

Growing toward maturity I

What is maturity for Christians?

Introduction

There are many beginnings and ends in our lives.

For students starting school and graduating and for adults starting work and retiring.

In Japan nowadays, there is no working at one company for life anymore, but retiring from a company is still an end to one's career. In the same sense, whenever one starts working at a different company, it's a new beginning.

In our education system in Japan, up to junior high school is mandatory: 6 years for elementary school and 3 for junior high school.

Therefore, in theory, everybody starts together and finishes together, but there is no guarantee of the same outcome for everybody. It all depends on how hard one worked.

There are so many quotes of famous people on hardworking. These quotes are convincing and have power to encourage us.

What is a beginning that the Bible teaches?

For those who accepted Jesus as their savior, it's when they accepted Jesus.

This beginning is offered equally to everyone; it doesn't matter who you are, what you are, how rich or poor you are.

What is the goal that the Bible teaches?

What is the goal for those who accepted Jesus as their savior?

Is it to go to Heaven? That's just a chronicle goal like graduating from schools.

The Bible teaches no matter how long you have been Christian, we all receive the same gift, just like you get a diploma when you graduate from a school.

If the outcome is the same, are we to do nothing as Christians?

Read **Luke 19:11-27**

In this parable, there are servants who earned more from what they are given and who earned nothing by doing nothing. Points in this parable: whether you earned something or not and whether you did something with what you have.

From this parable we can learn that God expects us to do something and gain something.

We get to our goal even if we don't do anything, but God's will for us is to do something before getting to the goal, and when we do, God will tell us, "Well done, my good servant!" just like in this parable.

Minas = Money, then it's just a profit

Minas = Values, then it's something money can't measure

What are minas for Christians then? What do we do to increase our "minas?"

With this in our mind, let us think about maturity in this first part of this series, "Maturity for Christians."

For those who haven't accepted Jesus as a personal savior, I believe this will help you accept Jesus

What Paul gave up and what he gained

Paul is the most symbolic person in New Testament.

Paul is also perfect as Christian, and it may be a little burden for us to want to be like him.

Paul is Jewish and he talks about himself in Philippians 3:5-6

He lived perfectly as a Jew, but he says it meant nothing when it comes to his accomplishment as a Christian.

Philippians 3:7-8

One of the great things Paul did is that he gave up his life as a Jew.

Naturally he was born Jewish and was Jewish, but he gave up all that a Jewish person would be proud to have.

For me, on the hand, there are things I should give up but haven't been able to; e.g. comfort and pride.

Material things – easier to give up.

The way of living and values – hard to give up but Paul was able to.

You may able to go back to the old ways, but Paul never did.

What did Paul gain in return?

Philippians 3:8-9

Three things Paul gained

1. Christ

What is it like to, "gain Christ?"

It means to gain a right relationship with Christ. Jesus became Paul's savior.

Paul used to persecute churches and jailed Christians, therefore being allowed to accept Jesus as his savior was such a huge act of grace from God.

Paul used the phrase, "to gain Christ" to describe having the right relationship with Christ.

"Gain Christ" to me feels very personal, yet I question whether I'm that close to Christ or not.

Also, I feel I didn't "gain Christ" on my own, with my power or effort.

Knowing the fact of gaining Christ and that fact being a spring of empowerment are two totally different things

For Paul, the hope to gain Christ was empowering him to spread the gospel.

Philippians 4:13

Although of course Paul needed to water, food and clothing to live, but in a totally different sense, all Paul needed in order to live was Christ. Jesus filled him and he was able to live. He didn't need anything else to fill the void, or he never had that void once he had Christ in his life.

I have to admit having lots of things to satisfy me besides Christ in my life.

Paul tells us that in order to give up everything else, we shouldn't be putting our effort on giving them up but instead we should be seeking to be filled by Christ.

Paul gave up everything when he gained Christ.

2. Recognition as One in Christ

Paul tells us that he got hope to be recognized as "one in Christ".

If to "gain Christ" means the relationship given by accepting Jesus as one's savior, then this "one in Christ" would mean close fellowship with Christ. The previous relationship has become more intimate in which one can have fellowship with Christ.

Upon considering this, I can't help feeling like an outsider who is struggling to get back into the relationship, although I'm supposed to be inside this relationship.

The Bible teaches us that our sins are completely forgiven by Christ's crucifixion.

Redemption by this crucifixion is perfect.

Every one of our sins has been forgiven by it.

We have been saved and given perfect redemption.

Yet, we are not completely free from our sins in our daily lives. Even Paul confesses what a miserable, hopeless sinner he is in Romans 7:15, 21-25.

In his confession, he is not saying "a miserable person" is one outside Christ

By saying miserable about himself who still remains inside Christ, he's talking about his weakness

In other words, even if we feel that we are doing well spiritually and keeping ourselves very close to God, being in Christ has nothing to do with our doing well but Christ's redemption.

No matter how hard we try, or how good we are in worldly measurements, it doesn't affect the fact that we are in Christ only by Christ's redemption, which is amazing.

We need to understand and embrace this fact in order to fight against Satan's nagging words which attack us.

3. Righteousness

Through faith, we are able to have righteousness given by God.

Paul tells us we are given hope of being able to have righteousness given by God.

As we are 100% in God, we are given 100% righteousness through faith.

Paul teaches us about righteousness given by God in Romans and Philipians.

This also means we are completely separated from unrighteous world.

If we have righteousness given by God, we are able to get close to God.

Ephesians 3:12

Are we able to “approach God with freedom and confidence” like the Bible teaches us?
We need to believe God want us to do so since Jesus made the way for us to do so

Paul gained three kinds of hope.
This has nothing to do with his Jewish background.
Like Paul we are able to gain these three kinds of hope.

Closing:
Philippians 3:10-16
Hebrews 6:1-3

They tell us to go forward from where we already are.
It is important to think about the hope that Paul gained.
It is important to remember what Jesus has done for us and be thankful for God’s grace

Yet we should look toward more the “minas” God has prepared for us with God’s redemption and grace as our basis.

We should “expect” and “have desire” to be given a big “mina” by God.
Paul and the author of Hebrews teaches us that with this expectation and desire, if we keep seeking through faith, we will be able to get closer to maturity.