

CHILDHOOD AND MATURITY

“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.” (1 Cor 13:11)

Little children are reasonably easy to understand and control. They have only a limited vocabulary and usually say only what we tell them to. Often they repeat words like a parrot without understanding what they are saying. We can put little children in a play pen with the confidence that they cannot escape. They are also often quite transparent. They have not yet learned to mask their feelings behind a veneer of respectability. Usually parents can anticipate what little children are going to say and do.

As children grow older, however, they become harder to predict and control. They learn to climb out of their play pens and put words together in sentences of their own. Now we are not sure what they are going to say or do. Before, they were only repeating our words and ideas. Now they can articulate ideas of their own.

The spiritual application of this principle is obvious. As young and immature believers we “talk like a child”. We speak as we are spoken to. We repeat words and phrases that have come from the minds of others. Our thinking and reasoning also mirror the convictions of our spiritual parents. Often we are not certain what we believe until we ask.

With maturity, however, we develop the ability to speak, think, and reason on our own. This maturity creates a real problem for many denominations. This is why religious leaders often fear inquiring minds. They want their followers to only repeat like a child what they are told. Roman Catholics, for example, try to control their spiritual children by means of an infallible interpreter. In 1870, when Europe was ablaze with individual thought, the Roman Catholic Church officially proclaimed the infallibility of the pope. Roman Catholics are now duty bound to think like children. They are not permitted to speak, think, or reason on their own once the pope had spoken.

Protestants attempted to solve the same problem by means of an “infallible interpretation”. Each sect devised a creed that was not to be challenged. The leaders of the sect determined what their followers were permitted to believe and everyone else had to accept it or leave.

Jesus, however, solves this dilemma in a much different way. He created a family where little children and mature people could live and worship together in complete harmony. He did this by placing his Seed within each new convert. Those who are thus “born again” are partakers of His Spirit. Since family members are invariably at different levels of maturity they are held together, not by intellectual conformity, but by love.

In the framework of God’s family we are not only encouraged to think on our own, we are commanded to do so. Note: **“Do not put out the Spirit’s fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.” (1Thes 5:19-22)** In the early church there were many “prophets” who traveled the world with a wide variety of messages. Believers are not to “quench” the Spirit or treat prophetic utterances with contempt. We are commanded, however, to “test everything”. Like an assayer tests samples of ore, we are to test prophetic utterances. We are to hold on to everything that is good and avoid the evil.

Once in the family of God, it is not easy to get out. To escape from His family we must deliberately trample the loving work of Christ, His Spirit, His holy angels, and other members of the family. This does not happen because we have inadvertently entertained a thought that no one else has had, but because we have made a deliberate decision to reject Christ. The words “false teachers” are found only one time in the Bible, 2 Peter 2:1. Note that the “false teachers” are not merely men with novel ideas, but those who deny our Sovereign Lord. The denial of Christ also rears its ugly head in a profligate life style. We are not to eat with those who openly and defiantly commit fornication and other acts of rebellion against Christ (1 Cor. 5:11). By their own malicious conduct they have severed themselves from Christ and have fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4).

So don’t be intimidated or afraid to think, for our Loving Heavenly Father actually wants us to grow to maturity and put away childish things!