

Maturity and Unity; the Individual and the Body

By Peter McArthur



In the New Testament one of Paul's' greatest concerns is his desire for both the individual believer and for corporate believers to grow. For the individual he desires that **maturity** should prevail; but for the Corporate Body he desires that **unity** should be practiced.

You can see the very same theme in Jesus' words of John chapter 17, the so-called "High Priestly Prayer". So let's consider this for a moment.

For the individual believer maturity should be a clearly recognized aim. This is one of the most obvious themes found in Proverbs for example. Over and over in that book we find the three-fold sequence of "Knowledge, Understanding and Wisdom" repeated. Look through Proverbs yourself and you will see this as a constant factor. It all starts with Knowledge which is basically the **acquiring** of facts, which in due time leads to Understanding which is the **interpreting** of those facts. When all this is properly and regularly carried out we should arrive at the ultimate, Wisdom, which is the **application** and living out of all those things.

It's a progression of spiritual development, something that should (daily) require our attention. We have been given "Life" through the New Birth as a gift. Theologically it's a **finished work once received**. However the rest of our earthly life is a **continuous working out**, wherein we are **constantly receiving more** from the Father.

Looked at that way it's easy to see that the Father is continually enlarging us inwardly so that by applying His Truths we will arrive just where He wants us; in a state of maturity and wisdom. As this happens, usually over many years of obedience to and intimacy with Him, our conception and appreciation of God develops. Instead of simply being concerned with the Saving aspects of God (Jesus as **Saviour** for example) we grow to recognize God's

Sovereignty (Lordship). Then after due time we begin to grow into a broader appreciation of God wherein we appreciate His Fatherhood.

Now of course those three aspects are all intertwined, and I'm in no way trying to set the aspects of Saviour, Lord and Father against one another. I'm simply trying to establish an overview, which is that our conception of God develops as we mature. It is NOT a lessening of Jesus over against the Father or any such thing. I still believe in the Trinity!

A warning though: attempting to grow into maturity without humility, obedience and discernment can easily lead to introspection and self-interest. It could take you down the rabbit hole of self-focus and inward looking, resulting in you actually getting further away from maturity rather than nearer to it!

To counteract this tendency the Father has placed in Scripture (particularly the NT) the need for the Individual to also be concerned about the Body. When these are in harmony we will neither become too entrenched in our own spiritual development, nor be over-zealous in trying to create unity by man's endeavours.

In fact we can't have true maturity unless we're also truly concerned about unity amongst the brethren; and the reverse is also true – true Holy Spirit led unity requires quite a measure of individual maturity!

In regard to Unity, it's clear that we are not meant to chase after "church unity" and try to make it happen, to create it. Paul tells us, not to manufacture unity but to maintain it ("*being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" Eph 4:3).

This word "preserve" originally meant *to make haste with diligence*. So we not meant to create unity but to maintain it, to preserve with all diligence the fact that God has already initiated it for us. Wonderful thought!

When we give due attention to our own individual growing into maturity, we will find it easier to also develop a greater fondness and love toward the brethren as a whole – as a Body. These two things are inter-locked and even dependent on each other. The point to realise is that individual developing of our personal maturity is never to be directed by man, or the hidden carnal desires of the soul. In past ages men and women ran off to monasteries and nunneries to try and accomplish this; all to no lasting avail. They lived in deserts, in caves, subjugating their flesh and attempting all sorts of "spiritual exercises". It leads to nowhere except frustration, and in some cases, spiritual delusion.

As we sense we are growing into maturity (by His grace more than our effort) we begin to understand why the Father has put us through so many experiences, trials, temptations and of course blessings. He uses such to progressively lead us into more expansive and fuller truths of His own Life. The purpose behind this is not to make us more "spiritual" in the religious sense, but to reveal to us more of His splendid purpose and grand intention. So the more we participate in letting the Father have His way in us the more we gain a fuller understanding of Him. This ultimately is the reason Maturity and Unity are so important to Him and so vital for us.

Have you ever noticed that when you go through some experience of God you don't always appreciate its importance, but later when maturity and wisdom begin to take a greater hold

on you, you see more clearly how all the parts relate as a whole? That's a kind of relating to God in a very deep fellowship. It's a foretaste of that beautiful fellowship that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have enjoyed from the very beginning. And the time will come when we experience it in a very grand way indeed, throughout all eternity.

I would encourage you to give more due attention to your own individual spirit maturity, and at the same time to be more conscientious in working toward maintaining the unity of the Body. As long as both are firmly established on the Father's purpose we won't go astray. Too much focus on your self in regards to your maturity or too much stress and trying to make unity work amongst the brethren, will tire you out and make you weary in spirit and soul.

Let it all be God-breathed, God-inspired and intended only by God and then the priorities of the Father will take hold of your life. His blessed Holy Spirit will stand beside you (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; and 16:7), the Son will continue to pray for its accomplishment (John 17:20-23), and at the end there will be a wonderful conforming to the image of Christ Himself (Romans 8:28-30). Beyond all that, not much else matters!

In Y'shua our Saviour and our Head.

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