

**Sonoraville Baptist Church**  
**Sunday, August 14, 2011 – 6:00 PM**  
**Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor**

**The Marks of Maturity - Romans 1:11-15**

**Introduction:** Corrie Ten Boom in her book, *The Hiding Place*, relates an incident which taught her an important principle. She and her sister, Betsy, had just been transferred to Ravensbruck, the worst German prison camp they had seen. The barracks were overcrowded and flea infested. Their Scripture reading that morning had reminded them to rejoice always, pray constantly, and give thanks in all circumstances. Betsy told Corrie to stop and give thanks to the Lord for every detail of their new living quarters. Corrie at first refused to give thanks for the fleas, but Betsy persisted. She finally did. And during the months spent at that camp, they were surprised to find how openly they could hold Bible study and prayer meetings without guard interference. Several months later, they learned that the guards would not enter the barracks because of the fleas.

Did you know that your attitude will affect how you deal with your circumstances? Did you also know that your attitude will determine the impact those circumstances have on you? God often uses circumstances to do a work in our lives because He's not looking to make us comfortable. He's looking to make us mature, and this will be the subject of our message tonight.

A couple of weeks ago, we saw five Christian characteristics of Paul: He has a Thankful Attitude; a Servant's Spirit; a Prayerful Concern; a Submissive Will; and a Gracious Heart. Tonight, we'll add four marks of maturity to that list.

If you'll recall, we said that all of these marks of Christian character or maturity come from a life that had been tested through the tough times. We learn the most from the difficulties we face - from the fires and storms we go through. That's when our character is molded. When we can thank God for the fleas, then we have taken a step in the right direction in understanding what God is looking for in our lives.

*11 I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—*

*12 that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.*

*13 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.*

*14 I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.*

*15 That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. **Romans 1:11-15 (NIV)***

The first mark of maturity we see in Paul's life is he had:

**1. Humility (12)** - Pride is the opposite of humility and it can be one of the greatest stumbling blocks for Christians. Pride is what keeps us from admitting that we're lost, and it also keeps us from admitting we have a need. Pride can also keep us from experiencing what God wants for us.

Paul knew first-hand how pride hinders and destroys, but he had also learned how humility can build a person up. So, over the years of his ministry, he had developed a humility of mind.

For example, in vs. 12 he talks to the Romans about being "*mutually encouraged*" by each other's faith. Here was a man who had accomplished many things in the name of Jesus, telling these young Christians that he wanted to be encouraged by their faith. He not only wanted to give some spiritual gift to them, he said that he needed to receive something from them.

When we get to the point when we think that no one can teach us anything, we are wrong! The Christians in the church in Corinth had become that way. They had divided into cliques based on the teachers they were partial to. Some were following Paul, others Apollos, still others Cephas, and some claimed they followed Christ. But all of them were wrong because they were all puffed up with pride. Paul told them that this kind of divisiveness had no place in the body of Christ. Christ is not divided. When we are, we are not walking in humility.

Paul felt as though he had something to learn from the Romans, and they had something to learn from Him. They needed what each other could bring to the table. The fact is, we all can learn from one another. This is how we grow in our faith. But we have to have a spirit of humility in us so that we'll be open to receive from one another. This is the kind of attitude Paul had. It is a mark of maturity. Secondly, Paul had:

**2. Purpose (13)** - Paul had a determination to accomplish the Lord's work. Paul understood the God had a plan for his life and his plans should be in accordance with God's. He told the Romans that he "*planned many times to visit...*" His life had direction. He made plans. And so should we.

Now, we shouldn't just pull our plans out of the air. We shouldn't make plans and ask God to bless what we have planned. No, our plans should be made as a result of prayer and studying God's Word. That way, our plans are more likely to be based on the will of God.

Paul prayed and knew that God wanted to use him win souls for the Kingdom of God. He understood clearly his purpose. That's why Paul could say in vs. 13 that God desired for him to "*have a harvest among you (see people saved) just as I have had among other Gentiles.*" Paul had a purpose. That purpose was given to him by God. He was driven by that purpose. That purpose guided his actions. A mark of maturity is when we understand that we have a purpose that guides our life. Thirdly, Paul was also guided by:

**3. Obedience (14)** - Paul understood what God had done in his life. Before he was saved, he thought he had a godly direction, but he found out that it was merely his direction he wanted to take. He was building a name and a reputation for himself. But God had delivered him from that life. Meeting Jesus had changed his direction and because of that, he could serve Christ with the attitude that he would never fully repay the debt of love he owed. And because of what Christ had done in his life, in vs. 14, Paul said he felt "*a great sense of obligation to people in his culture (the Greeks) and to people in other cultures (the non-Greeks), to the wise and foolish alike.*" In other words, his obligation was to share the gospel with all people.

Oh that we could get to the point in life where our obedience to Christ is not a choice we make - do I obey this or not? Do I follow Christ in this matter or not? But rather our obedience to Christ becomes our lifestyle. Our obedience becomes the result of the life of Christ living in us.

You see, if we are growing and bearing the marks of maturity, we are being conformed to the image of Christ, and we begin to think like Him, talk like Him, and act like Him. And we'll desire to please God. That was how it was for Paul. Finally, we see that Paul's maturity was marked by:

**4. Eagerness (15)** - In vs. 15, Paul tells the Romans that he was "*eager...to preach the gospel*" to them. Now we're all eager about some things. Friday night, I took Griff to the Braves game. We went because we had free tickets, but more than that, I was eager to see his face when he saw that baseball stadium and all those baseball players. I was sorta disappointed though because this was the night the Braves were retiring Bobby Cox' number, and they had invited all the players and coaches from the 1991 "Worst to First" team back for the celebration. As they were calling out their names, Griff looked at me and said, "*PopSteve, who are those guys? Are they famous?*" But all in all he had a good time and he was eager to go.

We are eager about a lot of things. You may be to get paid, or eager for the weekend, or eager to go on vacation. But as Christians, the question is, are we eager to serve God? Are we eager to see the church grow? We might say "Yes" to all those things, but how eager are we when we find out it will cost us time, energy, money?

Our eagerness is a reflection of what we love. Paul loved Christ first and foremost. That love for Christ translated into a love for people. That love for people resulted into a desire to see them saved, which was what God sent Christ to do - to seek and save that which was lost.

When we're in love with God, we'll be eager for God's work to be accomplished and His will to be done. And that eagerness will create an expectation that as we step out in faith we will see God at work.

So, a mature life is a life that bears the marks of humility, purpose, obedience, and eagerness.

**Conclusion:** Let me close with a story. When the Titanic was sinking and the order to abandon ship was given, a rich lady realized she had no time to pack. On her dressing table, she saw her jewelry box and a bowl of oranges. She decided that the things that were most valuable to her was not the jewels, but rather the oranges. At least she'd have something to eat on the life boat.

When it came down to the time Paul would face God, he said in **Philippians 3:7-8 (NIV)** "*But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.*"

Paul's life was a mature life that was marked by thankfulness, servitude, prayerfulness, submissiveness, graciousness, humility, purpose, obedience, and eagerness. Can that be said about us?