

# Wednesday with the Word

## Wheat Street Baptist Church

Pastor / Teacher: Rev. Ralph Basui Watkins, MFA, DMin, PhD

### What Does It Mean to Be a Mature Disciple of Jesus Christ?

#### **Vision:**

We exist to develop mature disciples of Jesus Christ who make a real difference in the world by actively seeking the love, justice, freedom, liberation and peace of God.

(Luke 4:18; Matthew 25:31-46; Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 1:16-20; Mark 6:30-44; Mark 7:1-23; Mark 9:33-37; Mark 10:13-16; Mark 12:41-44; Acts 1:6-11; Acts 2:14-21; Acts 2:43-47; Acts 4:23-37; Philippians 4:4-9)

#### **Mission:**

We are in union with God's work of liberation in the world. We reach outside the walls of the church to be the church. We are committed to innovation and change as God's calls us to reach and disciple people by doing ministry that makes a *real* difference 365 days a year. We get people closer to God, their community and God's will for their lives and the church by *keeping it real and relational*.

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#### **Our Core Values / Beliefs:**

1. We believe that God's Word is the authoritative guide for the work of God's church.
2. We believe that the Holy Spirit is alive and well and speaks to and through the church and we will be led by the Holy Spirit.
3. We believe that Jesus' model of a daily ministry of liberation is the model for ministry therefore we embrace it and practice it.
4. We believe that God is doing a work of liberation in the world and our goal is to hear God and be in line with the mission and work of God in the world.
5. We believe that forming mature disciples of Jesus Christ is the primary work of the church.
6. We believe in an open door and an open table, in that all people are welcomed at Wheat Street and they are eligible to serve, worship and give because they are created in the image of God.

What Does It Mean to Be a Mature Disciple of Jesus Christ?  
John 13:34-35

**34** “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. **35** By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Introduction: What does it mean to be a Christian? I don't want us to gloss over this question. When we assume we know the answer already, we don't take the question seriously.

What does it mean to be a Christian?

Is being a Christian something we do?

Is being a Christian about behavior or relationship?

How do we know we have a relationship with Jesus Christ?

What are the signs of being in a relationship with Jesus Christ?

Is being a Christian about what I do or how I love?

Is being a Christian about being in a loving, grace filled relationship with God, and I therefore love and serving others?

Is Christianity about doing or being?

I want to take this question seriously because I believe that Christians have been given a bad name. Our bad name is based on judgmental spirits who have made our faith about doing and not being. I want to argue tonight that being Christian is about being. It is about being in a loving salvific relationship with a loving God that calls us to love God, by loving and caring for others. It is out of this living relationship that we act. We act because we love and love, Godly love, Agape love is the basis of our actions.

What does it mean to be a Christian?

John 3:16-18

**16** “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

**17** “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. **18** Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

\*God loved

- \*God sent God's son
- \*Not condemn but to save
- \*We are saved by believing

So we see that God's motivation is not to condemn, or judge but to save. We as Christians, who believe in God, are not sent to condemn but to share the love of God so that others might be saved.

What does it mean to be a Christian?

Romans 10:5-10

**5** Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them." **6** But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) **7** "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). **8** But what does it say?

"The word is near you,  
on your lips and in your heart"

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); **9** because[a] if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **10** For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

\*It is not about abiding by the law or doing certain things

\*To be saved is to confess and believe that Jesus Christ is Lord & that God raised Jesus from the dead

\*Our relationship with Christ will shape and inform our behavior, life style and choice but it is not synonymous with who we are in Christ. Our being a Christian is not about behavior but rather it is about relationship with God, people and God's church.

When we confess what we believe, that Jesus Christ is Lord and that God raised Jesus from the dead, then we are Christians. We have entered a relationship with God and we are "saved." There are no additional actions required to enter into the relationship. The relationship has been established. The next question is, now that we are in that relationship, how do we grow up and become mature Christians?

"To be a Christian means we are in a loving, grace filled relationship with Jesus. We live under grace, not under law. It is not about behavior but relationship. It is out the foundation of this relationship that we live a life of love and service."

## **New Question: What does it mean to be a mature Christian?**

We are going to argue in part two of this lesson that our behavior is affected by us being in a relationship with Jesus. When we are rooted and maturing in a relationship with God the relationship should change us.

The deeper and more mature our relationship is with God the less people can manipulate us to be what they expect. When we know God and are grown up in God we will hear God's voice over the judgmental voice of misguided folk in the church and outside the church who want to make our faith a faith of dos and don'ts. When we know God, we hear God, and live up to God's standards for us and not folks misguided standards, that most of the time aren't biblically based. Christianity is not a behavioral modification program.

We look to Jesus to be like Jesus. We don't look at church folk. Church folk can sometimes judge you based on what you wear, Jesus never would. Church folk judge you on where you have been, Jesus never would. Church folk judge you on what service you attend, Jesus never would. When I say church folk, I am not necessarily saying they are Christians, what I am saying is that they attend church. Church attendance and participation no more makes you a Christians the same going to the doctor regularly doesn't make you a doctor.

If we look to Jesus, and know what Jesus was like, it would tell us what we should be like.

Philippians 2:1-11

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, **2** make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

**3** Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. **4** Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. **5** Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

**6**

who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,

**7**

but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

**8**

he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.

**9**

Therefore God also highly exalted him  
and gave him the name  
that is above every name,

**10**

so that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

**11**

and every tongue should confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

\*Jesus was about love and humility

\*Jesus acted out love, lived out of love, and loved as he lived

\*Christians, mature Christians, are humble, they are not selfish, they always think of others, are always trying to help others, they are always thinking about the bigger picture

\*They are concerned with being true the mission of God's church

What does it mean to be a mature Christian?

2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:5-11

For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, **6** and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, **7** and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love. **8** For if these things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. **9** For anyone who lacks these things is short-sighted and blind, and is forgetful of the cleansing of past sins. **10** Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more eager to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble. **11** For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you.

\*Are you adding?

How do you add? How do you grow your faith?

1. Try God?
2. Prayer
3. Study
4. Verse focus / Bible Character Study / Book Study
5. Solitude
6. Meditation
7. Serving
8. Giving – practicing the gift of generosity
9. Helping others
10. Fasting
11. Living your dream and call
12. Fellowshiping with saints who are serving God and going in the right direction
13. Personal devotion
14. Regularly participating in worship (attending does not equal participation)
15. Using your God given gift to it's fullest potential
16. Stretching yourself as God calls you to lead and do a new thing
17. Doing your old thing a new way
18. Etc.....

What is God looking for in mature Christians? When we get to heaven what is God going to ask us? God is looking for Christians who have grown in their faith to the point that they serve others, and are blessed in the serving, and don't expect to get credit from folk because they serve and don't even realize they are doing it. They are just acting in the context of the relationship.

Matthew 25:31-46

**31** "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. **32** All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, **33** and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. **34** Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; **35** for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, **36** I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' **37** Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you

something to drink? **38** And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? **39** And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' **40** And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family,[a] you did it to me.' **41** Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; **42** for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, **43** I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' **44** Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' **45** Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' **46** And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Who goes to heaven in this passage and who goes to hell?

Luke 10:27

**27** He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

1<sup>st</sup> John 4:7-21

**7** Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. **8** Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. **9** God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. **10** In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. **11** Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. **12** No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

**13** By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. **14** And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. **15** God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. **16** So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

**17** Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. **18** There is no fear in

love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. **19** We love because he first loved us. **20** Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. **21** The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

"Christians love and Christians act out of the loving relationship they have with God by loving others. The motivation for our acts is the love of God that moves us to love. "

Are you a Christian?

How do you know?

What do you look like?

Why do you do what you do?

Is love the guiding principle in your life?

How is your faith lived in your serving of others?

How does your faith look outside the walls of the church?