
Chapter 6 Moving toward Maturity

A newborn is expected to grow. No one criticizes an infant for needing milk, but something is wrong if years pass without development. Hebrews uses that picture to challenge believers who had heard enough truth to become teachers but still needed the basics explained again (Hebrews 5:12-14).

What Christian Maturity Means

Christian maturity is not knowing impressive words, collecting spiritual experiences, or holding a church position. It is growing into steady obedience, sound judgment, Christlike character, and the ability to use Scripture rightly (Hebrews 5:14; Ephesians 4:13-15; Colossians 1:9-10). Mature believers are not carried about by every new teaching because they have learned to recognize the difference between truth and error (Ephesians 4:14; 1 John 4:1).

A Disciple Learns, Follows, and Becomes Like Christ

A disciple is first a learner. No believer outgrows the need to hear, study, and obey the words of Jesus. A disciple is also a follower who accepts the authority of the Master rather than borrowing only the teachings that fit personal preference. Finally, a disciple is an imitator: not a copy with no personality, but a person whose character is being shaped into Christ's likeness (Luke 6:40; John 8:31-32; 1 Corinthians 11:1).³

That definition joins truth and life. Learning without following can produce pride. Following without learning can become zeal without knowledge. Trying to imitate Jesus without depending on the Holy Spirit becomes moral strain. Christian maturity grows as the Word renews the mind, the Spirit produces holy fruit, and obedience turns truth into practiced wisdom (Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 5:16, 22-25; Hebrews 5:14).

Maturity includes both becoming and doing. We become more like Christ in love, purity, humility, courage, and endurance; we also do the work He gives us through worship, witness, generosity, service, and care for others (Colossians 3:12-17; James 1:22-27). Activity without character can wound people. Character that

never serves others remains incomplete. Christ forms a people who both bear His likeness and participate in His mission.

Some Christians speak as though doctrine belongs to the mind while spiritual life belongs to the heart. Scripture does not separate them. What we believe about God shapes how we worship, pray, endure suffering, recognize error, and treat other people. A sincere experience interpreted by false teaching can lead a believer away from Christ. Sound doctrine gives spiritual experience its biblical boundaries, and life with the Spirit moves truth from the page into faithful obedience (John 4:23-24; 1 Timothy 4:16; Titus 2:1, 11-14).

Hebrews 6:1 says, “let us go on to perfection.” The word points to maturity or completeness, not sinless perfection achieved by human effort (Philippians 3:12-14; James 3:2). Growth is God’s work in us, but believers must respond through obedience, practice, correction, and perseverance (Philippians 2:12-13; Hebrews 5:14; 12:5-11).

A Foundation Is for Building

Paul does not tell Christians to discard repentance, faith, resurrection, or judgment. He warns against repeatedly laying the same foundation without building

upon it (Hebrews 6:1-3). We return to foundational truths for strength and correction, but we should not remain unable to explain or apply them.

The six items appear in three natural pairs. Repentance and faith describe conversion toward God (Acts 20:21). Baptisms and laying on of hands concern introductory teaching and embodied practices in the believing community (Acts 2:38-42; 8:12-17). Resurrection and eternal judgment direct the believer toward the future completion of God's plan (John 5:28-29; Acts 17:30-31).

Growth Happens in the Church

Maturity is personal, but it is not private. Christ gives ministers to equip the saints, and every member contributes to the body's growth (Ephesians 4:11-16). Believers grow through teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, prayer, service, correction, and encouragement (Acts 2:42; Hebrews 3:12-13; 10:24-25). A person who refuses accountable fellowship cuts himself off from means God ordinarily uses for growth.

Why the Church Exists

A church can be busy without being faithful. Programs, meetings, and crowds are not the mission by themselves. Jesus

gives the church a clear direction: worship God, proclaim the Gospel, make disciples, teach His Word, build up believers, and show His love through holy and compassionate service (Matthew 22:37-40; 28:18-20; Acts 2:42-47; Ephesians 4:11-16). These purposes belong together under Christ's authority.

The church must not choose between truth and love as though Jesus permits only one. He proclaimed repentance and the kingdom, and He also fed the hungry, welcomed the rejected, healed the sick, and showed mercy (Matthew 4:17, 23; 9:35-38; Luke 4:18-19). Compassion does not replace the Gospel, because temporary help cannot reconcile a sinner to God. Gospel proclamation does not excuse indifference, because the love we announce must become visible in our treatment of people (James 2:14-17; 1 John 3:16-18).⁴

The Great Commission includes the whole path: going to people, making disciples, baptizing believers, and teaching them to obey Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20). A healthy church therefore asks more than, "How many responded?" It also asks, "Are people learning Christ, joining His people, growing in holiness, serving with their gifts, and helping others follow Him?"

Numbers can describe part of the work, but only Scripture can define success (1 Corinthians 3:5-9; 4:1-5).

Belonging, Accountability, and Service

Church membership does not save anyone, and a membership roll is not the Book of Life. Yet the New Testament does not picture Christians as permanently unattached individuals. Believers are joined to a body, known by shepherds, responsible for one another, and called to gather, encourage, correct, bear burdens, and serve (Acts 2:41-47; 1 Corinthians 5:12-13; 12:12-27; Hebrews 13:17). Meaningful belonging gives visible form to those responsibilities.

Biblical accountability is not unquestioning loyalty to a leader. Christ is Lord of the church, Scripture judges every teaching, and leaders themselves are accountable to God (Acts 17:11; Galatians 1:8-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4). Healthy leaders equip rather than possess people; they welcome honest questions, correct with gentleness, and refuse to use fear, secrecy, or claims of spiritual "covering" to control consciences (2 Corinthians 1:24; 4:1-2; 2 Timothy 2:24-26).⁵

Every believer has a place in the body. The Spirit gives gifts for the common good, not for self-promotion or spiritual rank (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 1 Peter 4:10-11). Mature disciples move from being only receivers to becoming servants, while still remaining teachable and willing to receive care. No gift makes a person independent of the body, and no quiet gift is unimportant.

Faithfulness Is Not Measured by Church Size

A small congregation is not a failed large congregation. The New Testament recognizes churches meeting in homes as well as larger public gatherings (Acts 2:46; 19:9; Romans 16:5). Size changes available resources, but it does not change the church's calling. A small church can worship deeply, teach carefully, care personally, evangelize faithfully, and send workers generously.

Large churches and small churches face different temptations. A large church may mistake reach, excellence, or visibility for spiritual health. A small church may become inward-looking, resistant to newcomers, or convinced that little can be done. Christ evaluates faithfulness, truth, love, holiness, endurance, and obedience—not prestige (Revelation 2:2-5; 3:7-13).

The right question is not, "Are we impressive?" but, "Are we obeying Jesus with what He has entrusted to us?"⁶

KNOW THE WORDS

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
Maturity	Growing stability in truth, character, discernment, and obedience (Hebrews 5:14; Ephesians 4:13-15).
Foundation	Essential teaching that supports later growth (Hebrews 6:1-2; 1 Corinthians 3:10-11).
Discernment	The practiced ability to distinguish truth from error and good from evil (Hebrews 5:14; Philippians 1:9-10).
Perseverance	Continuing in faith and obedience through pressure and delay (Hebrews 10:35-39; James 1:2-4).

THINK IT THROUGH

Q Does Maturity Mean Needing Less of the Gospel?

No. Maturity means understanding the Gospel more deeply and living consistently with it (Colossians 1:23; 2:6-7). The mature believer does not graduate from Christ; he becomes more firmly rooted in Christ.

Q Can I Follow Jesus without Belonging to a Church?

A person may be separated from a congregation for a time because of illness, persecution, travel, or the need to leave

an abusive setting. Those situations deserve patience and care. But choosing permanent isolation is not the New Testament pattern. Jesus saves individuals into a people, and many commands—bear one another’s burdens, forgive one another, encourage one another, submit to one another, and use gifts for one another—cannot be practiced alone (Galatians 6:2; Ephesians 4:32; 5:21; Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Peter 4:10).

Q Does Evangelism Treat People like Projects?

It can, if the goal is merely a statistic or a quick story. Jesus saw people as sheep needing a shepherd and responded with compassion (Matthew 9:36). Faithful witness listens, speaks truth plainly, respects the person’s dignity, and continues to love even when the answer is no (Mark 10:21-22; 1 Peter 3:15-16). We cannot control another person’s response; we can refuse manipulation and represent Christ truthfully.

Q Is a Small Church Less Important?

No. Christ’s presence and authority do not depend on attendance figures. A congregation should desire to reach people and should not use smallness as an excuse for fear or stagnation, but biblical fruit is larger than numerical growth. Faithful teaching, genuine conversions,

holy lives, loving care, persevering prayer, and sacrificial mission all matter to God (Acts 14:21-23; 1 Corinthians 3:6-9; Revelation 3:8).

WATCH FOR COUNTERFEITS

Some movements measure maturity by unusual experiences, special titles, secret knowledge, or access to powerful leaders. The New Testament measures growth by truth, love, holiness, service, endurance, and likeness to Christ (Ephesians 4:13-16; Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Peter 1:5-8).

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Read Hebrews 5:11-6:3. Write one area where you need greater understanding and one area where you need repeated obedience. Ask a mature believer to help you take a concrete next step (Proverbs 15:22; Hebrews 10:24-25).

TALK IT THROUGH

1. Why does Hebrews compare basic teaching to milk?
2. What does maturity look like in Ephesians 4:13-16?
3. Why is a foundation necessary but incomplete by itself?
4. How does the local church help believers grow?

5. What false measurements of maturity should Christians reject?

FIVE DAYS IN THE BIBLE

Day 1: Ready to Grow — Hebrews 5:11-6:12

Identify the warning, the foundation, and the encouragement.

Day 2: Built on Christ — 1 Corinthians 3:5-17

Notice the only foundation and the responsibility of those who build.

Day 3: Equipped Together — Ephesians 4:11-16

List the marks and means of maturity.

Day 4: Add to Your Faith — 2 Peter 1:3-11

Write the qualities believers are told to develop.

Day 5: Pressing Forward — Philippians 3:7-16

Contrast perfection already reached with pressing toward the goal.