Signs of Immaturity

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Being from the Seychelles islands, I have had the privilege of spending time on yachts, catamarans and fishing boats. We sailed from the mainland to a smaller island in a large schooner during one particular holiday, and an unexpected storm struck us, causing the boat to severely pitch and toss through the angry swell. I was seasick, fearful and experienced instability – to put it mildly! This picture of a boat tossed about and losing its bearings is the image Paul uses in Ephesians 4 to describe the instability of immature Christians. This is relevant for you and me because each of us has areas in which we are not yet mature and could be swayed off course and wrongly influenced.

Lockdown Lures

There are also unique dangers we face during this lockdown season. Our isolation brings unique temptations and 'winds of doctrine' across our paths, making us more susceptible to being tossed to and fro. In this article, I will unpack two signs of spiritual immaturity. I will also show from Ephesians 4 how we can navigate these tumultuous times, growing into greater maturity and a life anchored in Christ.

No Longer Children

God's goal is for us to be flourishing, full-grown spiritual adults, in "mature manhood" (Ephesians 4:13). The aim is that "we may no longer be children" (verse 14, ESV). He is not saying we mustn't have faith and trust like a child, which Jesus encourages when He says we must be like children. Paul is speaking here of being spiritually immature, especially in our thinking, as he uses the child/adult analogy.

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Signs of an Immature Christian

1) Being Easily Influenced

The first sign of being immature is being easily influenced by faulty or seductive ideas, or being the person who over-emphasises secondary issues (someone who 'majors on the minors'). This is the person being "tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes." (Ephesians 4:14, ESV) One author insightfully writes on this Scripture, "Paul speaks of the clever trickery of men; the word he uses (kubeia) means skill in manipulating the dice ..."[1]

Our Social Dilemma

We see this 'clever trickery of man' evidenced in the Netflix documentary, 'The Social Dilemma'. The film exposes how social media companies aim at one level to connect us, but on a deeper level to manipulate and cunningly control us (monetise us). They actually do change thinking and behaviour. It is terrifying and sobering to watch! Of course, there is a place for believers to be on social media, but we have to keep our eyes wide open. To navigate discerningly through it while staying grounded in Christ is not easy. These platforms are a playground for all kinds of colourful teachings, misinformation and man's clever opinions. In this environment, it is easy to get swept up by the many voices and be lured away from what is truly important.

Majoring on Minors

Our great enemy, the devil, is crafty enough to subtly side-track us away from the central call and message we are called to bring. The power of God is found in the Gospel (Romans 1:16), not in preaching on the strong winds of social issues, no matter how urgent they are. A Christian is firstly called to be an ambassador of Christ who rightly represents the government of heaven (keeping King Jesus at the centre) not fighting against or being known for minor or side-issues. This can include majoring on a secondary doctrine, arguing over vaccines, government

conspiracies and the like. People are saved by the power of the gospel message, not any other type of message.

This doesn't mean we can't have strong opinions on real issues of our day; we can. But being spiritually mature means being able to discern what is essential to the faith, and what is secondary.[2] Remember God's great goal for us is to grow up into "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13, ESV). A Christian is then firstly a lover of Jesus who makes disciples of Christ, not fighting for a pet doctrine or being known for being "anti-" or "pro-" something. What dominates your social media postings? These are often signs of what we value and how mature we are.

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2) Being Opinionated

The second sign of being immature is being opinionated and argumentative. This might shock some of us, but we are called to walk in "all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2 (ESV)), and to "speak the truth in love" (verse 15) and build one another up "in love" (verse 16). It is heartbreaking to see the way Christians aggressively criticize and take on godly leaders and each other, especially on digital platforms. It is not wrong to have strong opinions or convictions that cause us to differ with each other. And it is not wrong to disagree at times. But attacking words, and the 'I-am-better-than-you' attitude should have no place among us. It is a sign of immaturity. Rather the wisdom from above is "…peaceable, gentle, open to reason" (James 3:17, ESV). We are all guilty of erring in these areas, but the Lord is patient and kind towards us. He calls us to more.

How Then Do We Grow into Mature Christians?

1. Drink from God's Well

In the simplest answer: by growing in Jesus and remaining connected to one another. There is no shortcut to becoming a godly, mature person. My spiritual maturity is directly linked to my faith and relationship with Jesus. We are "to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ"(Ephesians 4:15, ESV). Mature believers are those who find their life and joy and sustenance in Jesus and who persistently press into the Lord daily, finding His grace to make godly choices and to love people amid temptation and life's pressure. If we are drinking more

from the wells of news outlets and social media than God's Word and presence, we will remain easily swayed from Christ, anxious and fearful.

2. Remain Connected to the Body

Along with this, we have to remain connected to one another in the "unity of the faith" (Ephesians 4:13, ESV). We are part of this beautiful, messy body of Christ where we mature as we serve one another and speak the truth in love (verse 15) and, conversely, learn to hear and receive the truth in love. One of God's great tools to mature us is His people! Sometimes the tool is painfully applied to round off sharp edges in our character and thinking, especially through conflict and offence.

3. Submit to Leaders

We also grow as we submit under the 'five-fold gifts' – the apostolic leaders whose job it is to train us into ministry and maturity (verse 11). Choose to trust and listen to the safe voices of your local shepherds and apostolic ministers above the voices of strangers on social media.

In case we forget, the winds, waves and storms of life will buffet us all no matter how mature we are. But rather than being easily-influenced, immature Christians, swept up into fear, anxiety or side-tracked away from Christ, the Lord will help us navigate and flourish through this life, growing up into a mature faith that will be a testimony to all.

Related Resources:

- The Role of Reason
- Deception & Compromise
- Falling Away Through False Teaching
- Counterfeit Christianity
- The War on Culture

References:

[1] William Barclay: The New Daily Study Bible [2] For further reading on this, check out my article Real Christians Never Disagree