

Last Sunday we began a series of sermons on measuring Christian maturity. We need some idea of where we are as a Christian in order to shape our prayers.

No matter at what age we become a Christian, we are immature and have a lot of spiritual growing to do. I pointed out last week that we tend to measure the wrong things about being a Christian. Most people want to measure things that are easy to do, things that are easy to count, things that make easy comparisons of one person to another. We tend to measure attendance at church, money given to the church, and time sacrificed to things like prayer and Bible study and committees. But in the Bible none of these are measures of Christian maturity.

Instead, we find much harder things to do, things hard to measure, and hard to use as comparisons. The measures in the Bible are not about comparing ourselves to other Christians, but rather comparing ourselves to Jesus.

God is working out his plan for the spiritual growth of each of us. As we saw last week, His plan includes various negative experiences or trials. These test our faith in various ways. As we persevere in faith through these trials our faith grows and matures. So even though the trials are bad in themselves, like this virus threat, God uses them to accomplish something good in us. So we should anticipate how God will bring good out of bad through such events.

Adopting such an attitude is not an easy thing to do. In fact it may be harder than the trial experience itself. Never-the-less, one measure of how mature in Christ you are is the attitude you exhibit when problems, roadblocks, trials, loss, and other negative experiences come into your life.

This morning we turn to two other measures of spiritual maturity. They both deal with relationships. As we will see, our relationships are a priority with God.

Relationships are hard. They are hard because they involve two independent people. Every person has a unique set of values, beliefs, desires, goals, personality, and behaviors. Each of us is a unique individual. We are different from every other person. It is no wonder we often clash with each other.

It is easier to get along with another person if you have a lot in common with that person. But still there is conflict in such relationships.

One thing we all have in common is part of the problem. The one thing we all have in common is sin. We are all sinners. **Sin can be described this way: Unspoken behind all of our words and actions every day is me, myself, and mine.** That means we all normally, naturally think of ourselves in every situation. We don't think of God.

Most of our days are focused on what we want rather than on what God wants. Most of our days we make our own plans and agendas and do not pray them up to him for approval. We fail to praise God and thank God as much as we should. This is our great sin problem.

I could not begin to count my sins for a day, much less all the days of my life. But someone is counting my sins. Someone in heaven is writing down and tabulating all of our sins. The amount of our sins is huge.

And yet... and yet God has offered a way to be forgiven of ALL of our sins. He sent Jesus to die for our sins. His death paid for all of our sins. He did not die for just the small sins. He did not die for just some of our sins or even most of our sins. Jesus died for ALL of our sins. No matter how huge the amount of our sin is, his forgiveness covers it all.

In view of your great sin, Jesus' great sacrifice, and God's promised blessings, is there anything he could ask of us that would be too much?

If you think so, you are ignoring the details of your sin and his grace.

There ARE hard things he has commanded of us. It is these hard things that are the measure of our spiritual maturity. Let's now look at two of these.

> **If you sinned against another, make it right.**

Jesus spoke of this in his Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:23-24 (NIV) "... if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Some people have the mistaken idea that if they just pay a little attention to God, that will satisfy God. In the old days of the Israelites a person did this by going to the temple and offering an animal sacrifice to God. Many people thought that this was all God really wanted.

These days people think much the same thing. They think that going to church, putting a bit of money in the plate, and sitting through a sermon is all God really wants of us.

Jesus disagreed. Jesus disagreed because God had pointed out long before, the fallacy of this way of thinking. A long, long time ago, God commanded the king of the Israelites, King Saul, to go and destroy the Amalekites. He was to put to death all of the people and all of their animals.

But Saul and his soldiers disobeyed God. They kept some of the best animals, thinking they would sacrifice them to God. So God's prophet, Samuel, rebuked Saul for disobeying God. He told Saul that God valued obedience more than gifts. He said, "**To obey is better than sacrifice.**" (**1 Samuel 15:22**)

Jesus taught the same principle in Matthew 5. Picture this. A man has brought a live animal, a goat, to the Jewish temple to be sacrificed on the altar by the High Priest. He has already entered the temple, waited in line, people waiting behind him, had his animal inspected as suitable, and then as he is coming up to the High Priest remembers that he sinned against someone. That someone is angry with him, maybe not speaking to him. He has to interrupt the proceedings and says, "I've got to leave. I have to set things right with a friend. Can I leave my goat tied up to that post?"

How embarrassing would that be. How humbling.

I know a bit of what that is like. Some weeks ago I was making a shopping run, and got through the checkout, groceries all bagged up only to discover that I forgot my wallet. I had to tell the clerk I had no money, could I put the cart over to the side. I would run home and back and then pay. Sure, she said. But it was embarrassing.

Applying what Jesus said to today means if you are preparing to come to church on Sunday and remember that you have sinned against someone, change your plans. Go to that person and apologize. Try to be reconciled to that person. Try to make things right. Work to restore the relationship. Then come and worship God. This shows that you value what God values. God values our relationships with each other.

As the guilty party in the relationship, seek to be reconciled. This is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

This would be a hard thing to do. It is something most people avoid doing. I would not be surprised to learn that there are some in our church who find themselves in this situation. You are avoiding doing this hard thing. You might have tried to bargain with God to get out of it. You would rather give money or time instead. You would rather do something easier and less humbling than to go to the other person and apologize and seek reconciliation.

Avoidance is what the immature do. Do not settle for immaturity. If you will handle it like Jesus commands, you will grow to be more like him. It is a step towards spiritual maturity. Afterward you will rejoice. And next time it will be a little bit easier to obey in this.

The second command is also a hard one. It too requires humility. This should not be surprising. Recognizing our stance before God as sinners requires humility. We never outgrow this. We never achieve our way out of being humble before God. Instead, the more mature you become as a Christian, the more humble you will become.

> **If someone sins against you, forgive them.**

This too, is first seen in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 6:14-15 (NIV) “... if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

This is the opposite of the first. The first case had you sinning against someone else. Here it is someone else who has sinned against you. But the responsibility from Jesus is the same in both. He commands his followers to make the first move towards reconciliation.

Jesus is more pointed in Matthew 18. There he tells a story to make the point that since we have received forgiveness of our huge debt of sins against God, we must be willing to demonstrate forgiveness towards anyone for their few sins against us. He expects us to act like we have been treated by God.

If you refuse to forgive someone their sin against you, you are insulting God. You are making light of his grace towards you. You are treating as a little thing the death of Jesus.

Our relationships matter to God. If we would be like Jesus, we must work towards reconciliation with others no matter who sinned against the other.

So how would you evaluate yourself by these two commands? Do so with some questions.

Is there someone who is angry at you for something you said or did?

Has someone been cold towards you lately?

Has someone stopped talking to you?

Has a friend started making snide comments about you, either to your face or behind your back?

If so, then you may have sinned against that person. Go and make things right.

On-the-other-hand,

Are you harboring ill feelings towards someone?

Have you been avoiding someone, refusing to talk to them?

Do you keep rehashing the bad thing someone said or did to you?

If so, then you need to go and forgive that person. Seek to be reconciled.

God went to great lengths to forgive us. He did so out of love for us and a desire for a good relationship with us.

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Today, you can become a follower of Jesus Christ. But you cannot become a Christian without taking a hard step. You must admit your great sin against God.

Then, you must believe that God sent Jesus to die for ALL of YOUR sins.

Believe that Jesus died for you and was raised from the dead. Believe that Jesus will one day return from heaven to set things right upon the earth. What a great day that will be!