



Marks of a Mature Christian
Philippians 3:4-16
March 8, 2020

Once we have become disciples of Christ by putting our faith in him and being baptized in his name, our journey has just begun! Disciples are intended to become like their teacher (Luke 6:40). Or, to change the figure, God's will is not only for us to be born again but also to mature to be like Christ (Colossians 1:28; 1 Peter 1:2). But what does a mature Christian look like? Philippians 3 shows us five marks of a mature Christian.

First, they know what wrong things they tend to put their confidence in. Paul's language for this is "put confidence in the flesh" (v. 4). My language is what we think makes us "okay" or ways we try to establish our value. Previously Paul had put his faith in his religious pedigree and accomplishments (vv. 4-6). Some of us may do that too, only with a different list. Or we may seek to be "okay" by secular accomplishments or personality traits. Being aware of what we tend to put our trust in will help us. What do you tend to think makes you an okay person?

Second, mature Christians consciously and deliberately renounce putting confidence in any such things. Paul labels the things that some people might consider gains as loss or even garbage (vv. 7-9). The latter word means refuse, rubbish, leavings, sweepings, dirt or dung. Can you imagine trying to get your friends to think you are a great person by proudly showing them what you swept up in your dust pan? Do you ever show any such things to God?

Third, mature Christians are totally engrossed with Christ (vv. 7-11). Notice how often "Christ" appears in this paragraph. And notice all the things Paul was seeking in his relationship with him. He counted his "trophies" as loss *for Christ* (v. 7). In fact, he counted everything loss for Christ because *knowing Christ is of so much more value* (v. 8). He wanted to *gain Christ* (v. 8). He sought to *be counted righteous by faith in Christ* (v. 9). He wanted to *know Christ, know the power of his resurrection, share in the sufferings of Christ, become like Christ in his death, and so attain the resurrection from the dead* (vv. 10-11). Christ was his all in all.

Fourth, mature Christians are aware and openly admit that they have not arrived. Paul says he has not obtained full maturity in Christ, is not perfect, and does not consider that he has made this his own (vv. 12, 13). He states clearly that he has not arrived. Instead, he puts all his failures behind him and keeps pressing on to be like Jesus (vv. 13-15). He then states a truth that I have seized upon as the theme of today's message—"Let those of us who are *mature think this way*" (v. 15).

Fifth, mature Christians seek to help others mature in Christ (cf. Colossians 1:28). This passage shows three ways Paul sought to do this: 1) words or teaching, including directly exhorting the Philippians to think and act properly (vv. 15-16), 2) backing up his words with his own example (vv. 4-14), and 3) trusting God to work on others (v. 15; cf. 2 Timothy 2:25).

How do your impressions of what constitutes a mature Christian compare to this list? This list isn't comprehensive, but since it is Scripture, we know it is reliable. It provides us a healthy next challenge. May we continue to work out our salvation along these lines, as God also works in us to fulfill his good purpose (Philippians 2:12-13; cf. 1:6).

