

# Characteristics of Maturing Believers

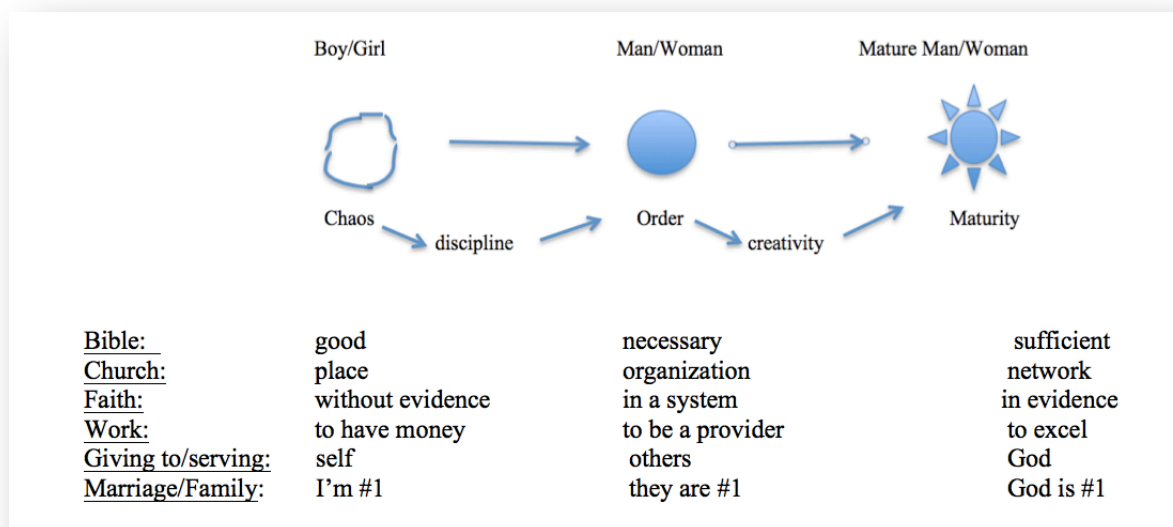
By Dave DeWitt

I asked myself, “Is there any difference between spiritual growth, in general, and growth to maturity? Does the Bible recognize maturity as something distinct from, and different from, spiritual growth in general?” It seems (to me) that it does. Of course, the Bible directs everyone toward maturity, but many don’t make it, and there seems to be something different in those who do.

Consider the lives of men and women like Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Job, Moses, Joshua, Deborah, Hannah, Samuel, David, Daniel, Ruth, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles during their ministries. It seems that there is something more, and actually, something spiritually different than there is in the lives of, say, Cain and Abel, Noah’s sons, Joseph’s brothers, most of the Israelites in the wilderness, Miriam, Saul, Eli, Absalom, Elisha’s servant Gehazi, the rich young ruler, and the followers who left Paul and went back into the world.

In the book “The Mature Man,” I suggested three categories (Chaos, Order, and Maturity) and two different kinds of growth (Discipline and Creativity). Of course, these are just artificial designations, and one could have any number of categories in between. I think I recognize chaos, order, and maturity in the Bible. When the Israelites came out of Egypt, they needed the order of the Mosaic Law. When Jesus encountered Israel bogged down in the order of the Pharisees, they needed to press on to maturity. Paul treated the chaos in Corinth with orderly rules, and the orderly man Timothy with creatively pursuing maturity.

But this is mostly about application, not interpretation. I am not suggesting you can find this chart in the Bible. I am suggesting this is a good way to apply what the Bible teaches in today’s world. It is my observation that as we grow today, we go from something like chaos, to order, to maturity.



Here are 10 of my observations on the subject:

1. If you are in chaos, you need order. If you are orderly, you need to go on to maturity. You can go from chaos to order and from order to maturity, but you cannot go from chaos to ma-

turity. You must first develop some kind of order. The Mosaic Law and Proverbs are examples of order.

2. The way to establish order is very different than the way to establish maturity. Order comes through discipline. Maturity comes through creativity. Creativity should never be applied to chaos.
3. Left to themselves, all areas of our life will tend to move to the left (toward chaos). Order and maturity require effort.
4. The down side to order is that it tends to see itself as an end in itself. The state of orderliness will usually settle into systems and organizations that oppose maturity just as much as they oppose chaos. Order must be creatively overcome in order to become mature. Just as chaos will tend to hold you down into itself, so will order.
5. Generally speaking, we move from chaos to order by joining some group, which gives us fellowship, accountability, and structure. The Mosaic Law and Proverbs were for the nation of Israel living in the Land. But we move from order to maturity individually. No national law-keeping could write the Psalms, teach the Sermon on the Mount, or go on missionary journeys.
6. Order is boring. If growth is only defined in terms of order, there will be little motivation for it.
7. We are all in different places in different areas of our lives. Some of what we think or do is chaotic, some orderly, and (hopefully, but not necessarily) some aspects of our lives are mature.
8. A mature person is not someone who is mature in all or even most areas of his or her life. A mature person is mature in the most important areas of life, which always includes his or her relationship with God and area of calling. [I'm defining "calling" with five elements: spiritual gifts, natural talents, societal role (in family, work, community, etc.), life situation (concerning health, national origin, race, age, etc.), and desires (what you like to do).]
9. The areas where we are not called, or where we easily tend toward chaos, should receive only enough attention to get them to order. Then they can be maintained through habits, laws, and traditions. Get it to order and forget it. We should not spend much time outside of our calling.
10. Life is the most rewarding, exciting, and motivational in the area of maturity (which can only be developed by creativity applied to order). The reason many people keep bouncing in and out of chaos is because they have no creative area of maturity to motivate them. The best they can then hope for is that life will be some sort of boring order. So they usually end up back in chaos.

In the above chart, I have suggested some examples. Chaotic people see the Bible as a good book. Orderly people see it as a necessary book. Mature people see it as a sufficient book.

Chaotic people see the church as a place to go. Orderly people see it as an organization to be part of. Mature people see the church as a network of close believing friends.

Chaotic people see faith as a blind leap into something without evidence. Orderly people see faith as tied to a system (like Calvinism, Conservatism, or whatever their denomination believes about that). Mature people see faith as tied to real evidence in the real world (such as the massive evidence for the resurrection of Jesus or the infallibility of the Bible).

Chaotic people work to have money to spend, orderly people work to provide for others, and mature people work to achieve excellence.

Chaotic people think in terms of giving to themselves, orderly people give to others, and mature people give to God. The same is true when it comes to family. Chaotic people are always thinking about themselves first, and consequently are usually constantly in arguments and end in divorce or estranged from other family members. Orderly people put family first. They may or may not like the idea, but they do it because some rules or some counselor said to do that. Mature people put God first. God then dictates all their behavior, including family behavior.

Now I would like to look at 20 principles derived from Bible passages written by mature people or about maturity. I will make the point, discuss it a bit, and then list a few references.

## 1. Maturing believers avoid people who enjoy sin.

**Immature people** hang around with other immature people – people who enjoy being chaotic. They think it's fun (or funny) to get drunk or high, to pursue fornication or adultery, to lie or cheat or be dishonest, cheat the government, shoplift or gossip about others. But as we grow in Christ, we simply don't want to be around that. To escape those habits, we need some form of order. **Orderly people** are all about what not to do. It's not because they have something better to do but because their tradition says not to do that. **Mature people** don't want to re-enter chaos because they have something more exciting to live for, and chaos would hinder that. It's not that mature people follow some better law that says not to do that, they just simply don't find it attractive.

- **Psalm 1:1-3**—*How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers*
- **Psalm 26:4-5**—*I do not sit with deceitful men, nor will I go with pretenders [or men of falsehood]. I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked.*
- **Proverbs 4:14**—*Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.*
- **James 4:4**—*You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

## 2. The more mature people become, the more alone they will feel.

**Chaotic people** often have lots of shallow, surface-level, chaotic friends. They seek each other out to do chaotic things together. **Orderly people** have institutional friends. Their friends are those in their church, school, ball team, golf league or social group. **Mature people** will have a few close friends, but it will be increasingly difficult, though important, to maintain significant friends. Maturity is a function of creativity, and creativity leaves most people behind. This means that mature people will tend to have friends that network together in various ways at various times, but they are not the larger number of friends who are drawn to some chaotic pursuit or ordered by some organization. Creatively maturing people are often rejected by former friends, and find themselves feeling increasingly alone. Pursuing God will eliminate many former friends.

- **Psalm 41:9**—*Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.*
- **Psalm 55:12-13**—*For it is not an enemy who reproaches me, then I could bear it; nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me, then I could hide myself from him. But it is you, a man my equal, my companion and my familiar friend.*

- **Psalm 88:18**—*You have removed lover and friend far from me; my acquaintances are in darkness.*
- **Proverbs 17:17**—*A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.*
- **Proverbs 18:24**—*A man of too many friends comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*
- **Jeremiah 15:17**—*I did not sit in the circle of merry-makers [or mockers], nor did I exult. Because of Your hand upon me I sat alone, for You filled me with indignation.*

### 3. Mature people realize their sin and their need for repentance.

Repentance is a change of mind, that results in a change of life. **Chaotic people** either justify their sin or are in continual repentance presuming upon the grace of God. They are like the kid who asked God for a new bike, but said, “I know God doesn’t work that way, so I stole the bike and asked for forgiveness.” Repentance characterizes the Christian from conversion to maturity. **Orderly people** repent systematically. They may go to confession before attending mass, or confess their sins in church each Sunday morning. **Mature people** recognize that they are perpetual sinners and in constant need of repentance. Notice what that looked like for David:

- a) **He knew forgiveness depended on the grace of God, not some good work to balance the scale.**
  - **Psalm 51:1-2**—*Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.*
- b) **His sin was always before him. He did not try to justify it, deny it, or ignore it.**
  - **Psalm 51:3**—*For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.*
- c) **He understood that sin was only and always against God, not the people he had wronged.**
  - **Psalm 51:4**—*Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge.*
- d) **He believed in original sin. He was born (conceived) with a sin nature.**
  - **Psalm 51:5**—*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.*
- e) **He understood that without repentance he could not pursue truth in his innermost being.**
  - **Psalm 51:6**—*Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.*
- f) **He realized that only God could forgive sin.**
  - **Psalm 51:7-10**—*Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness, let the bones which You have broken rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*
- g) **He didn’t see repentance as a religious system of order, but a broken and contrite heart.**
  - **Psalm 51:16-17**—*For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.*

### 4. Mature people love to study the Bible, the written Word of God.

**Chaotic people** think they should read the Bible, but rarely get around to it. **Orderly people** read it according to some organized catechism or under the direction of some authority structure. **Mature people** study the Bible because they love to do it. The more a person matures, the more he or she loves to read and study the written Word of God in the Old and New Testaments because they feed his or her spirit and connect him or her to God.

- **Psalm 119: 97 and 105**—*O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day... Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*
- **2 Timothy 3:14-17**—*You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*
- **1 Peter 1:24-2:2**—*For “All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls off, but the Word of The Lord endures forever,” and this is the Word which was preached to you. Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the Word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.*

## 5. Mature people pursue humility and avoid pride.

**Chaotic people** are often in conflict with those around them because they need to maintain a certain level of pride. **Orderly people** will express their humility organizationally but pride individually. Their church, mission, or charitable ministry humbly gives to others, but they will work for an honorable place in that organization. **Mature people** focus on their value to God, not the people or organizations they are involved with. So the only legitimate conflicts for mature people are with people who insist on violating the character of God.

Pride is value independent from God. Humility is value dependent on God. Maturing people increasingly realize that conflicts are usually about pride, and resolutions are about humility. Generally speaking, whether it is with God, a spouse, children, friends, or work associates, conflicts involve things I want for myself. Arguments are usually based on the assumption that we should retain some amount of pride.

- **Isaiah 66:1-2**—*Thus says the LORD, heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,” declares the LORD. But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.*
- **Micah 6:8**—*He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*
- **Numbers 12:3**—*Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.*
- **Matthew 16:24-25**—*Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”*
- **Matthew 18:3-4**—*Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*
- **Philippians 2:8**—*Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*
- **James 4:6**—*God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*

## 6. Maturing people suffer for being good and speaking the truth.

Both mature and immature people suffer, and both suffer from ill treatment. The difference is, immature people suffer because of their sin, and mature people suffer because of their righteousness. A **chaotic person** might suffer because he or she has a hangover, or got caught. He or she suffers because they are reaping what they sowed. An **orderly person** suffers because his group is being targeted. Possibly the press is prejudiced against them, or their message is not being heard. They might suffer because the conservatives lost to the liberals, the Baptists are being overtaken but the charismatics, or the socialists are gaining ground over the capitalists. But **mature people** suffer because they decided, on a personal level, to follow God. They suffer because they take a stand for the character of God. They are mistreated because they speak out for things like biblical values, godly morals, and the Gospel.

- **Matthew 5:10-12**—*Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*
- **1 Thessalonians 2:2**—*but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.*
- **2 Timothy 3:12**—*Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

## 7. Maturing people are fruitful because they do not focus on the world.

I'd like to illustrate this with Christ's parable of the sower (or soils) in Matthew 13:18-23. The first soil never begins the maturing process. He never gets in the game.

*When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road.*

A **chaotic person** is something like what Jesus called the rocky soil. He hears and receives the Word of God, but he has no firm root in himself because he has a personal pleasure base that is violated when he faces affliction or persecution for his faith.

*The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.*

An **orderly person** is something like what Jesus called the weedy soil. Orderly people get beyond a personal pleasure base. They are willing to put up with the loss of some immediate gratification to make money or make a difference in the world. But that means they will be pursuing wealth and/or they are worried about the world. My application (not given in the parable) is that our worry about the world and its riches is usually expressed, in our post-modern world, organizationally (as in a political party, a social philosophy, a business, or non-profit corporation). The organization becomes the focus, it must be fed, survive, grow, and spread its influence or its income-generating capacity. I'm suggesting that today the worries about the world and the pursuit of its wealth are usually pursued organizationally.

*And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.*

A **maturing person** is eternally fruitful because, rather than focus on a personal pleasure base or the worries of the world and its wealth, he or she pursues an understanding and an application of the Word of God.

*And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.*

## 7. **Maturing people deal with persistent sin legalistically.**

**Chaotic people** live in persistent sin. **Orderly people** go to life's intervening institutions to deal with persistent sin, especially when the sin is socially unacceptable (like alcohol, drugs, and eating disorders). **Mature people** also look for order to deal with persistent sin. Here's the thing about persistent, perpetual, habitual sin – they are a piece of chaos. No one, even mature people, are ever free from those sins. If a person's life is full of these sins, or they are dominant in their lives, then they may never make it to maturity, or even order. The cost of sin is great, and although forgiveness is available, the consequences of sin cannot be erased. If the consequences are great enough, they can keep us from maturity.

When those persistent sins come up in the life of a mature person (as they do with everybody), they are recognized as chaos that must be treated with order. A mature person does not think that he or she has somehow grown beyond their capacity to sin. When those sins come up, maturing people put them in the category of chaos that needs order. But unlike the orderly person, they deal with that order personally rather than organizationally. They personally, individually, cut out whatever is causing them to sin in that area. Notice Jesus' use of hyperbolic (more extreme than reality) statements to express this idea. Also notice that the apostles never applied this by suggesting believers literally cut out parts of their bodies. But they did apply it by individually cutting out what caused them to sin. [A good way to understand Christ's teaching is always to look at how the apostles understood it as they wrote to the church.]

- **Matthew 18:8-9**—*If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.*

## 8. **Maturing people do not exercise authority over other believers.**

**Chaotic people** see leadership in terms of authority. Either they have authority over others, or others have authority over them. This, of course, leads to constant strife and a spirit of competition. **Orderly people** solve this problem with organizational authority. The organization has the authority. People within the organization are appointed by their capacity to carry out the objectives of the organization. **Mature people** never see themselves as authority figures. The truth itself is the authority. Among Christians, that's the truth contained in the Word of God. But even in a corporate structure or in the home, a mature leader acts more like a judge, trying to hear the evidence and make the best decision, rather than like a lawyer, presenting a case for a certain position. In the New Testament, only the apostles had authority, all the leaders they appointed (elders, overseers, deacons, etc.) only had responsibility.

- **Matthew 20:25-28**—*But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*
- **John 13:12-14**—*So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me*

*Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."*

## 9. Maturing people learn to give without the expectation of reciprocity.

The verb ἀγαπάω (*agapao*) and noun ἀγάπη (*agape*) were not the major words for “love” in the Greek language, but the apostles took these words, gave them their own emphasis, and used them as the defining words for Christian love. *Αγάπη* (*agape*) love is doing the best good for someone without expecting something in return for the gift. Self-serving (*eros*) love only gives when it expects something in return. Friendship (*phileo*) love is swapping, and ἀγάπη (*agape*) love is giving.

Self-serving love is well illustrated by romance. Romance is an emotional response tied to the sex drive. Everything that is given romantically expects reciprocity. **Chaotic people** see romance as something that serves their own “needs.” It’s usually more physical for men and more emotional for women, but it is always self-serving and demands reciprocity. **Orderly people** really do not know what to do about romance. They try to regulate it with rules (family values, traditions, church practices), but that never works very well. “The heart just wants what it wants.” **Mature people** fall in love, too. It seems that the message of the Song of Solomon is that God has designed romance to get us married. But mature people understand that romantic love must be turned into a giving love if a relationship is to last.

But this is true in all relationships. They are usually initiated by something we get out of it. **Chaotic people** will leave it at that, and usually destroy the relationship. **Orderly people** tend to relegate friendships systematically or organizationally, hence they become functional, static, or boring. **Mature people** who are getting something from a friendship, will immediately ask themselves how to turn that into a giving situation, thus making it a long-term thing.

- **Matthew 22:37-40**—*And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. “This is the great and foremost commandment. “The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”*
- **John 13:34-35**—*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*
- **1 John 2:10**—*The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.* This is a major theme throughout the writings of the Apostle John.
- **Philippians 2:1-4**—*Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*

## 10. Mature people are judgmental and intolerant of evil.

Let’s start this one talking about orderly people, because that’s where being judgmental gets a bad reputation among believers. **Orderly people** are judgmental about everything that isn’t part of their system of thinking. And that’s good when they have a perfect system, like the Mosaic Law or the Book of Proverbs. But today’s systems are not just judgmental about sin but about social practices that have nothing to do with sin. “Don’t drink, dance and chew, or go with girls



that do.” **Chaotic people** then look at orderly people and reject the whole idea of judging others and lapse into tolerance with ideas like “Love Wins” and “Hate the sin and love the sinner.” **Mature people** have established some societal order base (or system), but they have also realized that their system is not God or the Word of God. So in order to mature, they need to evaluate their system biblically so that they become tolerant of what is not biblically sinful, and intolerant of what is.

We are not to judge in the sense of seeking justice and paying back an eye for an eye. That is only for God and territorial government. But we are to judge in the sense of evaluating those in our world, as to their adherence to, or violation of, the Word of God. Chaotic people confuse, actually reverse, the two. They believe we should tolerate (usually called “love”) everyone, but exercise pay back on those who wrong us. For example, they think we should tolerate homosexuality in the church. But in, say, movies, they want the father whose family was killed to hunt down and kill the bad guys. Orderly people realize they need to evaluate people and denounce sinful activity. But they have trouble distinguishing sin from their socially-preferred behavior. Mature people look to the Bible to define sin, and realize, if they tolerate it, they are licensing it for their children and grandchildren.

- **Matthew 18:17**—*If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*
- **Matthew 23:15**—*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.*
- **John 7:24**—*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.*
- **1 Corinthians 5:11-13**—*But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler — not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.*
- **Ephesians 5:11-13**—*Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.*
- **Philippians 3:2**—*Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision.*
- **2 Thessalonians 2:9 and 11**—*that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders... For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false,*
- **2 Peter 2:1 and 3**—*But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves...and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.*
- **1 John 4:1**—*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*
- **Revelation 2:2 and 20**—*I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false... But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel.*

## 11. Maturity loves the truth.

I recently watched an episode of the newer version of “The Beauty and the Beast” (and I am not necessarily recommending it), which had an interesting line. The Beauty is talking to the Beast, who she has to lie about to everyone she knows to protect him, and she says something like, “Being with you is the only place where I can live in the truth.” Of course, if they are not living in godly purity, they are not really living in the truth. But there is something very purifying about the truth, even for chaotic people and unbelievers who have a perverted idea of the truth. Actually, one of the reasons chaotic people like to make sin acceptable is so they can be truthful about it, as exemplified in the corner bar.

So why do unbelievers follow Satan, who *does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies* (John 8:44)? I suspect the answer has something to do with the fact that we are sinners, and most sin is accompanied by lies. I recently heard an attorney say this to a group of people, as a reason for defending a guilty person: “Which one of you could say, ‘I have never done anything wrong’? Since we all do wrong things, we all deserve a defense.” That’s an amazing philosophy. “Wrong” deserves to be defended because we all do it? And a defense is never about the truth, it’s about what makes a client look good or innocent. Jesus told His disciples to avoid going to court over anything because you are always guilty of something (Luke 12:58-59). So, in court, your attorney will not tell the truth, he or she will leave out things and slant things (a clever way to lie) in your favor. The only way to go to court and not lie, is to do what Jesus did and say nothing.

**Chaotic people** don’t tend to come to grips with their sin and repent of it. So they live in a world of lies to justify it to themselves and others. **Orderly people**, like the Pharisees, justify certain sins while condemning others, because their system or organization does that. For example, it might be okay to justify gossip as a prayer request, but wrong to not tithe to the church. Organizationally, justified sin leads to hypocrisy, which is just another form of lying. **Mature people** understand the freedom that follows the truth and progressively rid their lives of lies, and when they catch themselves in a lie, or are tempted to lie, they confess it quickly and get back on the path of truth. Only *truth in the innermost being* will set us free.

- **Psalm 51:6**—*Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.*
- **John 3:19-21**—*This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.*
- **John 4:23-24**—*But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*
- **John 8:31-32**—*So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”*
- **John 17:17**—*Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.*
- **John 18:20**—*Jesus answered him, “I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret.”*

## 12. Mature people develop an eternal perspective about everything.

**Chaotic people** are characterized by a short-term perspective. For example, I have been told several times that the people in the inner city do not have a long-term perspective because they are just trying to survive every day. Yes. But it is also true that the reason they are just trying to survive every day is because they do not develop a long-term perspective. Chaotic people interact, vote, get married, and have jobs that involve short-term thinking. They do not contemplate the consequences of tomorrow, or next week, or next year, or 10 years from now, let alone eternity.

But wait! Aren't there a lot of heaven-focused churches in the ghettos? Maybe. But I suggest that chaotic people are thinking of heaven as an easy escape, not something to prepare for. Heaven cannot be achieved, but we are to prepare for it. An eternity that requires spiritual discipline and moral excellence (walking *in the light* – 1 John 1:7), does not usually dominate the chaotic person's idea of heaven. The idea of eternal evaluation (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10) is not part of a chaotic view. For them, "going to heaven" is like signing up for welfare or voting for a politician who will give them government aid, free.

**Orderly Christian** people have an eternal perspective. They understand that they only go to heaven by grace through faith in the blood of Christ to pay for their sins. But they only think of evaluation collectively, in the terms that their earthly organizations or traditional systems dictate. The idea of personally standing before Christ to be judged, not being supported by their group or fellowship base, is not a consideration for the orderly. **Mature people** who are Christians are focused on eternity. And both the orderly and the mature Christian depend on the blood of Christ offered by His grace to get there. But the mature idea of eternity is not just a focus on going to heaven, but a time of extreme personal evaluation by Christ that will determine their eternal situation, after they get there.

- **Matthew 24:45-46**—*Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time?*
- **Matthew 24:46**—*Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes.*
- **Matthew 25:28-29**—*Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.*
- **John 6:27**—*Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."*
- **1 Corinthians 3:13-15**—*each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*
- **2 Corinthians 5:9-10**—*Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

## 13. The fruit of maturity is disciples for Christ.

A **chaotic person** may be your buddy, but he will never be your mentor. He might teach you things, but those things will never be significant for godly living or eternal values. **Orderly people** do things for other people. They give food to the poor, build them houses, and get them med-

ical attention. They plan to add some form of evangelism or discipleship. But it rarely happens. Usually, discipleship and Bible teaching get set aside or lost altogether (as with the YMCA or The Salvation Army). The reason this happens to orderly people is because they usually work through corporations, and corporations generally want to survive and grow. It's hard to grow with evangelism and Bible teaching because only a few are interested in it. It's much easier to grow your organization with social works projects. If you don't think so, announce an evangelism or discipleship effort in your church and see how many sign up. Then announce a program to feed the poor or build them houses and see how many sign up. Mature people realize the need for building the Word or God into individuals willing to study it.

- **Matthew 28:18-20**—*And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*
- **Acts 1:8**—*... but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.*
- **2 Timothy 2:1-2**—*You therefore, my son be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*

#### 14. Mature people do not try to identify with the world.

**Chaotic people** love the world. They consider it good ("cool," "with it," "hip," or something) to be worldly. They live for the present moment and go with the flow. They are trendy, joining in with the movements of their culture. They see the changes in morality as they see changes in technology. It's all good and positive. Of course, they believe in good and bad (or rather benevolent and malevolent) people, but the world is getting better as people become more tolerant of each other and stop living in the past. "Love Wins."

**Orderly people** are trying to fix the world. They believe the world is going in the wrong direction and can be improved with the right system. There are conservative systems and liberal systems. Conservatives believe things were better in the past, and we should get back to it with systems like capitalism, constitutionalism, parochial schools, God-fearing churches and "one nation under God." Liberals believe things will be (or could be) better in the future, and we should bring it about with systems, like socialism, evolution, humanism, and communism. Both liberals and conservatives want to fix the world by establishing their systems and defeating the opposing systems.

**Mature people** are interested in individuals, not the world. Mature believers in Christ are interested in glorifying God and reaching people for Christ, along with discipling them in the Scripture. They are not interested in fixing or changing their world, their country, their church, or any organization.

The leaders and prophets of Israel were nationally-oriented because that's what God was doing – revealing Himself through the nation of Israel. But the church is a global fellowship of believers, not tied to any nation. Neither Jesus nor the apostles ever did anything patriotic. They recognized God's commitment to the future of Israel and the preservation of the Jewish people, but they never fought for the preservation or advancement of any part of the physical world. They never pursued fixing the social, political, or economic ills of Judea, Galilee, Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, Asia, Greece or Rome. They never campaigned for better schools, constitutional governments, or economic stability. They saw themselves as citizens of heaven, not the world.

The world will deteriorate into moral chaos, be judged by God in a tribulation period, and rebuilt by Christ at His Second Coming. That will last for 1000 years and then be totally destroyed (its elements burned with intense heat) and be replaced by a New Heaven and a New Earth. And man has nothing to do with bringing any of that about.

- **John 14:27**—*Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.*
- **John 15:19-20**—*If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.*
- **John 16:33**—*"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."*
- **John 17:15-18**—*"I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."*
- **John 18:36**—*Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."*
- **1 John 2:17**—*The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.*
- **Philippians 3:20**—*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;*
- **2 Peter 3:10-12**—*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!*

## 15. Maturity is sin sensitive.

**Chaotic people** are sin insensitive. They have a conscience from creation, but they have warped it into a conformity with the world (Romans 2). **Orderly people** are sensitive to the sins dictated by their traditions and systems, but other than that, they have trouble seeing themselves as sinners. **Mature people** see themselves as in a constant, continual, ongoing battle with their own sin nature. They have received a new nature from God at salvation, but they are painfully aware of their old nature and battle with it every day. They hate their sin. It's their biggest problem. They continually confess it, but they cannot escape it this side of heaven.

- **Romans 7:21-25**—*I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin*
- **1 John 1:8-10**—*If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse*

*us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.*

## 16. **Maturity endures personal provocation.**

**Chaotic people** live for themselves with a short-term perspective. So they are easily provoked, not generally patient, and quickly become jealous. **Orderly people** deal with provocation institutionally. They consider it wrong to provoke, or be provoked by, someone in their group, but consider it right for their group to provoke an opposing group. **Mature people** learn to avoid provocation by discarding personal attacks and not boasting about themselves. They are continually learning to be committed to pleasing God. They are interested in what God thinks of them, not what others think. That allows them to be patient and kind and endure a wrong suffered, because the real issue is not the suffering but how God sees their response to that suffering. There are two aspects to agape love in the New Testament, one is giving, the other is not being provoked.

- **1 Corinthians 13:4-7**—*Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*
- **Galatians 5:22-23**—*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

## 17. **Mature people try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.**

**Chaotic people** try to learn what is pleasing to themselves. “To thine own heart be true,” “Trust your heart,” “Go with your gut feelings,” that sort of thing. But if you serve yourself, you will be miserable. Most chaotic people are miserable or just a small step away from it. Actually, that’s why you will hear them laugh a lot in crowds, like at an airport, a sporting event, or a party. They are laughing at silliness, not humor. It masks their misery acquired by self-service. **Orderly people** try to please others. There is a lot of pleasure in that. Actually, serving others is a good cure for misery. Serving others almost always makes people happier. The problem is, you will also be disappointed. Serving others is a discouraging job because you are always looking for their appreciation, or at least their improvement. It’s a good idea not to follow up on people you serve, you will most likely be disappointed. **Mature people** are *trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord*. Even non-Christian mature people are looking beyond pleasing people. They are serving mankind, future generations, some cosmic global force, or something beyond humanity. Christian maturity is compassionate and tenderhearted toward people, and serve them as best they can, with an emphasis on believers in Christ. But they do it for God, because it pleases God. So their reward is not in the appreciation or accomplishments of others. It’s in the pleasure of God. But not everything in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is covered in one of God’s commands. Those commands must be applied to our life today. So a mature person is continually *trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord*.

- **John 14:15**—*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.*
- **Ephesians 5:6-10**—*Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), **trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.***
- **Philippians 2:5**—*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.*

## 18. **Mature people *have their senses trained to discern good and evil.***

The word for “senses” in Hebrews 5:14 is [αἰσθητήριον (*aistheterion*), *senses* or sense of *perception*]. It’s not about the things we perceive, but the way we perceive things. It about the way we understand what we encounter in the world. It’s very much like the more modern concept of a worldview. **Chaotic people** will perceive the world the way most everyone around them does. As the world changes its way of perceiving things, they change along with it, without any awareness that they even have a worldview or sense of perception. **Orderly people** have a definite worldview. But their senses are established by a system of thinking, not by being trained to discern good and evil. Their sense of perception is established by their liberal, conservative, religious, or economic presuppositions.

The book of Hebrews was written to orderly people – Jewish Christians who could not break out of their Judaism, which made them *dull of hearing*. They needed the solid food of maturity, but they were stuck in their orderly thinking. **Mature people** are able to move beyond the basics. They understand the Gospel and resurrection of the dead, but they are also in the process of training their mind to have discernment and be more sensitive to the good and evil things going on in the world around them.

- **Hebrews 5:11-6:2**—*Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses [αἰσθητήριον (*aistheterion*), *senses* or sense of *perception*] trained to discern good and evil. Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.*

## 19. **Mature people are overcomers.**

The one who reigns with Christ, who inherits the blessings of God, is the one who overcome the world. In a sense, that’s the challenge of the Christian life – to overcome the world. **Chaotic people** do not overcome the world, instead they are overcome by the world. The world molds them into its image and they go along for the ride. **Orderly people** sometimes overcome the world. If the tradition or system they adhere to is world overcoming in certain areas, then they do pretty well in those areas. **Mature people** understand that the things which need to be overcome are never completely defined (or accurately defined) by any orderly system. They can only be overcome by having *their senses trained to discern good and evil*.

- **Revelation 2:11**—*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.*
- **Revelation 2:26**—*He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to Him I will give authority over the nations.*
- **Revelation 3:5**—*He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.*
- **Revelation 3:12**—*He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.*

- **Revelation 3:21**—*He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*
- **Revelation 21:7**—*He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.*

## 20. **Mature Christians believe in the sufficiency of the Bible.**

- **Revelation 22:18-20**—*I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming quickly.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.*

The *words of the prophecy of this book* indeed refer to the words written in the book of Revelation. In other words, this book of Revelation is the last book, and no one should add to it or take away from it. To add to it is to add to the Bible. To take away from it is to take away from this apocalyptic prophecy which is part of the Bible. Therefore, the prohibition to “add to or take away” can be applied to the whole Bible. **Chaotic people** take away from the Bible by ignoring it or denying it. **Orderly people** add to the Bible the traditions of their groups or organizations. **Mature people** follow every word of the Bible, not ignoring things they don’t like or adding traditions they do like.