a short passage of the Bible, reminding us of some spiritual truth for which to praise or give thanks for as we move into a time of prayer for our church. I encourage you to come out and join us. You do not have to pray aloud, but we encourage you to agree in prayer with those who are doing so.

I teach the Bible in my sermons. There is often teaching in the newsletter or other publications and communications of the church. We teach in our Vacation Bible School, children's choir, and other children activities. In all these ways and more we are intent on teaching the Bible so that you can grow towards Christian maturity. Your growth is your responsibility. Our responsibility is to help you achieve it. We encourage you, inform you, and teach you how to obey Jesus.

It is not just the pastor and teachers who do the teaching. That teaching sometimes comes from other Christians. Let's say that you are having trouble with forgiving someone who has hurt you. As you share that problem with your Bible Study group, they can pray for you. Someone in that group other than the teacher may have had the same problem once before and can tell you how they learned to forgive. The whole group benefits from being part of this exchange of information on obedience to Jesus.

This personal teaching/helping of one member to another is one reason we study the Bible together in small groups. I encourage you to become part of such a group. It doesn't have to be here. Some of our members are involved in Bible study groups in the condo development where they live. Others study the Bible with co-workers during lunch. Maybe you have a friend who attends a Bible study group at a restaurant during the week with people from lots of churches. If our groups don't match up with your schedule, start praying

that God will show you a group that does. We can start another group at another time other than those we already have.

Teaching is important and necessary if you are going to grow towards Christian maturity. So here is the point I am making today. Here is what I want you to do with the information I've presented to you today. Here is our church's goal for you today.

Devote yourself to learning, understanding, and applying spiritual truth.

Get involved in the teaching of our church. Attend the worship and preaching. If you are already doing that, take the next step of getting involved in a Bible study group. In a Bible study group you can ask questions, you can discuss answers. You can ask for prayer and be prayed for. You can hear how others are learning to obey Jesus. You can share your story. You can be encouraged by the stories of others. You can develop closer relationships with others who serve Jesus.

Every time you are involved in hearing the Bible taught, make sure you learn something. Make sure your understanding grows so your application can grow too. Make it your prayer to learn something, to take something away that is practical, something for you to do. Feed your prayers with the teaching. Apply to your daily life what you are learning.

Don't stop at just hearing the Bible taught. Don't stop at just learning what the Bible says. Don't stop at understanding what the Bible means. Go all the way to applying what God is saying to you. Go all the way to living out the spiritual truths you are hearing, learning, and understanding. Go all the way to Christian maturity.