

How Emotions Affect Spiritual Maturity

Emotional/Spiritual Maturity

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Many of you have listened to the Dr. Laura radio program before. And, as you know, people call in to the program and get her advice about what their moral obligation is in any given situation. If it is an accurate pulse of this nation's moral understanding (which I believe it is), then this nation is morally bankrupt and emotionally immature.

What strikes me about the people who call in is that most are so emotionally wrapped up in their dilemma that they do not have a clue as to how to resolve it—especially using a right moral judgment. In almost every case, they are emotionally immature to the extreme and are just totally blinded to any even common sense solution.

Commonly, the callers present their moral dilemma like this: "My boyfriend is an alcoholic, can't keep a job, beats me, and I suspect has other girlfriends—but I love him and I want to marry him." Does that not sound immature, to say the least? In several cases the female caller will add something like this: "I've lived with him for two years, and he charges me rent. Do you think it's fair that I have to pay half the rent? Or should I tell him I'm only going to pay 25% of the rent from now on?" You see—totally missing the point of the whole problem. The callers cannot see the moral forest because of the emotional trees!

Psychologists speak of emotional immaturity. Social scientists call it "a lack of emotional intelligence." But they seldom understand what constitutes it. And you know why. They do not have God's Holy Spirit, or understanding of God's truth. So, what is **emotional maturity**? It is not something taught in colleges and universities. It is something that should be taught before the first grade. It is the technical art of putting the Ten Commandments into practice! It is the real secret to human happiness, but it is not taught—not by parents, not by teachers, not by schools, not by the government. Not by anyone except, hopefully, by those in God's church. How can parents teach their children when they, themselves, are emotionally immature? How can teachers instill emotional maturity in children when they have not grown up emotionally themselves?

Emotional maturity is development from the state of "self-centeredness" to the state of "outgoing concern for others." Satan takes—God gives. Satan hates—God loves. There we see the essence of the difference between maturity and immaturity. Giving with outgoing concern is the way of God, and the principle of His law of love. As human beings, we have to be taught to have emotional maturity. It is something that has to be

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learned from somebody who is already emotionally mature. It cannot be learned from immature parents, or immature leaders, or immature preachers. (I am thinking of this world's mainstream Christianity.) For members of God's church, the impact of emotional maturity on our spiritual lives is of the utmost importance, because control of our emotions directly affects our **spiritual maturity**.

Now, all human beings are moved to action by their emotions. So, no matter who we are or what age we are, emotions affect us dramatically. An *emotion* is a strong feeling, a disturbance, a departure from the normal calm state of rational thinking and acting. It is an impulse toward an action that has not been reasoned and approved by the mind. Among the emotions are such feelings (or, impulses) as fear, anger, disgust, grief, joy, surprise, and desire; and that is just to name a few. Of course, there are many emotions that human beings go through.

Closely associated to our emotions are *moods*. A mood is, basically, a predominant emotion. An emotionally immature person is usually moody, and has never learned to control his moodiness. So whatever the dominant emotion is, that is the one that drives the individual at that time.

God endowed us, in His own image, with a mind. We must first learn and acquire knowledge. We are endowed also with the capacity to reason from that knowledge—to think, to plan, to arrive at conclusions, and to make decisions. God intends our minds to direct our actions. But we must learn to do this. And we can never achieve God's purpose in placing us on this earth unless we first **learn** to be emotionally mature. The development of right *character* is the purpose of human life. And character is the ability to come to right knowledge and wisdom, and then to direct the mind and body into this right course.

Herbert Armstrong once told of a tragic example of emotional immaturity with respect to the development of right character. It was over twenty years ago that he included this example in an article. He wrote of a highly educated man, whose life had been devoted to the field of education, assuming readily the responsibility of teaching others. While he himself had not learned right character development, he still was quite happy to try to teach it to others. Mr. Armstrong writes:

His mind was stored with knowledge of science, history, mathematics, and literature. He had knowledge of facts about the earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars. He had acquired knowledge of facts about many other things, but not about himself—his moods, his feelings, his drives, impulses and desires. He had not stopped to study and analyze them, let alone learn to control

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them.

As a child he had been pampered, petted, spoiled—permitted to have his way, never taught self-restraint, self-control, or how to understand his moods, feelings and desires, and to control and guide them according to the sound reasoning of the mind, instead of impulsively following them without mental direction.

He was married, had a fine family, an honored position with rare opportunities. But letting feelings, moods, and impulses dominate his mind, instead of making his mind rationally and wisely direct them—his marriage crashed, his home was broken up, and he fled in fear from his high position and brilliant future. He not only wrecked his own life, he forced great sorrow, unhappiness, and suffering on many others. His emotions had so dominated his mind that he came to see circumstances through the eyes of his feelings, and his understanding became warped and distorted. [Keep in mind that Mr. Armstrong is speaking about an emotionally immature individual. He continues...] Physically, he grew to normal maturity and was reasonably proficient in athletics. He possessed a number of university degrees. He was mentally mature so far as this world's faulty education instructs. But emotionally he was still somewhere between ages 8 and 12! And, sadly, his spiritual age was no older.

The great tragedy of this society is that nearly all people mature physically, and maybe almost half even mature mentally somewhat; but very few ever grow up emotionally or spiritually. Today, we even wonder about that because it seems like emotional **immaturity** is the norm, rather than the exception.

Now, let us take a look just briefly at the physical explanations for emotions and see what the scientists have to say. I think it is eye opening, and shows how long it takes them to come up with simple biblical truths. For centuries, philosophers and theologians have investigated the relationship between reason and emotion. Recent developments in neuroscience have given a new twist to science's understanding of this relationship. These developments are at the heart of the concept of **emotional maturity** (or, as scientists call it, "emotional intelligence").

Using new information from neuroscience and psychology of the brain, scientists have found that two of the key structures of the brain are the *limbic system*, which is the emotional center of the brain, and the *neocortex*, which is where thinking occurs. (Keep

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in mind that this is from the physical standpoint.) This physical mechanism works like this: Within the limbic system lies the amygdala, which assesses information from the world outside and scans it for potential danger. It builds up a store of "emotional memories." Its impulses link to the neocortex through the brain's prefrontal lobes, where we work out what is an appropriate response to the emotion being transmitted. (So much for the technical aspect of how that happens.)

According to David Goleman, a psychologist and science writer for The New York Times, in his book *Emotional Intelligence*:

A particularly strong emotional reaction from the amygdala can bypass or overwhelm the prefrontal lobes so we react without thinking. This could involve anything from saying something deeply hurtful or exploding in anger, to road rage, violence or murder.

In biblical terms, we understand this reaction to be the point where we should invoke self-control to prevent the explosion of anger. It's impossible for human beings to reach complete emotional control.

Romans 8:7-8 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

People who are not subject to the law of God do not have self-control. And an individual who does not have self-control does not have emotional maturity—or, emotional control—and, therefore, cannot have spiritual maturity. But continuing the quote from Mr. Goleman:

One of the key insights of the concept of emotional intelligence is that all behavior has an emotional component. Without our emotions we would not be able to value anything, make decisions, or feel close to anyone. However, we also need our thinking capacities to generate options for how we should behave. Emotional intelligence, therefore, is all about reason and emotion working together in harmony.

Anyone who reads his Bible would find that out right away. But these scientists work a lifetime to find out these things. Continuing the quote:

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Of the various emotional intelligence skills, the most basic is emotional awareness. Without being aware of what you are feeling you cannot begin to behave or think appropriately. Other skills include: being able to empathize and maintain relationships with others; to delay gratification in order to accomplish one's goals; and to resist negative influences.

It is interesting that he called the proper reaction to emotion "skills." Skills are something *learned* and *developed*. The proper reaction to emotion is learned and developed—producing emotional maturity. So, although they use a different terminology, the word "skills" is an accurate assessment—because skills are learned.

Goleman examined evidence showing that many drug abusers are trying to escape from uncomfortable or intolerable feelings. They turn to drugs because they do not know how else to deal with these feelings. To back this up, he quotes a Harvard Medical School study of heroin and other opium derivative addicts which found that: "The most striking emotional pattern was a lifelong difficulty handling anger and a quickness to rage." So we see that those who are emotionally immature and cannot handle their emotions properly have a tendency towards substance abuse.

He also quotes another study of several hundred 12 and 13 year olds, published in 1994, which found that: "It was those who reported higher levels of emotional distress who subsequently went on to have the highest rates of substance abuse." So there is no doubt that emotional immaturity is directly related to substance abuse.

Goleman's conclusion was that: "It is important to deal with the root cause of the problem by giving children the skills they need to cope with negative feelings so they don't need to resort to drugs later in life. Childhood aggression, loneliness, and depression also have their roots in emotional intelligence deficiencies [which I am calling "emotional immaturity"]. He cites the success of projects that have taught skills such as dealing with anger."

Through all his human research, Goleman rightly concluded that: "The skills of emotional intelligence can be learned. . . . Childhood and adolescence is the crucial learning period, because that is when the skills of emotional literacy are being laid down. . . . and children with good emotional intelligence skills can cope better with adversity." You almost feel like saying to the scientists, "Duh." After reading God's Word for so long, it is "in there"—and it is very clear that is the case. But individuals without God's Holy Spirit have to go through hard knocks to find out what God teaches us in His Word. And, even then, they do not have the whole story.

I quoted Daniel Goleman's research because I wanted you to see that, even without God's Holy Spirit, scientists can see the effects of emotional immaturity, and that it takes someone to teach self-control and a learning attitude in order to become emotionally mature. Scientists have arrived at that understanding. But without God's Spirit they cannot come to understand how to go about doing that, because they do not have the right standard as what to teach those who are emotionally immature.

Training in emotional maturity starts in the home. This emotional maturing should start the same time that mental training is begun, and that is very early in life. It is within the first few months of a child's life. We know that Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." This is a truth that God has placed in His Word—one that this world does not understand.

Training of the emotions involves control and right direction of feelings, tempers, and impulses. It means control over anger, jealousy, hatred, fear, grief, resentment, selfishness, pride—all of the emotions, not just one. Since the right direction is the way of God's law and since the way of God's law is the way of love, and love is the principle of outgoing concern—it means we must teach our children to use their own minds to understand their moods and guide them in the direction of outgoing concern. That is, **love towards others**. This is the very foundation of emotional maturity, as it is for spiritual maturity.

Yelling, loud talking, bursts of anger, and rudeness all show a lack of emotional intelligence (or, immaturity). Emotional immaturity is simply letting human nature run its own way without any control from a right thinking, reasoning mind. It is just simply that.

Herbert Armstrong described his own personal experience when he was being emotionally immature early in his ministry. He was a very sincere man. And, although this might have been embarrassing later in life, he shared it with us. And he said:

I remember the first funeral I was called on to officiate. At funerals, many people let their emotions of grief run uncontrolled. A great fear seized me. I was afraid I would not be able to keep calm and control my own feelings; and I knew I must do that and, with calm tenderness and sympathy, comfort the bereaved. I was much younger then, and in the emotional struggle that went on inside my mind over ability to carry this responsibility, I began to go to pieces.

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That is hard to imagine of Mr. Armstrong, who appeared before kings and prime ministers, going to pieces at all in public speaking. But, going on with the quote, he said:

I announced to my family I just couldn't do it. We were at the time visiting in my father's home; and he came to me, put his hands on my shoulders, calmly shook me, saying in a voice of authority with which he had not spoken to me since I was a child: 'Here! Snap out of it! This is your responsibility! This family is broken up in sorrow, and they are relying on you. You can't back out of it! Wake up! Come to yourself! Get a grip on yourself! You are going through with this, and you are going to do it with credit and calm dignity and sincerity!'

That, I remember, sobered and calmed me and brought me back to my right senses; and I replied quietly, 'Yes, Dad. Of course I will.'

Then I went to a private room and closed the door and talked to my heavenly Father about it; and received from Him the emotional control I had lacked for this ordeal—and that first funeral was an ordeal! But when I literally placed myself in God's hands as His instrument, He used me; and the words He spoke through my mouth resulted in the conversion of the bereaved parents.

I found it difficult, as I was later more and more frequently called upon to officiate at funerals, to so control my own emotions as to achieve right balance—that outer calmness—without going to the opposite extreme of hardening my senses. So that I was able to achieve emotional control, with dignity and poise, yet with extreme tenderness, gentleness, and heartfelt sympathy for those in sorrow—so that I could give them the help they needed in their greatest trial, and still not break down with them.

The seriousness of emotional maturity is seen in our conversions—in that none of us can achieve real Christian growth and perfection until we have acquired *emotional stability*. Our feelings and emotions were given to us for a purpose. They are designed into us. They are not to be abolished, but intelligently guided—by mind control—into the proper conduit of God's law! God has given us the emotions so that we can *overcome* the natural tendency of man's mind to react to the emotions.

The difference between emotional *immaturity* and emotional *maturity* can be seen very clearly in the contrast between man's natural reaction to emotion (which is usually without self-control) and God's actions (which are always with control). Let us take a

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look at God's anger and His self-control. Even anger has its place in the arena of emotions. God always has righteous anger, but human beings most often have emotionally immature anger. And we are going to see the contrast to that. In Exodus 4, when Moses protested at the prospect of being God's spokesman before Pharaoh, although God was angry with him, He controlled His anger and came up with an alternate solution to this problem with Moses. God is speaking to Moses, and He says:

Exodus 4:12-16 "Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you shall say." And he [Moses] said, "O my Lord, send, please send by the hand of whomever else you may send." [Meaning, "Please send someone else."] So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and He said, "Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. Now you shall speak to him, and put the words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do. So he shall be your spokesman to the people. And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God.

The emotion of anger is so powerful and destructive that it is expressed as the imagery of *fire*. Both humans and God are said to "burn with anger." As we see here, in verse 14, it says that the anger of the Lord was "kindled" against Moses—as if a fire is kindled. Anger might flare up like a flame, be stirred up like a fire, or smolder. Its similarity with fire is seen in its spontaneity, in its difficulty to be contained, and in its destructive power. So quite often throughout Scripture *fire* is used to represent anger and uncontrolled emotion.

God's anger differs from most examples of human anger. Expressions of God's anger exhibit ***no loss of control!*** Rather, as an act of God's will His anger results in deliberate judgments against sin—actions (1) appropriate to the situation and (2) in keeping with His own character as holy and just. God's anger does not have favorable outcomes for sinful, rebellious, complaining, and faithless people.

Let me just give you four examples very quickly of unfavorable outcomes. (1) In anger, God prevented the entire generation of faithless adults from entering the Promised Land forcing them to experience forty years of wandering in the wilderness. (2) When the wandering Israelites complained about their hardships, God's anger was aroused; and His fire consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. (3) In another incident, when the people wailed at their limited diet of manna, in His anger God threatened to force them to eat quail until they detested it. (4) At another time, in His anger God instructed Moses

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to put to death all those who worshipped Baal of Peor. So we can see that God uses different methods of reacting in anger to those who are wicked or sinful, or to those who are faithless. And He applies—at that time and in that situation—the right use of anger. That is, the right penalty at that time.

It is recorded in Deuteronomy 6 that Moses warned the Israelites to fear God alone and no one else. He says there:

Deuteronomy 6:15 (For the LOORD your God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LOORD your God be aroused against you, and destroy you from the face of the earth.

Despite this catalog of awful displays of God's anger, the other side of the picture is equally striking. When God's people repent from sin and place their trust in Him, God turns aside His anger, and He brings mercy, compassion, and blessing upon His people. David expressed confidence that God's anger against His people is only a momentary experience, in contrast to a lifetime of God's mercy. There was no comparison of how long God's anger lasts as to how long His mercy lasts. And God characteristically terminates His wrath and forgives people's sins.

Micah 7:18 "Who is a God like unto you, pardoning iniquity, and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy.

Perhaps the prophet Nahum best puts both of these truths together: (1) God's wrath is for the wicked. But (2) His mercy is for the repentant and faithful.

Nahum 1:2-7 God is jealous, and the LOORD revenges; the LOORD revenges, and is furious. The LOORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies. The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked. The LOORD has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet. He rebukes the sea, and makes it dry, and dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither, and the flower of Lebanon wilts. The mountains quake before Him, the hills melt, and the earth heaves at His presence. Yes, the world, and all who dwell in it. Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him. The LOORD is good, a stronghold in the day of

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trouble; and He knows them who trust in Him.

God's anger is not automatic, or predictable—because He is never out of control, and He always chooses the right action for the right incident. He judges each situation righteously! And He exercises and withholds His anger in response to prayer. So *prayer* is extremely important to us whenever we are feeling the effects of God's anger. When we have done something wrong, we have to pray and ask God to forgive us of that, so that He can give us mercy.

To contrast God's anger, human behavior [or, anger] is almost always inappropriate—at least for someone who does not have God's Holy Spirit. Today we are in an emotionally immature society, and it is not hard to find examples. Here are a few extreme examples of emotionally immature people succumbing to uncontrolled anger. I want to give you these examples because to see them in contrast to God's anger is just mind-boggling and amazing.

This first example is a fishing incident in Simcoe, Ontario, where 21-year-old Rawie Trotman was charged with stabbing a fellow angler in an argument over a worm. In another incident in Reading, Pennsylvania, 18-year-old Brian Hertzog was charged with shooting his sister (leaving her paralyzed below the waist) because she beat him in a wrestling match. In Carrollton, Texas, 52-year-old Deena Murdoch was charged with choking a fourth-grade boy because he sneaked a peak at her grade book. In Oakland, Michigan, an unidentified "big, blond" female customer was sought by police for allegedly punching out a 55-year-old female clerk at a Hudson's department store when the clerk rolled her eyes at the customer's request for a price check on a dress. "Don't you ever roll your eyes at me," were the last words the clerk recalled before being decked. (It is funny, and yet it is sad—is it not?)

And then the final example that I wanted to give to you, to contrast man's anger with God's: In Crown Point, Indiana, 82-year-old William Fagyas was charged with stabbing his 84-year-old wife, Eleanor, in the chest because, according to police, she "was not in the Christmas spirit." Now, of all of them, that one I believe; because there are more murders committed on Christmas than on any other day of the entire year. So, apparently, he was in "the Christmas spirit" by doing that.

Ecclesiastes 7:9 Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools.

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So whenever our anger develops and comes out, and we have lost control of it—remember, we are being **a fool** (at the very least). Human anger is often sparked by a threat to our own self-interests and usually results in bitter hostility. Technically speaking, anger is a response growing out of an interpretation of certain stimuli. It may produce a desire to respond, and that response is called **wrath**.

So, anger of itself is not sin. But if we allow anger to be 'out of control,' it becomes wrath, and that is when it begins to become sin. God has 'wrath;' but He does not sin, because He has it in the right way. We must determine if, how, and when we will respond to the stimuli—just as God does. But with God, the proper response is part of His character. So His proper response is automatic. And this is *a character attribute* God develops in those who obey Him. The emphasis is on obeying, because if we do not obey what God tells us, we cannot be emotionally mature.

To summarize anger as an emotion: "Anger is the emotion of instant displeasure and indignation arising from the feeling of injury done or intended, or from the discovery of offense against law." The anger attributed to God in the Bible is that part of God that stands opposed to man's disobedience, obstinacy, and sin. And it manifests itself in punishing man's rebellion. Anger is not "evil" per se—but an emotion that can instigate a wrong reaction. If anger were in itself sinful, how could God Himself be angry? But we know that God does get angry, because Scripture tells us so. But Paul commanded the Ephesians that, when angry, they were not to sin.

Ephesians 4:26 Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath.

Someone once said (and this is a great quote, although I do not know who said it), "Staying angry is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die." Anger becomes *sinful* when it rises too soon and without careful consideration. It is *wrongly used* (1) when the injury that ignites it is only apparent; (2) when it is disproportionate to the offense; (3) when it is transferred from the guilty to the innocent; and (4) when it is 'long drawn out' and becomes revengeful.

Matthew 5:21-22 You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders shall be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be in danger of hell fire.

I wanted to zero in on anger without a cause is sin, and we should avoid it at all costs.

Let us take a look at emotion in religion for a moment. Of all the phases of life, there is none in which emotional immaturity is more apparent than in religion. People are prone to go to extremes. Either they deliberately work up their emotions to a frenzy, or they make their religion wholly mental expression (restraining their emotions entirely). Paul warned Timothy of this problem, and did not mince any words in attacking it.

I Timothy 4:1-9 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God has created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine, which you have carefully followed. But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.

So, "in the latter times" there will be profane and vain wives' tales, and babblings, and so on. We cannot listen to those because, eventually, they will stir up anger. We have to look to God. And part of being godly is to have control of our emotions (especially our anger).

Many people—usually the more illiterate, or at least the less educated—follow religions that are almost totally emotional. In their meetings, the preachers say nothing that is thought provoking, but only that which is emotionally arousing. They do not teach or instruct, but are there to generate unrestrained emotion. It is almost like a pep rally in high school. All of us have been in high school before, and you remember that the whole purpose of that pep rally was to stir up the emotions to such a frenzy that you would willing to go out and do anything almost (including get out there with the football team and run the ball). But that is how it is designed, and that is how many of these religions are—the ones that stir up emotion.

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They ask the congregations questions like "Does Jesus love you the way you are?" And it is echoed by a thunderous "Amen" and "Hallelujah!" The main job of the preacher [in those churches] is to generate euphoria in uncontrolled emotions, until the whole congregation is out of control in a frenzy of fanatical enthusiasm. Then there are the more quiet emotional sects, but who also accept the counterfeit of sentimentality and emotion (for deep spirituality). Mainstream Christianity usually accepts one extreme or the other—of *emotion* or *the lack of emotion* in the place of *real, true spirituality*. But emotion is **not** spirituality! For human beings, emotion is a physical reaction.

While a certain emotional reaction should naturally follow true and deep spiritual experience, nevertheless it is a physical reaction from that experience, and it is not, in itself, spiritual experience. Human emotion is produced by the nervous system of the physical, fleshly body. It is, therefore "of the flesh" and not "of the Spirit." The Holy Spirit of God is not given to anyone who merely "**feels spiritual**" or becomes emotional in religious worship. Even the pagans experience emotion in their worship of the antichrist deities. A prime example of this was seen in the news yesterday, when the Palestinians were up in arms and emotionally psyched up—ready to die or blow themselves up, in order to satisfy, not spirituality, but to satisfy drummed up extreme out-of-control emotion.

You remember the incident when the apostles were put in prison by the high priest; and, at night, an angel came and let them out of the prison. Then, early the next morning, they entered into the temple and taught. When the high priest sent for them and they were not to be found, he got quite angry. The guards were even still standing by the doors. And he was not angry because they were actually gone, but because of the stir that it would cause among the people.

Acts 5:25-29 So one came and told them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people!" Then the captain went with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, "Did not we strictly command you that you should not teach in this name? And, look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood upon us!" But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men."

When a physical human being has anger against us—no matter what that anger is, or what they are going to do to us—we have to obey God rather than men. If we do obey

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God (rather than men) and we keep His commandments, we will not have immature anger. We will not have emotional immaturity.

Acts 5:30-32 "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him has God exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so is also the Holy Spirit, which God has given to those who obey Him."

So, in order to be *emotionally mature* and to be *spiritually mature*, we have to have God's Holy Spirit. That Holy Spirit is given to them who **obey**.

Most mainstream Christian churches mistake the ***emotional counterfeit*** for *genuine spirituality*, and preach that "God's law is done away." They preach a doctrine of salvation "without works," meaning "without obedience to God" or to God's law. They preach a feel-good religion of emotion only with total disregard for keeping the Ten Commandments. But no one is a *real Christian* unless he has received and is being led (in obedience to God's law) by the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:9-13 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit that dwells in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Of course, part of "mortifying the deeds of the body" involves getting rid of emotional immaturity.

Romans 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.

So the Holy Spirit in us is the love of God, which is the only love that fulfills God's law! In Romans 5, Paul says:

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Romans 5:5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which was given to us.

Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of a sound mind.

II Timothy 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear; but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

True spirituality, therefore, is **sound mindedness** because true spirituality can come only from the Spirit of God within us. True spirituality is rational. Rational means reasonable. To be "rational" or "reasonable" requires self-control. On the other hand, true spirituality is not mere mental religion divorced from all feeling and emotion. There are the purely mental religions that do not even believe in the Holy Spirit of God. So just being in mental control of emotions is not enough.

Emotional maturity does not mean "emotionless" maturity, any more than it means uncontrolled emotion. The truly emotionally mature are Spirit-guided by sound Spirit-mindedness—by God's Word. And the emotions are controlled, but not anesthetized. The emotionally mature *do* express enthusiasm, joy, and happiness. They *do* feel and express gratitude, reverence, and adoration in their worship of God. They *do* feel and express compassion, mercy, and sympathy.

God is Spirit, and they that worship **must** worship Him *in Spirit* and *in truth*. [John 4:24] We cannot worship in truth without understanding God's Word with a sound mind. But this kind of worship is not devoid of feeling and resultant emotional expression. Even though the emotion is a physical reaction, it does in fact accompany (or, react to) true experience. The emotionally mature *will* properly express sympathy in a very sincere manner—from the heart. They *will* express on occasion (at the proper time) sorrow, anguish, and compassion. And they *will* also express happiness, enthusiasm, and zeal. Their happiness is overflowing, and that is called **joy!**

The emotionally mature combine the controlled expression of emotion with physical health and an educated mind that is Spirit-led. Emotional maturity develops hand-in-hand with physical, mental, and spiritual growth. The end result is that emotional maturity and spiritual growth blend into the *perfect spiritual character* God intends for us to become. Emotional maturity and spiritual growth result in **spiritual maturity!**

Let us take a look at spiritual maturity a little more deeply. The effect of a full knowledge

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of the Word of God and its correct application in everyday life—which includes emotional control—is spiritual maturity. Jesus included an important illustration regarding Christian maturity in the Parable of the Sower. In Luke 8, Jesus tells of optimum spiritual growth—from initial reception of God's truth to loyal membership in the church. He warns that those who become overly concerned with their material goods, and other affairs of this present age, will **not** bear mature "fruit"—such as self-control. There is no such thing as spiritual maturity without self-control. Let us read Christ's explanation of the Parable of the Sower.

Luke 8:11-14 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear: then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for awhile, and in time of temptation fall away. And the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.

So we can be called into God's church and begin to grow; but then be choked by the cares of this world, which puts us right back into emotional immaturity.

Luke 8:15 But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bring fruit with patience.

And we know that patience requires a great deal of self-control. In I Corinthians 2 and 3, Paul uses a child-adult metaphor as his basis for exhorting the Corinthian Christians to have mature conduct. These scriptures must be understood in relation to the various problems that the Corinthian church was having at that time. They were not acting like Christians at all! There was sexual immorality, false doctrines, envy, strife, and division and other sins within the congregation. The Corinthian church, as a whole, was emotionally and spiritually *immature*.

I Corinthians 2:6-11 However we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages to our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified

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the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them unto us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

So we cannot have spiritual maturity without the Spirit of God.

I Corinthians 2:12-14 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Those things of emotional maturity are spiritually discerned.

I Corinthians 2:15-16 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no man. For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

I Corinthians 3:1-3 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, even as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; [Because they were emotionally immature; and, as a result, also spiritually immature.] for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now are you still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal, and walk as men?

Here in I Corinthians 2, Paul speaks of Christian wisdom—that is, the mystery of salvation, formerly hidden but now revealed to true Christians by the Spirit of God. This wisdom is from God and is not the worldly rhetoric that was popular among the Corinthians at that time. In mainstream Christianity today, that is exactly what we see. We see human rhetoric, rather than the ministry (of mainstream Christians) directing the

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people to God—to obedience, and repentance, and so on.

In verse 6, the word "perfect" in the King James Version (and "mature" in the New King James) refers to those who **competently discern** the doctrinal and spiritual matters of God's way of life.

The actions of the Corinthians were typical of "babes in Christ." They were no longer *natural* people—because they believed in Christ and were incorporated into His Body. But neither were they mature *spiritual* people—because they squabbled about leadership in their congregation. Paul addressed them as ***immature babies, spiritually.***

I was going to read I Corinthians 14:3-20, but you can just put that in your notes. It also talks about the proper conduct of a Christian—and how to be emotionally mature and, later, spiritually mature. In a similar way as to how Paul spoke to the Corinthians, the author of Hebrews chides his readers for being immature children, still living on milk. In contrast, those who eat "solid food" are the mature—those described as able to "distinguish good from evil."

Hebrews 5:12-14 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk, and not solid food. For every one who partakes of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age [and who are emotionally mature, and who are maturing spiritually], those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

So, in order to be emotionally mature and spiritually mature, what we learn of God's truth and God's way has to be *lived*. And we have to live it seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. "Weekend Christians" are not emotionally mature, and neither are they spiritually mature. In fact, "weekend Christians" are not Christians.

In Philippians 3:11-15, Paul speaks of those who have attained maturity and describes his ministerial effort to attain conformity with Christ. In I John 1, we see that an absolute state of maturity is *not* possible in this present evil age, with these fleshly bodies. Nowhere in the New Testament does maturity imply sinless perfection.

I John 1:8-10 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not

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sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

In Colossians 1 and 2, Paul made it clear that his objective, and that of those who ministered with him, was to bring every member of the church **to maturity**. This was to be brought about by the proclamation of Christ, by admonition, and by teaching all God's way of life involves.

Colossians 2:1-8 For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you, and for those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. As you have therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk you in Him, rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

Again, we are warned there by Paul to beware of the philosophy of this world. If a minister teaches not from the Word of God—from the holy Scriptures—and if he preaches from his own mind, then he is a false minister and should not be believed. Or if he teaches after the traditions of men—as many religions have traditions of men that supersede what is said in God's Word. So we are to avoid those, as Paul tells us here.

Colossians 2: 9-10 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

So, if we are in Christ, obeying God's truth and God's Word, then we are complete only by being in Him. And a major part of that completeness is spiritual maturity. The doctrinal knowledge necessary for maturity is not like the intellectual mastery of mysterious formulas that Gnosticism proclaimed as the way of salvation during the time of Paul, and that is still being proclaimed today. Rather, this knowledge is a developing of our understanding of God's truth, and is thoroughly Christ-centered—because we

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mature in Christ, not away from Him or apart from Him.

Our knowledge of God's way of life is not only *intellectual*, but also *experiential and personal*. We walk "in Christ" and are rooted and built up in Him. Paul was speaking of an ongoing process of growth through daily experience and assimilation of God's truth as we experience living God's way of life. Emotional and spiritual maturity prevents deception by false teachers, who promise forgiveness and perfection through philosophical and other worldly means. In Ephesians, Paul taught that God has given His ministers the task of helping the church become complete in spiritual maturity. This cannot be done if the church has a problem with emotional immaturity, as the Corinthians had.

Ephesians 4:11-15 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints [Or you could put in there "for the spiritual maturing of the saints" or "for the completing of the saints"], for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect [or, complete] man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but speaking the truth in love [Of course, that love is *agape love*.], may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.

Maturity is a goal desired for the Body of Christ, and is promoted by those who teach and proclaim Jesus Christ and His way of life. This cooperative ministering results in "the perfecting of the saints." In verse 12, the word **perfecting** is *katartismos* in the Greek. It means "the process of a fitting"—as you would if you had a tailor-made new dress or new suit that *perfectly fit*. And it also is used in the sense of *preparing fully*. Our conversion and spiritual maturing to be like Christ is a process in which we are fitted into Christ's spiritual Body. We are being tailor-made to fit and be prepared fully for our responsibilities in the Kingdom of God.

Not until we fully fit will the church be truly *unified in faith* and *completely mature* in the knowledge of the Son of God. Essential to our spiritual growth is *agape* type of love. It is significant that, in the New Testament, the idea of growth into maturity consistently related to obedience to the teaching of the apostles.

Christian maturity is the result of acquiring a comprehensive knowledge of Christ and

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His way of life, with the help of the Holy Spirit, through His ministry. Such knowledge prevents deception by false doctrine and enables us—with discernment and competence—to apply God's truth to everyday life. Unlike the lives of immature false Christians, the lives of mature true Christians (both in thought and in action) are always in accordance with biblical teaching. It is 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

We see this in the emotionally and spiritually mature life of Jesus Christ, when He was on the earth. He was a man of brilliant "emotional" colors. Jesus felt compassion. He was angry, indignant, and zealous. He was troubled, greatly distressed, very sorrowful, depressed, deeply moved, and grieved. He sighed. He wept, and He sobbed. He groaned. He was in agony. He was surprised, and He was amazed. He rejoiced greatly and was full of joy. He greatly desired. And He felt the effects of love and hatred.

In our quest to be like Jesus Christ, we often overlook the emotions He had while He was on earth. Jesus revealed what it means to be fully human and made in the image of God. His maturity reflected the image of God, without a deficiency or distortion. When we compare our own emotional lives to His, we become aware of our need for **a transformation** of our emotions and intellect—so that we can become fully Spirit, as God is!

To those who are truly filled with the Spirit of God, let the inspired words of the apostle Paul to the elect of God ring in your ears: "God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."—A mind that is emotionally and spiritually **mature!**