

## ACT YOUR AGE!



**FRIENDS, DO NOT BE CHILDREN IN UNDERSTANDING; IN MALICE BE BABES, BUT IN UNDERSTANDING BE MATURE. 1 Corinthians 14:20**

**ALL THAT IS NECESSARY FOR EVIL TO TRIUMPH IS FOR GOOD PEOPLE TO STAND BACK AND DO NOTHING.**

*Scripture:*

**Hebrews 6**

*Let us never grow weary of doing good*

1. Let us stop going over the same old ground again and again, always teaching those first lessons about Christ. Let us go on instead to other things and become mature in our understanding, as strong Christians ought to be. Surely we don't need to speak further about the foolishness of trying to be saved by being good, or about the necessity of faith in God;
2. you don't need further instruction about baptism and spiritual gifts and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.  
... I am confident you are producing the good fruit that comes along with your salvation.
10. For God is not unfair. How can God forget your hard work for the Lord or forget the way you used to show your love for God -- and still do -- by helping his children?
11. And we are anxious that you keep right on loving others as long as life lasts, so that you will get your full reward.
12. Then, knowing what lies ahead for you, you won't become weary with being a Christian, nor become spiritually dull and indifferent, but you will be anxious to follow the example of those who receive all that God has promised them because of their strong faith and patience.

**Isaiah 40**

*On eagles' wings*

30. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;
31. but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.



## **NOT GOOD ENOUGH TO GET ANGRY – ARNOLD PALMER ANECDOTE**

Thanks to Marv Stark who told me the story of an amateur golfer who was playing a round of golf with Arnold Palmer. The amateur golfer hit several poor shots, and after quite a few holes, he was getting more and more angry with his game. Finally, the amateur golfer missed a short putt and swore repeatedly at his putter and everything else in his bag, cursing the bad luck he was having.

Arnold Palmer looked at the frantic man and said, “Just relax and enjoy the game. You’re just not good enough to get angry.”

That’s true about a lot of things that get us stirred up. Sometimes what we really lack is the skill or the knowledge to do something. We don’t know enough to be angry. But rather than admit it, people convert ignorance to hostility, not improvement and understanding. (I’m sure that you are relieved to know that I’m not talking about you.)

We will come back to the gospel according to Arnold Palmer in a moment. The Apostle Paul said the same thing to the Corinthians.

**“FRIENDS,  
DO NOT BE CHILDREN IN UNDERSTANDING;  
IN MALICE BE BABES,  
BUT IN UNDERSTANDING BE MATURE.”**

**1 Corinthians 14:20**

### **ACT YOUR AGE**

So Paul challenged the Corinthians to “act your age.” This lesson is not about years, it is about maturity – mature faith combined with a reasonable amount of knowledge. So that makes this a difficult lesson.

Why? Because industries spend billions of dollars trying to help us look and act like we are some other age. They want us to buy make up to make us look younger, or products to create poufy hair to make us look older or more beautiful. Some people began smoking at an early age so that they would be seen as adults, while others work hard to quit so that they will live longer.

How much advertising can you think of that is

aimed at making people think they are something that they are not?

What people look like does not determine the quality of their thinking. For example: When a Hollywood star like Mel Gibson comes under stress, we find that he is not the great professor that he pretends to be. He’s anti-Semitic. When a beautiful model opens her mouth, suddenly the illusion of perfection is shattered.

You’ve heard someone say to a child, “Act your age,” in an attempt to curb inappropriate bad behavior. Can you imagine a 2 year old acting like ... a two year old! Some adults need to hear this too.

### **BENEFITS OF MATURITY**

There are great benefits to spiritual maturity and one of them is that we get to make decisions based upon the accumulation of past experiences. Often these are better decisions later in life. When you listen to what the past has taught, you can learn to be more patient, loving, and respectful (and much more). However, as evidenced in the book of Hebrews, sometimes people get stuck at a particular maturity level and don’t seem to grow at all.

No matter how long you’ve been reading the Bible, there is always more to learn. I have heard people tell me that they struggle to believe in the God they learned about in Sunday School. Well, I hope so! Children need concrete images; maturity requires a bit of abstract thinking that sees God in love, peace, reconciliation, and hope – like the story we told to the children this morning.

### **SO WHAT IS MATURE FAITH?**

#### **◆ KNOWLEDGE -- the more I learn the more I don’t know**

Life doesn’t slow down as we mature; indeed it seems to accelerate. Every time we explore God’s Word, we come from a slightly different place emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. That changing perspective can lead to exciting new insights about God and what it means to live a life of faith. Immature Christians say, “I already know it all.” Mature Christians say, “The more I learn, the more I discover how much I don’t know.”

Let me be blunt. There is far more we don’t know about God’s world than we do know. Spiritual humility before God is the beginning of mature faith.

Mature Christians know that acceptance of and love for others doesn't mean you endorse everything they believe. But maturity makes you listen. Mature faith seeks understanding, but not polarization and staking out territory.

◆ **PATIENCE – be diligent in study, patient with God**

Patience is probably the most important ingredient in developing spiritual maturity. While there are ways to speed up your acquisition of knowledge, knowing what to do with that knowledge can take time. If you want to grow spiritually, be diligent in study, and patient with God.

◆ **ANGER – it only shows our own limitations**

Why did we begin with the Arnold Palmer story now? He's no theologian. Because most of us don't know enough about God to be mad at God. Most of us do not know enough about people who live in other parts of the world to be angry with them. We only show our own parochialism when we expect our standards to be the model for everyone else. God's zip code is not 95405 – nor is it USA, nor the Middle East, nor anywhere else you have visited. We don't know enough about God to use God's name to support our own narrow-mindedness and intolerance. We don't know enough about God to use God's name in vain.

◆ **TRANSCENDENT RELIGION -- the human response to the mysteries of God**

I'm a school teacher. I've never stopped being one. One of the classes that I taught was World Religions. We would always begin that class in search of a definition of religion. Here's one of the best we came up with:

**RELIGION IS OUR HUMAN RESPONSE TO THE MYSTERIES OF GOD.**

Why are there so many different religions? Because people have different mysteries. They live in different places. In Alaska the mysteries are different than they are in Los Angeles. In the desert the mysteries are different than in the redwood forests.

But God is one. God transcends all human conditions. And so we respond to God in different ways, because our needs are different.

## LOVING GOD

Not only do most of us not know enough about God to be mad at God, we don't know enough about God to even love God. We need to get smarter than we are. Read, study, discuss, and then turn your discontent into something constructive. Turn anger into acts of love. It's a goal worth attempting.

*Friends, do not be children in understanding; in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.*

Only be a child in expressing a small malice, but in understanding be mature.

## SO ACT YOUR AGE

- If you want to get your way, use a little psychology.
- If you want to get along with others, do a little reading before you do a little speaking.
- If we want to get along with people on the other side of the world, visit their country, read about their religion, understand their culture, and hear their ancestral stories.

We don't know enough to be mad about them.

They don't know enough about us to get mad at us either, not that it matters.

## WHY DO THEY HATE US?

Remember what we were asking five years ago – after 9/11?

We said, "Why do they hate us?"

And some of us were very self righteous and said that there is nothing about our country to hate. We are a beacon of hope to everyone.

But now we say, maybe not.

We don't always live up to that self image.

Not everyone is buying our self image.

And so our last defense is maybe they don't know enough about us to hate us, but what we fear is that maybe they do.

This is a good scripture lesson for us today. I've never thought Rev. Arnold Palmer was much of a theologian, but then I don't know him that well. Maybe Arnold Palmer could teach me something. Maybe I'm not good enough to get mad.

So I'm going to use my education, psychology, patience, love, mediation, business skills, parenting skills, and try to get better. I've learned some of these things and they work.

This is not a lesson about age or anger, it is a lesson about getting better. We don't get better when we cut off the dialog. Recognizing that is maturity.

### **AND HOW GOOD IS THAT?**

Not quite good enough, but getting better.

Religion is the human response to the mysteries of God. Explore some of those mysteries, those skills you know you have, and those ideas you don't know, and when you do, you won't want to be angry with God. You will want to fall in love with God all over again. Remember the first time you fell in love? When you did, you remembered that God is the source of that feeling. You can do it again. Just like the first time, only better.



### **RELIGION IS ABOUT GETTING BETTER**

Religion is about getting better.

But I think we may have missed the point of the Gospel according to Arnold. The first thing he said is **“relax and enjoy the game.”**

- **We are good enough to keep learning,**
- **We are good enough to reach out the hand of friendship to anyone.**
- **We are good enough to have an opinion about politics.**
- **We are good enough to care for children,**
- **to reach out to the bereaved,**
- **to make a hospital visit,**
- **to cook breakfast for the kids at Montgomery High School.**
- **We are good enough to worship together.**

**We are good enough to be loved by God.**

**You're good enough, and you're getting better every day.**

**So act your age.**

**Dr. John H. Cushman  
Presbyterian Church of the Roses  
2500 Patio Court  
Santa Rosa, CA 95405  
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