

## **Actions That Reveal Maturity In God**

'Jesus Who descended (to earth) is the One who also ascended far above all the heavens so He could fulfil all prophecies. He gave some people authority to be apostles and some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be shepherds and teachers for the perfecting of His people to do the work of serving and building up the Body of the Messiah until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full grown spiritual adult, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Jesus so we may no longer be spiritual children, tossed back and forth and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men in craftiness, after the wiles of error but speaking truth in love, we may grow up in all things into Him Who is the Head, Jesus, from Whom all the Body, being fitted and knit together through what every joint supplies according to the working in measure of each individual part, makes the Body increase to the building up of itself in love' (Ephesians 4:10 to 16).

There are many signs that reveal whether or not we are maturing in our walk with God. After accepting salvation by faith (Ephesians 2:8), our Spiritual walk is a slow progression rather than sprint to the finish line. Only after we have passed off this earth and are eternally with the Lord will we reach perfection (Hebrews 12:23) but in the meantime we need to focus on our walk with God and voluntarily choose to act in a way that glorifies Him in our bodies. 'Do you not understand your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit Who is in you from God? You are not your own for you were bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your Spirit, which belong to God' (1 Corinthians 6:19 & 20). Some people grow in God faster than others but the path of our Spiritual growth is usually determined by our willingness to change and become obedient. People who resent or refuse righteous change are rebellious and stubborn, which are as wicked as witchcraft and idolatry (1 Samuel 15:23). Some people change their attitudes very quickly whereas others prefer to hold onto earthly desires longer. There are some people who think they can walk with God on their own terms, which is actually rebellion and other people believe they know better than the Bible and teach their own fake gospel, which brings down a curse into their lives and possibly for eternity (Galatians 1:7 to 9). The Lord is very patient so whatever people choose to do we can be assured God will always have His way and will eventually work out our lives in His time frame. As time passes, little by little we will realise our attitudes have changed and our lives line up with instructions given to us in the Bible.

In the Bible, very young children and newly born-again Christians are called infants, little ones, babies or babes' (Matthew 21:16). Slightly more mature Christians are called 'Little children' then 'Young men' and mature Christians are called 'Fathers' (1 John 2:12 to 14). The Lord knows our hearts (Psalm 44:21) and He knows how long our individual growth will take. God said we are not to compare our own walk with any one else's walk (2 Corinthians 10:12). A lot of change comes by our own choice to willingly submit to the Lord and to be obedient to the Word of God. When God desires change in us the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and God gives us time to repent and stop what we are doing. When we refuse to listen to His direction, changes can only be made when God weeds out sin by purging, which is very uncomfortable. When people walk in rebellion too long, God punishes, chastens, scourges, reproves and disciplines His children to produce holiness and righteousness and to make us fit to live in His house in the Kingdom of God in heaven. God's purging can cause weak Christians to fall away or 'faint' away from God altogether. 'My child, do not take lightly the chastening of the Lord or faint when you are reproved by Him, for whom the Lord loves He chastens and He scourges every child whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure. God deals with you as with children. What child is there whom their father does not discipline? If you are without discipline ... then you are illegitimate and not God's children. We had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us and we paid them respect. Should we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of Spirits and live? Our earthly fathers ... punished us as seemed good to them but God punishes us for our profit so we may be partakers of His holiness. All chastening seems for the present to be not joyous but grievous, yet afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been corrected' (Hebrews 12:5 to 11).

As we mature in God we learn to surrender everything. Our earthly desires dim as we prefer to accept what God has for us in every area. Our will bends to His will. His ways and thoughts are not the same as ours (Isaiah 55:8 & 9). We need to learn to be content in our lives no matter what the circumstances. 'I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content in it. I know how to be humbled and I know how to abound. In everything and in all things I have learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in need' (Philippians 4:11 & 12). Submission, obedience and denying ourselves are what God demands of us, along with taking up our cross of suffering to follow Jesus. Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me. Whoever desires to save their life (on earth) will lose it (for eternity) and whoever will lose their life (voluntarily) for My sake will find it (for eternity). What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his (eternal) life?' (Matthew 16:24 to 26). Many people today hate the thought of denying themselves and enduring difficulties even if it does lead to eternal life. The apostles considered their suffering as joyful because they knew they were suffering as Jesus suffered (Acts 20:24; James 1:2).

Spiritual growth results in our desire to know God intimately and if we are to escape damnation, we must get to know God so well, it should be like having Him living as a holy royal guest in our homes all of the time, not just when people can see us. The more time we spend with Him the more we experience His holiness and peace. He is always there and responds to our desire to spend time with Him. The very second we lift our heart to Him, He pours His presence into our soul in an intimate heart-to-heart, holy relationship that cannot compare to anything else on earth. We are as close to God as we want to be. If we draw near to Him, He immediately comes close and draws near to us (James 4:8). If we attend church twice a year at Easter and Christmas and ignore God the rest of the time, then that is all we will ever have. If we pray daily, read the Bible daily and sit quietly with Him, then we will grow in God faster and will be rewarded in heaven too. In the Book of Psalms a yearning for the presence of God is spoken of like a thirst (Psalm 42:2; 63:1; 143:6). We are told to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and once we come to the place in God where He is everything to us, we will find ourselves conversing with Him all of the time about every subject. That is when prayer becomes a two-way conversation rather than a list of things we want.

Mature Christians exercise self-control and do not allow their emotions dictate their actions. God is in total control of our lives, the earth and the entire universe. Nothing happens on earth or in our lives without His knowledge and permission (Matthew 10:29). Just to prove how much in control God really is, we can look at the events that happened as God was building His nation of people, the Jewish nation. Every birth, marriage and death that occurred from the creation of Adam (Note: in connection to the birth of Jesus) was recorded in the Bible and the generations counted exactly as God wanted. Here is just one example of the total control God has over His entire creation as recorded in the Bible. 'All the generations from Abraham to David are (exactly) fourteen generations. From David to the exile to Babylon were (exactly) fourteen generations. From the exile to Babylon to the birth of Jesus were (exactly) fourteen generations' (Matthew 1:17). A mature Christian will not allow their faith to weaken when life becomes difficult. Some Christians have to tolerate terrible persecution but they do not give up even when facing death (Revelation 2:10; 12:11). We cannot think our trials are something strange. We need to accept trials are part of life and we can praise God through the storms of life. 'Beloved, do not be astonished at the fiery trials that come upon you to test you as though a strange thing happened to you. Because you are partakers of Jesus' sufferings, rejoice. At the revelation of His glory you also may rejoice with exceeding joy. If you are insulted for the name of Jesus you are blessed because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you' (1 Peter 4:12 to 14).

As we become more mature in God we are more able to forgive people. It is very hard to forgive people who persecute us, threaten our children or make our lives unbearable but for God to forgive us for our sins, we must forgive people no matter what they do to us. Jesus forgave the men who were murdering Him (Luke 23:34). We need to keep in mind, through our Lord Jesus, God has forgiven us for every sin we have committed against other people, so in return we must forgive others or the Lord Himself will allow us to be tormented until we do. 'Jesus warned, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged Me to. You should have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you." His Lord was angry and delivered him to the tormentors until he could pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father will also do to you if you do not each forgive your brother (and sister in the faith) from your hearts for their misdeeds' (Matthew 18:32 to 35). Forgiving people no matter what they do is not an option – it is a command. Forgiving others does not dismiss the wrongs done to us but it frees us from holding onto the humiliation or pain and it opens the way for God to step in and avenge us. "Vengeance is Mine," says the Lord, "I will repay" (Hebrews 10:30). If we hold onto unforgiveness, we do not hurt the person who has wronged us, we hurt ourselves and that in turn can become a root of bitterness, which in turn can rob us of our salvation. 'Whenever you pray, forgive if you have anything against anyone so your Father Who is in heaven may also forgive you your transgressions. If you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your transgressions' (Mark 11:25 & 26).

As we grow in God and desire to be more like Jesus, we realise not everyone will agree with us. Not everyone will be kind to us, not everyone will accept our faith and some will reject us. We will find some immature Christians actually resent our closeness to God and shun us. Immature Christians sometimes consider more devout believers as 'obsessive' or 'extreme' and resent their Spiritual knowledge that increases over time. Sometimes family members discourage us, some mock us and some totally reject us. Children may be disowned by parents. Parents may be rejected by their children. An unbelieving spouse may walk out and fight to remove their young children from the Christian parent but if the unbelieving spouse wants to leave, let them leave (1 Corinthians 7:15). Jesus said, "If they persecuted Me they will also persecute you" (John 15:20) and, "Brother will deliver up brother to death and the father his child. Children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. You will be hated by all people for My name's sake, but those who endure to the end will be saved" (Matthew 10:21 & 22). Blatant persecution comes from the evil one. 'All who desire to live Godly lives in Jesus will suffer persecution' (2 Timothy 3:12).

As we grow, we should seek out more mature Christians who can give good counsel (Titus 2:1 to 3). Sometimes we have to take ourselves away from negative or sinful influences for our own good. Jeremiah the prophet separated himself from sinful people and kept his eyes firmly on God (Jeremiah 15:16 & 17). It is very hard to give up family, homes, friends, a job and even our place of birth to follow the Lord but sometimes we have to, to prove to the Lord and ourselves, we really are putting Him first and to pass His test. If we are not willing to give everything up for the Lord He said we are not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:37 & 38). Abraham was sorely tested when God asked him to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22:2). Job was sorely tested when he lost everything except his poor longsuffering wife (Job chapters 1 & 2). Sometimes we are tested in ways we could never imagine God would allow, but terrible things do happen to some Christians and through impossible trials we need to learn to love God for Who He really is, not what He can do for us. We must obey Him, He does not obey us. Jesus said, "If anyone comes to Me and does not put after Me his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life they cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26 & 27).

One sign of a mature Christian is the way we are able to comprehend the depth of God's grace and mercy. Our salvation is an undeserved gift (Ephesians 2:8). We mere humans can do absolutely nothing to save ourselves. We have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). 'God, being rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us, even when we were (spiritually) dead through our sins He made us alive together with Jesus so by grace you have been saved' (Ephesians 2:4 & 5). 'He saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Jesus before times eternal' (2 Timothy 1:9). The Lord has done it all for us but it is up to us to accept and receive the gift of eternal life. The Bible says, 'Whosoever will' (Revelation 22:17). That means whoever wants to. Salvation cannot be forced. It is our choice. God calls us but if we reject Him on earth He will reject us on Judgement Day (Luke 12:8 & 9), which is a real event that will happen in the future.

Once we can comprehend the kind, merciful deed of salvation through grace (Ephesians 2:4), we will move on to show mercy and kindness to others even when they do not deserve it because we did not deserve salvation through the unmerited grace and mercy from God. Some people take a long time to become kind and loving and there is nothing worse than a mean, nasty Christian. Those people are the type who drive baby Christians out of church. They wound a lot of people and woe to them for causing 'babes' to stumble. Jesus said, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him for a huge millstone to be hung around his neck and he should be sunk in the depths of the sea" (Matthew 18:6). People who behave carnally like that are not genuine believers. They do not have the love of God in their soul and if they do not love those who they can see then they are unable to love God Whom they cannot see (1 John 4:20). Since we have accepted grace and mercy from God, He expects us to be kind and merciful to others (Luke 6:36). We must love one another and we cannot choose whom we will love. Showing the love of God to each other is not an option it is a command (1 John 4:21).

Mature Christians understand the importance of the power of the Holy Spirit in our walk with God. The Holy Spirit is a vital part of the Godhead and is always referred to in the masculine sense. "The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit Whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and will remind you of all I said to you" (John 14:26). Immature Christians often minimise or quench the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19) causing Him grief (Ephesians 4:30). The Holy Spirit is our Counsellor (John 14:16), Truth and Guide (John 16:13), Comforter (Acts 9:31), Strengthener (Ephesians 3:16), Helper (Hebrews 13:6), Teacher (1 Corinthians 2:13), Protector, Confidant, Advocate and Intercessor (Romans 8:26 & 27). We are never alone after we have been filled with the Holy Spirit because He takes up His dwelling within us (Romans 8:9). We cannot be transformed and have our attitudes renewed by our own efforts so we need the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23).

As an ongoing sign of Spiritual maturity, more mature Christians avoid sin at all costs and sometimes to live a holy life means to give up something we enjoy and sometimes family or friends cannot understand why we refuse to partake as we once did. For example, smoking is sin and when a Christian realises that and gives smoking up, their work colleagues may find the new stance against sin so convicting they become annoyed and mock the Christian or they might continue to offer cigarettes to tempt them. Mature Christians change the music they listen to. Drinking in hotels and going to worldly dances are no longer enjoyable. People who were once aggressive become more placid as they desire to become more like Jesus. Coarse language and crudeness should cease (Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 4:6). With maturity comes wisdom and the realisation we are ambassadors for our Saviour and we must represent Him in everything we say and do (2 Corinthians 5:20). Christians are not perfect but what God sees is our efforts to be as sinless as we humanly can be simply by obeying the guidelines set down in the Bible and relying on the Holy Spirit to help us be holy as the Lord has commanded (1 Peter 1:16). If the Bible says we should not do a certain thing, we must stop doing it. If the Bible says we should do something or we see a need in someone's life, we should strive to obey and do the best we can (1 John 3:17). We strive to demonstrate our hope of salvation that came from God

through the blood and cross of Jesus. As God's representatives we refuse to risk our testimony by attaching ourselves to anything unGodly. We must avoid sin and avoid even the appearance of sin (Romans 12:9 & 21; 2 Corinthians 13:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:22). We are not to do anything that would cause people to mock God or the sacrifice of Jesus, causing our Saviour to be shamed (Hebrews 6:6). One way of leading people to Jesus is by showing them God's holiness through our words and actions. 'Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God' (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Leaving our sinful past in the past where it belongs is difficult for some people but if we are to progress we must let it all go. We must learn to move forward in God and leave all our prior sins under the blood of Jesus. If anyone has committed a sin they feel is terrible, that person needs to forgive themselves. As we mature in God, we are able to fully understand we are Spiritually a new creature. Our body remains the same but our Spirit is renewed after salvation. 'If anyone is in Jesus they are a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all (spiritual) things have become new. All (spiritual) things are of God Who reconciled us to Himself through Jesus and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation' (2 Corinthians 5:17 & 18). The person we were before salvation is not the same person we are after salvation. Before salvation we were a child of disobedience and were lost in the kingdom of darkness (Ephesians 2:2; Colossians 1:13). After salvation we become the children of the living God and walk in newness of life with the Kingdom of God as our ultimate home (Romans 6:4). After salvation we can claim our rightful identity as a child of the King as we can accept our sins have been blotted out and forgiven (Acts 3:19). We have become the Righteousness of God through the blood of Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21). As genuine, Bible believing Christians we really can have a relationship with our Creator. Many new Christians utter a 'shopping list' type of prayer where they ask for things they want. As we mature in God, the requests give way to praise, enjoying the presence of God and having a normal conversation with Him. God really does speak to us when we listen. Even as a weak human being, we discover God wants to use us to increase the Kingdom of God and every obedient Christian has their own ministry, fulfilling God's will His way, giving God the glory (Ephesians 4:11 & 12). As we read the opening verses on the first page we can see no one ministry is more important than another and we will all be rewarded for our obedience to our individual calling (1 Corinthians 12:27 to 30). We must never take our salvation for granted. It is purely by the grace of God we are saved and we must never forget that. Imagine how lost our lives would be without Him. As we grow in grace we are more able to let go of the past, push aside any condemnation, guilt or shame and press on to our future. 'One thing I do. Forgetting the things that are behind and stretching forward to the things before me, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus' (Philippians 3:13 & 14).

A mature Christian realises we are in an invisible Spiritual battle that never ceases. When we struggle with nasty neighbours, rebellious children, division in the congregation or are persecuted, we should be able to understand we are not dealing with flesh and blood but with invisible, evil forces that like to vex all people but especially Jews and Christians. The enemy tries to use situations around us to make us stumble and if possible to cause us to fall away from our relationship with God. As we grow in God and realise what is behind some of our struggles we are able to go to 'battle' through prayer by using the whole armour of God. 'Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the principalities and powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Put on the whole armour of God so you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all you can to stand (through trials). Stand therefore, have the belt of truth buckled around your waist and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having fitted your feet with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, above all, take up the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Holy Spirit, which is the spoken Word of God' (Ephesians 6:12 to 17). Another part of our warfare is thanksgiving, praise and worship. 'To those who mourn in Zion, give them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness (depression) so they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord so He may be glorified' (Isaiah 61:3).

It is hard for our finite minds to be able to comprehend our glorious future with the Lord in heaven. The Bible speaks of our life in heaven as though it has already happened but yet we are still on earth. This is our future, on condition we continue to walk with God. 'You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to innumerable multitudes of holy angels, to the general assembly and assembly of the Firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the Spirits of just men made perfect (in death), to Jesus, the mediator of a New Covenant ... See that you do not refuse Jesus Who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused Noah who warned on the Earth, how much more will we not escape who turn away from God who warns us from heaven' (Hebrews 12:22 to 25).

Amen and God bless you.

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