

Introduction

In the last message on being a functioning member, I mentioned that surveys show that the number one sign of a mature person is that they have a job. In the church, mature believers should also know their gifts and calling, and should be using their gifts to serve others.

If you research “signs of an immature adult”, i.e., an adult that acts childish, you will also find lots of articles on the internet. Many sites will give seven, ten, twelve, or even fifteen signs of an immature adult. The most common sign is an adult who cannot control his/her emotions. Other common traits include selfishness, impulsiveness, and irresponsibility. There are lots of signs of immaturity.

When Paul wrote the Corinthians, he told them that he could not address them as spiritual men, but as to flesh, as to infants in Christ. He was telling the church that they were spiritually immature. Then, he gave some characteristics of why he was calling them immature. He said they were fleshly, and walking like mere men. He gave them examples of being fleshly, saying, “for since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly?” In Galatians 5, Paul gave fifteen characteristics of fleshly living, and ended by saying, “and things like these.” His list of fifteen characteristics was not complete; they were just examples of fleshly living. The lives of immature believers is characterized by fleshly living, while the lives of spiritually mature believers is characterized by walking by the Spirit.

We are in a series about being complete in Christ. We have seen that teleios, the word that is often translated as complete, also means mature. In many places where it is used, there is a comparison between childish behavior and adult behavior, or mature behavior. Paul's purpose or goal was to present every person complete or mature in Christ.

Spiritual maturity does not come overnight; it is a process. We learned that one of the most important characteristics of mature believers is that they know God; they really know Him. They know His ways, His heart, and His will. Spiritually mature believers have walked with God and pressed on to know Him. It has been a priority in their lives.

We also saw that spiritually mature believers have a mature diet. They can feed themselves, and do not have to be fed milk; they have learned to eat meat. They have learned to study the word of God, and through practice they can discern good and evil.

We also saw that spiritually mature believers have a solid foundation. They don't need someone to share with them the elementary principles; they have them down pat. They have pressed on beyond these foundational principles to maturity, and are able to teach others.

Our message today is how mature believers do not walk in fleshliness. Their lives are not characterized by fleshly living. Instead, they walk in the Spirit, and their lives are characterized by the fruit of the Spirit.

Mature Believer's Walk – Part 1

1. Does Not Walk in the Flesh (1 Cor 3:1-4)
2. But Walks by the Spirit (Gal 5:16-25)

1. Does Not Walk in the Flesh (1 Cor 3:1-4)

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he addressed them as men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. He gave two characteristics of immature Christians. First, they are fleshly. Second, they require milk to drink, not solid food. The analogy of milk and solid food clearly portrays an infant or baby. The Corinthians were not mature; they were immature; they were infants in Christ. We covered the diet of mature believers in the third message of this series.

(1 Co 3:1–2) “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of **flesh**, as to infants in Christ. {2} I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,”

The word flesh or fleshly is used three times. In the first occurrence, Paul said that he could not address them as spiritual men, but as to men of flesh. The KJV translates fleshly as carnal, so many people think of a carnal Christian as one who is walking in the flesh or sin. Much of the KJV was translated from Latin texts, and the Latin word for flesh is carnalis. Merriam Webster defines carnal as a) relating to or given to crude bodily pleasures and appetites, b) marked by sexuality. In the first occurrence, Paul told them that he had to address them as men of flesh.

In the second occurrence, he told them again that they are still fleshly, because they were not able to receive solid food. The third occurrence was in the form of a question. He asked them, “For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly?”

(1 Co 3:3–4) “for you are still **fleshly**. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not **fleshly**, and are you not walking like mere men? {4} For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not mere men?”

In Paul's follow-up question, he asked, “Are you not walking like mere men?” Mature believers are going to walk as godly men and women, not men and women of the world, or mere men. The jealousy and strife in the church of Corinth were indications of their fleshly lives, and that they were spiritually immature.

Paul gives three examples of fleshly behavior, saying, jealousy, strife, and division. He had already told them in the beginning of his letter that he had been informed by Chloe's people that there were quarrels and divisions among them. They had created divisions over the different leaders. Some were for Paul, some were for Apollos, some were for Peter, and some were for Christ. Now, in our text today, he refers back to his previous statement about division, and said, “for when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not mere men?” They were immature and carnal Christians, characterized by jealousy, strife, and division.

(1 Co 1:10–12) “Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. {11} For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you. {12} Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, ‘I am of Paul,’ and ‘I of Apollos,’ and ‘I of Cephas,’ and ‘I of Christ.’”

When I planted our first church in 1997, our church grew fairly quickly. There were a number of reasons for the growth, including the fact that we had a couple of evangelists that were part of the church plant. But another factor was there were three church splits that took place just as we

started up, and we picked up people from all three churches. Unfortunately, church splits are all too common, and it is joked that churches will split over the color of carpet. Church splits are indicative of immaturity and fleshly living. Paul's word to the Corinthians is very apropos today.

The Corinthians were spiritually immature, and their lives were characterized by fleshly living, strife, and division. Paul's goal was to help them become spiritually mature or complete in Christ. Therefore, he addresses their fleshly lives, their jealousy, and their strife and division, so that they can repent and press on to maturity. There are many aspects of becoming spiritually mature. We must pursue our relationship with Christ, make sure that we have good foundations, and deal with sins in our lives so that we can press on to maturity.

(1 Cor 3:1-4) "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. {2} I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, {3} for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? {4} For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men?"

Paul just gave three examples of a fleshly lifestyle. In his letter to the Galatians Paul expounded on what it means to walk in the flesh. Look at all the things Paul includes in that list. "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these..." And things like these means that even this list is not a comprehensive list of the deeds of the flesh. The Corinthians were living fleshly lives, not spiritual lives, and all of these deeds of the flesh were characteristics of their lives.

(Gal 5:19-21) "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, {20} idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, {21} envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"

If Paul was writing to the church today, would his message be any different? I do not believe so. The statistics that I have seen indicate that the church is still fleshly. In 2020, Mission Frontiers reported the following church statistics about pornography:

- 68% of church-going men view porn on a regular basis
- Over 50% of pastors view porn on a regular basis
- 76% of young Christian adults (18-24 yrs. Old) actively search for porn

In a 2020 survey by Pew Research, the following statistics were given:

- 57% of Christians believe sex between unmarried adults in a committed relationship is acceptable.
- 50% of Christians believe casual sex between unmarried adults that are not in a committed relationship is acceptable.

There is immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and other such things in the church

today. God wants the church to be complete or mature. Therefore, we must help people put behind the deeds of the flesh, and live transformed lives.

How do we help the church to leave a fleshly lifestyle and become complete in Christ? What are some things that we can do? First, we need to disciple new believers. When someone prays to receive Christ, their thoughts, attitudes, and actions don't suddenly and miraculously change in that instant. There is a growth process. They are a new creation, and old things are passing away, and new things are coming; but it is a process. Jesus commanded us to make disciples, and we need to mentor these new believers and help them grow. They need to learn to have a devotional, read their Bible, memorize Scripture, pray, serve, and give. They need to be disciplined.

(2 Co 5:17) "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

(Mt 28:19–20) "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, {20} teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Second, we need to encourage people to read their Bibles and gain a Biblical worldview. We need to help them live by God's moral standard. The world has done a great job of removing God's moral standards. The church needs to be the pillar and support of truth.

(1 Ti 3:15) "but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth."

Third, we need our pastors to preach the word of God. We need pastors to preach it accurately. We need pastors to preach it systematically. We need to preach the whole counsel of God. We need good, solid, Biblical preaching.

(2 Ti 2:15) "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth."

(Ac 20:27) "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God."

2. **But Walks by the Spirit** (Gal 5:16-25)

In Galatians, Paul did not just give them a list of the deeds of the flesh; he gave them some practical solutions so that they could stop walking in the flesh and start walking in the Spirit. He wanted them to press on to spiritual maturity. Let's take a look at some of these applications.

Paul starts by giving them a vision. He said that God called them to freedom, and that they were not to turn their freedom into an opportunity for the flesh. God has called all of us to freedom, freedom from sin. Many are still in bondage to sin, but God has called us to freedom.

(Gal 5:13) "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

Paul's second solution was to serve one another through love. Most fleshly behavior is about pursuing our own selfish desires. God wants us to get our focus off of fulfilling our own desires, and helping other people with their needs. Serving others is a fitting prescription for selfishness.

Paul's third solution was to walk by the Spirit. He said if we walk by the Spirit, we will not carry out the desire of the flesh, as the flesh and the Spirit are set against each other. Then, Paul gives the fruit of the Spirit. When we walk in the Spirit, we will bear the fruit of the Spirit. For us to walk in love, joy, peace, and patience, we must walk in the Spirit and be led by the Spirit.

(Gal 5:16-24) "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. {17} For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.... {22} But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, {23} gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

How do we walk in the Spirit? How are we led by the Spirit? I believe that we have to be filled with the Spirit and set our minds on the things of the Spirit. In Romans 8, Paul taught that "those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." If we are going to walk in the Spirit, we must set our minds on the things of the Spirit. Two of the best ways to set our minds on the things of the Spirit are to meditate on Scripture, and worship God with song.

(Ro 8:5-8) "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. {6} For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, {7} because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, {8} and those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

Similarly, in Paul's letter to the Colossians, he told them to keep seeking the things above, and to set their minds on things above, not on things that are on earth. Walking in the Spirit requires us to set our minds on spiritual things, not on the things of the earth, which are temporal.

(Col 3:1-3) "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. {2} Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. {3} For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

If we are going to be led by the Spirit, we need to be regularly filling ourselves with the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 5:18-20, Paul wrote that we are not to be drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but we are to be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with our hearts to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things. If we are going to be filled and led by the Spirit, we must be worshipers of God. We have to be singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. We have to be a grateful people, giving thanks to God for all things.

(Eph 5:18-20) "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, {19} speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; {20} always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;"

Paul gave one final thought about walking in the Spirit and not in the flesh. He said that those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. When we are baptized, we are buried with Christ by being put under the water. Then, we are raised up with Christ to a new, resurrected life, when we come up out of the water. Baptism is a picture of us being buried with Christ, and being raised up to a new resurrected life. Our old life has been crucified with Christ, and buried, and we have been raised up with Christ to live a godly life. While it is a picture, the reality is that we need to continually put to death the deeds of the flesh. We do not need to be baptized again, but we need to keep putting to death the deeds of the flesh.

(Gal 5:24) “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

Christians need to learn how to fight the battle of the flesh. Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer to pray that we will not enter into temptation. When Jesus was in the Garden praying, He exhorted the disciples to pray that they would not fall into temptation. Jesus knew that they would scatter when He was arrested, even though they said they would never do that. Every time Jesus came back to check on them, He found them sleeping instead of praying about the temptation they were going to encounter. We should pray about our activities, and that we will not be tempted. The Holy Spirit may direct us to change some of our plans.

(Lk 11:4) “And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.”

Another prayer that I have that pertains to keeping away from sin is to pray for more fear of the Lord. Solomon wrote that the fear of the Lord is to hate evil. By the fear of the Lord, we can avoid the snares and temptations. By the fear of the Lord, we can keep away from evil. I regularly pray for a greater fear of the Lord in my life, and for others.

(Pr 8:13) “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth, I hate.”

(Pr 14:27) “The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death.”

(Pr 16:6) “By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the Lord one keeps away from evil.”

Another thing that we can do to fight off temptation is to fill our minds with God's word. In Psalm 119:9-11, the psalmist asks, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word.... Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.” We need to store up memory verses about the areas that we are most often tempted in. Many of the memory verses that I learned pertained to areas of my life that I was asking God to change. I meditated on them, and made application of them as needed.

(Ps 119:9–11) “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping *it* according to Your word.... {11} Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.”

Paul taught that we should make no provision for the flesh. Solomon said that we should not go near the door of an adulterous. In other words, avoid getting into situations where we are going to be tempted.

(Ro 13:14) “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts.”

(Pr 5:8) “Keep your way far from her and do not go near the door of her house,”

For me, Karen took the children to the beach. There were too many women who were not dressed modestly at the Florida beach, so it was better to keep my way far from the beach. When I used to play the Las Vegas Desert Classic on the PGA Tour, I avoided most of the strip. I was at the golf course playing, or at my hotel room. It was in Las Vegas that the Lord taught me about meditating on scripture. I spent hours every day meditating and journaling the things that I was learning. I set my mind on the things of the Spirit, not on the flesh.

There are some people who should not hang around people who are drinking or taking drugs, because it is a strong temptation in their lives. When I was in prison ministry, there was a saying that was very true: “Same playground, same playmates, same results.” We must stay away from those who will lead us astray, and we must stay away from compromising situations. We should make no provision for the flesh. The internet offers many temptations, so some people buy internet filters that prevent you from going to pornographic sites. These filters would be good for families to have to safeguard their children's surfing.

Once we are in a compromising situation where we are being tempted, we need to seek the way of escape. God is faithful, and has promised us a way of escape from every temptation. In Hebrews we read that Christ was tempted in all things, and without sin. He knows how to help us in times of temptation. He will show us the way of escape.

(1 Co 10:13) “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”

(Heb 2:18) “For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.”

Often, the best way of escape is to flee. Paul wrote that we are to flee sexual immorality. That is what Joseph did when Potiphar's wife approached him; he fled. We need to pray, avoid temptations, seek God's help in temptations, and flee from them.

(1 Co 6:18) “Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.”

(Ge 39:10–12) “As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her *or* be with her. {11} Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. {12} She caught him by his garment, saying, “Lie with me!” And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside.”

Our walk in the Spirit is not meant to be lived independently. God puts us into the body of Christ, and we are to be connected to one another. Notice that when Paul told us to be filled with the Spirit, he said speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. It is not just private worship; it is corporate worship. If we are going to walk in the Spirit, we need to be connected to a local body, and actively participating. We need to fight it corporately.

(Eph 5:19–20) “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; {20} always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;”

In Hebrews 3, we are cautioned about having an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. The solution is to encourage one another day after day, so that we are not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Our encouragement to one another keeps us from falling away and sinning. We need one another. If we are walking in the Spirit, we must walk with others.

(Heb 3:12–13) “Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. {13} But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

In Hebrews 10, we are exhorted not to forsake the assembling of ourselves, as is the habit of some. We are to assemble together, and we are to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. We are to encourage one another, and this is part of our fight against sin. There are thirty-three one-another commands in the New Testament, encouragement is just one of them. We cannot do these one another commands if we are not connected to a local church body, and actively participating. We need one another and mature believers understand that we are not to try to live our lives independently.

(Heb 10:24–25) “and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, {25} not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

Conclusion and Applications

There are many characteristics of being spiritually immature. Paul addressed fleshly living, strife, and division. In his letter to the Galatians, he listed fifteen characteristics of fleshly living. If we are going to press on to maturity in our walk with Christ, we need to recognize and address these things in our lives.

Fortunately, Paul did not leave us thinking about the flesh; he gave us the solutions to walking in the Spirit. He told us to set our minds above, on the things of the Spirit. He said if we set our mind on the things of the Spirit, we will not carry out the deeds of the flesh. He told us to consider our members as dead to sin. He encouraged us to pursue love and to serve one another in love. In his other letters he encouraged us to continually be filled with the Spirit, and we do that by speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. We cannot do this alone at home; we need to assemble ourselves and corporately worship God.

What has God been speaking to you about today? Do you struggle with fleshly living? Do you struggle with strife? If the answer is yes, let me encourage you to confess that to God. If we confess our sins, God is faithful to forgive us and to cleanse us from all sin. Confess and acknowledge your sin to God. Then, ask Him to help you remove the sin from your life.

(1 Jn 1:9) “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Let me encourage you to set your mind on things above. Let me encourage you to read, memorize, and meditate on God's word. Let me encourage you to spend time worshiping God privately, and also participate in corporate worship.

God is the author and perfecter of our faith. He wants you to grow and mature in your faith. Ask Him to help you press on to maturity.

Closing Prayer

Father, our desire is to know You, and to be more like You. Our desire is to be complete and spiritually mature. Help us walk in the Spirit. We ask You to fill us afresh with Your Holy Spirit. Help us to be worshipers that worship and exalt You both privately and corporately. Help us to press on to spiritual maturity. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Introduction

1. **Does Not Walk in the Flesh** (1 Cor 3:1-4, 1 Co 1:10–12, Gal 5:19-21, 2 Co 5:17, Mt 28:19-20, 1 Tim 3:15 2 Tim 2:15, Ac 20:27)

2. **But Walks by the Spirit** (Gal 5:16-25, Ro 8:5–8, Col 3:1-3, Eph 5:18–20, Gal 5:24, Lk 11:4, Pr 8:13, 14:27, 16:6, Ps 119:9-11, Ro 13:14, Pr 5:8, 1 Cor 10:13, 6:18, Gen 39:10-12, Eph 5:19-20, Heb 3:12-13, 10:24-25)

Conclusion and Applications (1 Jn 1:9)