

Understanding People - Student Notes
Chapters 12 & 13: Maturity / Love & Conclusion

1. Some Biblical descriptions of Christian Maturity.

Several key scriptures come to my mind when I think about Christian maturity.

- 1) Conformed to the image of Christ - Romans 8:29. *A major purpose in our salvation. Maturity then is having a character that is becoming more like that of Jesus*
- 2) Hebrews 5:14 and 6:1 *both speak of maturity of having pressed on past the elementary teachings about the Christ and foundation of repentance from dead works and having faith in God being able to handle "solid food" - the more advanced teachings of the Scriptures that train our senses to discern good and evil.*
- 3) 1 Corinthians 2:6 *speaks of maturity in a context of a faith that rests on the power of God and wisdom revealed by the Spirit of God instead of that of man which is passing away.*
- 4) *In practical terms, maturity requires walking in the Spirit which will then be demonstrated by having a character that exhibits the fruit of the Spirit instead of the deeds of the flesh - Galatians 5:16-24. The flesh with its passions and desires are crucified and replaced with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*
- 5) *Jesus said that others will know we are His disciples if we have love for one another - John 13:34-35*
- 6) *Ephesians 4:13 speaks of maturity coming about in a context of a healthy body of Christ working properly with each individual working in harmony using their particular spiritual gifts and abilities to build itself up in love to attain a unity of faith, a knowledge of the Son of God, and able to protect itself from false doctrine*
- 7) *Paul's description of true spirituality in 1 Corinthians 12-14 is an expansion of what he says in Ephesians 4 about God gifting you with abilities, ministries and empowerment to work in humility and harmony with the rest of the body with love. Paul even gives a minimum definition of such mature Christian love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.*
- 8) Church Leader qualifications: 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9

2. Crabb's statements about evidence of Christian Maturity include:

1. *Mature Christians "**entice us to pursue** a God whom they know better than we." They should draw us to the Lord (194).*
2. *Maturity creates a growing awareness of our imperfection that drives us toward **dependency** on Christ (194).*
3. *Mature people are **not self-preoccupied** (194) "an unhealthy focus on oneself nourishes the arrogant presumption of self-sufficiency."*
4. *Maturity is most evident in the manner of relating including:*
 - A. *Abandonment of self-protection and **involvement** with others to encourage them to move toward God (pg 198).*
 - B. **Love**: *1 Corinthians 13 (but note that Crabb says that this is not "above-the-water-line activity." It is a love that is concerned about the welfare of other people above our own. pp. 196,197).*
 - C. *Love that is characterized by the **fruit of the spirit** and keeping the one another commands (197) - Crabb specifically lists "patient, kind, not envious, humble, sensitive, other-centered, slow to anger, quickly forgiving, haters of wrong, lovers of right, protective, trusting, hoping, persevering."*

3. Crabb's definition of Christian Maturity:

Crabb defines maturity according to his four circles - pages 199-200.

1. *Personal circle fullness - **longing toward ultimate satisfaction in God.***

2. *Rational Circle fullness -*

*R-2, regards self as unworthy of being loved by God, but also recognizing **dignity** as an image bearer by accepting God's love and cooperating with His purposes.*

*R-1, believing that there is **no other way** than Christ.*

3. *Volitional circle fullness -*

*V-2, **life is in Christ**, so demands nothing from life but strives to love God and others,*

*V-1, **behaves** in a manner consistent with that goal of love.*

4. *Emotional Circle: **Acknowledges emotions** and uses them to grow deeper in all the other circles. pp. 199,200.*

4. Crabb's contrast of two models for developing character.

A. "Acquisition/performance Model" (pp 204-205)

*"Character develops **without** directly working on the hidden issues below the water line" (p. 204). Crabb's perception of this model is that its stress is on the acquisition of knowledge and conformity to behavioral standards.*

*Its dangers are **conformity** to behavioral standards without a corresponding heart attitude. That is the foundation of legalism. It also can result in an academic Christianity in which people know about God but do know Him personally to be dependent upon Him. It also can result in people remaining isolated for fear of exposure of the hidden evils of their hearts - keeping up the facade of godliness defined by their behavior will not allow them to expose what they are really thinking and feeling.*

B. "Character Through Community"

"The study of people's relational patterns as observed in actual practice becomes the focus in an effort to promote repentance of self-protective patterns and to drive us to dependency on God . . ." (pg 205). Crabb also states that "Character fault is properly defined as a pattern of relating designed to protect oneself from more personal pain" (pp 205).

*The result is that Crabb **requires** personal interaction to expose things "below-the-water-line" as the essential means to character development - Christian Maturity. This model promotes exposure of defensive maneuvering of self-protection and their underlying unmet longings so that there can be meaningful repentance to cling to the Lord as the only hope in the midst of unresolved pain (pg. 206)*

C. Crabb's Summary (pg. 206).

*"It is my conviction that the **Acquisition/performance Model** leads at best to a love corrupted by unnoticed defensiveness and leads at best to a love corrupted by unnoticed defensiveness and lacking a presence that draws others to the person of Christ"*

*"The **Character Through Community** model has the potential to deepen a person's awareness of his weakness and dependence in a way that slowly frees him more and more from self-protective patterns of relating and increases a sense of presence that grows only through intimate communion with the Lord."*

5. The Essence of Maturity

*Crabb defines Godly character as "**confidence** in God that one day things will be as they should be" (p. 207). This requires that (1) "the reality of unfulfilled longings is deeply felt*

now,” and (2) “our inability to find satisfaction on our own is painfully admitted” (p. 207). Or stated another way. Increasing maturity directly corresponds to increasing dependence upon God. This requires honest exposure and acknowledgment of error or lack in any of the four circles to bring about repentance from all forms of self-reliance so that life is lived in a loving relationship of trust and dependence upon God purposed to glorify Him.

6. Some of the ways as revealed in the Scriptures that Christian character is developed
 - A. Salvation through the gospel of Jesus Christ: 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:4-6
Indwelling of the Holy Spirit: John 16:7-14; Romans 8
 - B. Prayer and Confession: Psalm 32; 51; 139:23-24; James 5:16; 1 John 1:9
 - C. Trials of life : James 1:2-4, Romans 5:2-5; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Psalm 119:67, 71
 - D. God’s chastening: Hebrews 12:4-11; Psalm 119:75; Psalm 89:30-33
 - E. The Word of God: Psalm 19:7-11; Psalm 119; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12
 - F. Knowledge of Christ & pursuing it: 2 Peter 1:2-8; Ephesians 4:13; Colossians 1:16
 - G. Walk by the Spirit: Galatians 5:16-26
 - H. Being a living sacrifice and renewing our minds: Romans 12:1-2
 - I. Putting off the old man and putting on the new: Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:5-10, 12-14
 - J. True Christian Fellowship: Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12-14; Heb. 10:24; the “one another” verses

7. A critique Crabb’s model of counseling - Pro & Con.

PRO: *Larry Crabb’s model of counseling has been called the “most Biblical” to date by some, but others claim that there is very little Biblical in it. These opponents would cite the fact that many of Crabb’s ideas are very similar to the theories of secular psychology.*

In Crabb’s favor, it must be said that he has made a sincere effort to be Biblical. He also freely acknowledges the inherent danger of a man trained in psychology to come up with a Biblical model simply because so much more study has been done in psychology rather than Biblical data (EBC, 48). Crabb puts forth his model as an attempt to move Biblical Counseling forward and he invites comment from others and strives to learn from them (UP, 14-15). In his books and in personnel discussion, Crabb treats other “Biblical Counselors” with Christian love - never contempt, even if attacked by them.

Crabb is trying to walk the fence between those who accept Psychology with little regard as to its truthfulness and those who reject anything tainted with anything to do with psychology. Crabb seems to put psychological research in the same realm as natural sciences - man attempting to understand his world. With that in view, there may or may not be helpful things from psychology, but it always must be checked against the truth of Scripture. Crabb does succeed at this in some respects.

The major benefit of Crabb’s model is that it does show humans to be complex creatures that behave in many different ways without understanding why they may behave in such ways. My belief is that there is a hidden part of man that is “below-the-water-line.” This would be that “inner man.” The man seen so well in Romans 7 in Paul’s struggle with the “evil principle” within him. Why does he do the very things he does not want to do? Crabb’s model does take people into that area of hidden attitudes and beliefs that eventually come out in their behavior. Crabb’s model does show the necessity of repentance that is more than regret for behavior. Repentance also deals with turning from wrong ideas of God as well as wrong thoughts and attitudes (see the Sermon on the Mount). Crabb’s concept of the four circles is a handy way to grasp onto how people function - especially the Rational, Volitional and Emotional circles. The personal circle as a driving force is accurate, but the nature of that driving force could use greater discussion.

EFC = Effective Biblical Counseling

UP = Understanding People

CON: *Crabb's model does include a lot of psychological thought with some of it not sufficiently screened by Biblical truth. In addition, there are times that Crabb's exegesis leaves a lot to be desired (but then again, so does the exegesis of so called "Bible scholars.") There are several of his ideas in which it seemed obvious that he searched the Bible to find something that would agree with him (i.e. "spoiling the Egyptians"). The Scriptures used to support the "unconscious" should be augmented by better ones to bring out the idea. His use of Proverbs 23:7 seems strained and his idea should be given greater support by other Scriptures.*

The greatest weakness I see in all of Crabb's work is that he does not deal sufficiently with all variety of ways in which God works on the heart of a human to transform him into the image of Christ. In his defense, he is primarily writing about the nature of people and God's use of people in the lives of other people to bring about maturity (true Christian fellowship, the practice of the "one another" commands, etc.). This is the third book in a series on basics of Biblical Counseling beginning with Basic Principles of Biblical Counseling and Effective Biblical Counseling. However, since his introduction speaks to the broader topic, then there should be at least a chapter that briefly discusses the many ways in which God has revealed that He transforms man from sinner to godly saint. I have listed many of these above in #6. Crabb's concentration is so much on how God can (and does) use humans in the process that these many other very important factors in bringing about maturity are overlooked. The result is a definition of Christian maturity that is good, yet lacks, and an unbalanced view of how maturity comes about. This may be partially due to Crabb writing as a reaction to the other things (Bible study, memorization, exhortation and service) and being done improperly.

Another weakness is that one might get the impression that a Christian must have a "trained" counselor to deal with all the "hidden issues" in order to become a mature Christian, but that is not true. A trained counselor can at best can only speed up the process by exposing sin, exhortation to correct thinking and encouragement to responding in godliness. In his defense, in his book, Encouragement: Key to Caring, Crabb does advocate healthy church body life in which informal counseling is a normal part of Christians interacting with each other in striving to help one another walk with Christ. "Trained" counselors are helpful, but professionals are not required. However, it is still weak in pointing out the many diverse ways in which God brings about godliness in His people.

I also think that Crabb's discussion of the personal circle was weak. He may have done better by talking about what theologians used to call the "God shaped vacuum" rather than need for relationship, and to talk about the eternal nature of man rather than "need" for impact. This opened him up justifiably to criticism that he had fallen into "need" theology. This could have then been framed more according to the purposes for which God has created man and His design of how man is to function than in terms of what man "needs" or desires which sounds closer to man centered theology instead of God centered theology. I do not believe Crabb is promoting a man centered theology since his counseling system is consistently pushing man to be dependent upon God and defines maturity in terms of dependence upon God.