

Title: EIGHT HABITS OF MATURING CHRISTIANS

Text: I Thessalonians 5:16-23

Intro: It is never God's will for believers to remain childish in their understanding and behaviour (**I Cor. 14:20**). We must all grow and mature in Christ, but sadly that is not instant. Our passage reveals eight habits we must develop if we are to spiritually mature. We must:

1. ALWAYS REJOICE (v.16). This is NOT a counsel to merely ignore sorrows and tragedies in life. It is an invitation for the presence and power of God to uphold us in both the good and bad times of our lives so that we can experience His peace and joy. Real joy is not reliant upon our changing earthly circumstances but rather on our unchanging God. True joy is not limited in time but lasting. It is the fruit of the Spirit that enables us be peaceful and calm even when people and things around us bring us vexing situations (**I Pet. 4:13; Jas. 1:2-3**).

2. ALWAYS PRAY (v.17). This is NOT vain repetition or a reference to All-Night Prayer Meetings (**Matt. 6:7**). God calls us to be consistent in prayer. There should be no prolonged gaps in our prayer life (**Rom. 12:12**). Since God is the source of the good things that we possess, it only makes sense that we would constantly depend on Him. One of the best things we can do is to cultivate a habit of prayer in all things – big and small (**Luke 18:1**). Prayer includes praising, confessing, thanking, asking, and also listening to God (**Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2**). Our prayer life should be an on-going, open communication. Saying "Amen" at the end of a prayer is not like saying goodbye at the end of a phone call.

3. ALWAYS GIVE THANKS (v.18). This verse does NOT say, "*FOR everything give thanks.*" but "*IN everything give thanks.*" It is God's will for us to be thankful IN all circumstances. A thankful attitude enables us to see the big picture, to be aware that God is in full control and that we can trust Him even when bad things happen (**Job 1:21-22**). **Verse 18** encourages us to develop an attitude of gratitude (**Eph. 5:20; Col. 3:17**). A grateful heart is instant and quick to react to God's faithfulness and give Him the glory He deserves. It provides contentment and is an antidote against greed, envy, materialism, etc.

4. ALWAYS FAN THE FLAME (v.19). The Holy Spirit is likened to fire (**Acts 2:3**). Fire is powerful and gives us both warmth and light. Yet, it can be quenched by water. Staying on fire for God is easier said than done for we can easily quench and grieve the Spirit by walking in the flesh and giving place to the devil (**Eph. 4:27-32**). Yet, being fervent and zealous for God is easier if we obey the previous verses. If we are always joyful, prayerful and thankful in all circumstances, then the Holy Spirit will be more effective in His operation in our lives.

5. ALWAYS LEARN (v.20). A true prophet is one who has been empowered by God to speak His truths. There are two types of prophecy in the Bible: (1) FORETELLING is when God predicts and outlines the future in striking detail; and (2) FORTHTELLING is the preaching and teaching God's word. Today we no longer have human prophets who can foretell the future but we have the Holy Bible in our midst which has now become our "*more sure word of prophecy*" (**II Pet. 1:19a**). Anyone declaring a "prophecy" that contradicts the scriptures can be dismissed as a false prophet (**II Pet. 1:20-21**).

Today's "prophet" would be a preacher. When a God-sent preacher speaks God's truth in love, we should not be offended even if our pride and feelings are hurt but many of us do! There are those who hold contempt of God's word and His preacher whenever they are reproved. You may not like some things you hear from God's word but that is no excuse for not giving heed. Be teachable and learn! (**Psa. 25:4-5**)

6. ALWAYS EXAMINE (v.21a). Test, examine and demand proof of everything you hear in relation to God's word (**Acts 17:11-12**). The Bereans were able to believe Paul because they knew the scriptures and were able to see if what Paul was saying was true or not. Many people come to church and are content at just hearing what the preacher says or what they hear on T.V. Unwittingly, they are slowly being deceived and led to a path of destruction because they are too lazy to examine things with God's word (**I John 4:1; II Pet. 2:1**).

7. ALWAYS HOLD ON TO GOOD (v.21b). Hold fast and don't let go of what is good and right God's sight. Often, the good thing is the hardest to do! Let us fight the urge to do what we know is wrong. With God on and by our side, we can win! (**Psa. 97:10; Phil. 4:13**)

8. ALWAYS ABSTAIN FROM EVIL (v.22). Paul says to stay away from something even if it only appears evil. This for two reasons: First, once you say you are a Christian, people begin watching you and if they see you anywhere near evil, they will surely find fault with you. Second, when we hang around people or activities, we begin to pick up their habits or their way of dealing with things. Common sense would tell us that, if we stick too long with someone or something that is clearly not of God, then we will be slowly influenced and eventually corrupted by their lifestyle (**I Cor. 15:33; Prov. 4:14-15; Psa. 1:1**).

Conclusion: When we live by these eight habits to spiritual maturity, Paul's prayer in **verse 23** will be a reality. God will sanctify us wholly – our spirit, soul and body will be preserved blameless until Jesus comes back! What an assurance for Christians! Unsaved friend, you too can have such assurance if you call on Jesus and ask Him to save you now!