

In Understanding be Men

By Paris Reidhead*

Now, please to I Corinthians 14. This is an important chapter, and it's one where I should like to read a great portion, but I believe that just a few verses will be sufficient. Verse 20:

“Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men. In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe. If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth. How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying. If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. What? came the Word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you, are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant. Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order” (I Cor. 14:20-40).

IN UNDERSTANDING, BE MEN. The very statement of this theme implies that we begin in the Christian life not as men, but as children. How glad we ought to be that this is the case. What a sad thing it would be if parents were to take a whip and drive the infant from the cradle in its helplessness out into some kind of service that they can expect to support the family. You are born as a babe. You are born of the Spirit of God into the family of God, as a babe in Christ. We all begin the same way. Whether our education be as limited as that of Peter, or extensive as that of Paul, we all enter the Christian life by identically the same means that we entered the physical life. We were born as babes; we are born as babes in Christ. This birth is an impartation of life, a registering of life, of relating life to us, a life which is on an entirely new level, of an entirely new kind, which must be nourished, and God has provided milk for the nourishing of this life, the Word of God as it pertains to repentance and faith, the forgiveness of sins, pardon from past transgressions. And the meat of God whereby we are established in Christ, and strengthen in the Word, and brought to that place that the Word calls mature, or perfect in Christ Jesus. Now being born as babes is a wonderful thing. To remain as a babe through prolonged spiritual pilgrimage is a heart-breaking thing to God, and to the church. There ought to be in every one of us a deep desire to grow up into Christ. I believe that unless this has been extinguished by sin, or by spiritual malnutrition, in everyone that has partaken of Heaven's life, there is a hunger for heaven's reality and for the presence of God. This is as normal as a child in the family becoming periodically and regularly insistent upon being fed. If you are born of God there is a hunger in your heart for God and a longing to grow up in Christ. This is natural, is to be expected, unless you have been tampered with somewhere along the way and have been told that all there is in the Christian life for you is pardon, and a persistence of failure and spiritual immaturity. Just as God puts into the heart of the little girl deep desire to stand as mother stands and work as mother works, and be as mother is to her, so God puts into everyone born into His family a desire to be like Jesus. The one who wrote the little song, “Be like Jesus, this my song, in the home and in the throng. Be like Jesus all day long,”¹ was simply echoing the cry of everyone that is born of God.

1 “I Would Be Like Jesus” By James Rowe

So, to be born, marvelous. To be born well insures a good start in the Christian life. How my heart aches for those that were not well born, that did not have the kind of preaching. You see, it is quite possible for one to have partaken of life without having partaken of truth, and obviously God is going to meet the needy heart on whatever level that heart is prepared to take of Christ. So the measure of your faith and your desire becomes the measure and the limit of your receiving. And I have seen in the past those that have had the simplest, easiest entrance into forgiveness of sins and pardon. All that happened was, they heard that Christ died and was risen from the dead, and He died for them. And they received Him. And there is evidence to believe that they were pardoned and forgiven and became partakers of His life. But you see the fact was they had never seen themselves. They had seen Christ, but they had not seen themselves. And so, before it was possible for them to grow on into Christ, and up into Christ, somewhere down the way God had to bring them into that experience of self-revelation. This is always a painful thing. Normally I think it precedes the sense of forgiveness. But just about the time we establish a pattern and say this is the way God works, God demonstrates that He is sovereign even of our formulae, and He does it just the opposite. So we are happy about that. Always remember this. So if you are born of God, dear heart, it makes no difference to me whether you're coming to Him was the formula that I might see as normal or not. Just rejoice and be exceeding glad.

But the fact still remains that somewhere along the line, if you are to become a mature Christian, you are going to have to see yourself. You are going to have to see yourself in His eyes. This is painful. It is excruciatingly painful. For it was usually our experience to see what we have done, and this causes us consternation, concern, grief, conviction, and God has to show us what we are. And so this requires being cornered in certain circumstances and under preaching and truth, and I have seen in many cases, where people that had a sense of forgiveness at one point in their pilgrimage made very little spiritual progress until they were cornered by truth and teaching and forced to see themselves, because it is apparently necessary that before we can want something we had to see the need for it. And if all that you wanted when you came to Christ was pardon from what you had done, you received all that you asked for and all that you wanted when you received forgiveness.

But you see, it's one thing for you to want and another thing for God to want for you. And the mature person isn't the one who has all he wants in Christ, but he's the one that has all that God wants him to have in Christ. And God doesn't only want us to have security against hell and pardon from sin, God wants us to be like Jesus Christ. And before this can happen, He has to show us how we are not like Jesus Christ. And this is that process of self-revelation. This is that painful experience from which many withdraw, just the same way that when the doctor begins to feel the apparently fractured arm, the tendency is to drag it and pull it out of his hands, because his pressure caused pain. And there are those that have a sense of forgiveness, but when the pressure of truth comes on them they withdraw, with a pain withdrawal, because they do not want pain. But you understand that if there is to be healing there has to be often pain, and this means that the doctor has to find where the break is in order to properly set it. This means that the Spirit of God has to show us what we are if He is to save us from what we are. So part of the process of growing up, whether it occurs before we are forgiven or afterwards, is indispensably that we see ourselves, see ourselves as we are, see our utter inability to be and to do that which is demanded of us in the Word. This is part of it, this self-revelation. For many it occurs before in the dealing of God in conviction. For others, it occurs after a sense of forgiveness. But for any who would go beyond this infantile state, it is imperative that they see themselves.

Then having seen oneself, through the pressure of circumstances wherein God causes us like Paul to despair of ourselves as we find it recorded in Romans 7, coming to the place where we see "that in me and my flesh there dwelleth no good thing," utterly hopeless, totally impossible of renewal or change, I am, says the devout heart that has seen himself, utterly incapable of ever living the Christian life on the level that is set forth (Rom. 7:18). I can't. Then instead of being filled with despair we are brought immediately to see that the Lord Jesus Christ expected this to happen to us, expected us to see ourselves, bankrupt in this fashion, in order that we might appropriate His victory and His life.

Then we understand that in addition to our union with Christ, our identification with Him in His death, seeing ourselves crucified with Him we also are brought early to see that the mature Christian life is to allow the Lord Jesus Christ first to possess all of us and then to live through us His Own Life, and that the Christian life in its normal aspects is the Lord Jesus Christ living in us His Own Life. I can't, but He can is the expression of the illuminated heart, the mature heart, the one Paul said, "I count all things but dross, but refuse, to be cast away; I know that the things I counted gain to me are lost to Christ" (Php. 3:8). Here is a man that is grown up in Christ, cherishing no illusions about himself, but not filled with despair because of

what he has discovered. He is not one that has his head down between his knees in heartbroken despair that he is no good, that there is nothing good in him and he is all bad. He made peace with this somewhere in the past. He consented to it and he is not trying to fight with God, nor has he gone into the frustrating experience of trying to prove that God is wrong. He has just seen himself as he is, and he has said, Well, God is right. He has said it in His Word, and He has revealed it to my heart, and what I am not, the Lord Jesus Christ is. The mature man is the one who with Paul can say, "I am crucified with Christ." Here he has dealt with the hopeless self, "nevertheless I live," accepting full responsibility both to appropriate victory and power, "nevertheless I live," and I am responsible to appropriate what the Lord has provided, "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). This is maturity speaking. This is someone that has come out of that happy stage of pardon, and that youthful stage of victory into that mature stage, as John speaks of it, as fathers, knowing Him who is from the beginning in His indwelling presence, and appropriating His life and allowing Him to live His life in and through that person.

Now obviously if we waited until everyone were grown up, we couldn't have a home. A home has to be made up of parents, and usually there is some difference in age, and then of children, and there will be inevitably a difference in age. And so, if we were to have a home where all were the same age it would not be a home. It would be an institution, but not a home. A home implies varied ages. A home implies that there are little children with all the needs that they have, and older ones with the varied interests and needs that they possess. And consequently we discover that God has established the church as a place where there will always be fathers and young men and children. This is to be properly so. Any church where all were on the level of maturity, where there was no prospect of growth or development, this would be a dying thing. We are told that there have been such institutions as the Shakers, where they died for lack of new blood, lack of any coming in. During the days when they could take orphans into their establishment and provide a home there were a certain percentage of the children raised in the Shaker settlements that chose this life. But then because of their celibacy there was no influx, and so these monuments to industry and intelligence are now becoming just obsolete centers where in some cases they are turned to other uses. God never intended the church to be this way. It is to be a place where there are babes being born, through the intercessory witness and travail of the believers. For every work of the Holy Spirit in your heart as an individual is to the end of making you fruitful. There is something of great dynamic fecundity in the Spirit filled life. There is a begetting in love and intercession, and witness. This is part of being a Christian, this desire to see your kind brought forth, and its number increased. And these that are born through your witness and your travail are babes, babes in Christ, and are so to be viewed. And so to be seen. And this is normal, and this is happy, and this is proper, and God wants it to be this way. But He doesn't want the babes to remain babes, and the young men to remain young men. He wants the young babes to grow into young men, and the young men to grow into adulthood. And the church, therefore, is to be the spiritual climate where this maturity can be achieved. And thus we find that Paul was dealing with a problem here in this church at Corinth.

The problem was childishness on the part of those that ought to have been adults. You know perhaps that one of the characteristics of children is that they play with everything. The wee babe has to touch everything. His eyes seem to be in the end of his fingers. He is not satisfied with feeling it. Then he has to taste it. It is an amazing thing to me to watch our youngest and discover that the experience is not complete until it has gone into the mouth. See it on the floor, part of the experience of acquainting oneself with the world, is to touch it, to taste it, to handle it, to feel it, and bite it. This is part of life, and it is childish to do this, because things which are not intended to go into the mouth often end up there. It is a rather frightening thing you know to find some tool that has accidentally been dropped headed toward the mouth. Every time anything gets in the hand the elbow bends and it aims toward the mouth. It is just natural I guess. It is part of being a child. But, of course, when Daddy is working with his tools, then son has to pick them up and feel of them, and if it has an edge, how sharp is it? And the best place to test the sharpness is in the concrete. If it cuts concrete it is sharp. And so a valuable tool that was never intended for concrete has to be rammed against the concrete, and of course Daddy becomes a little disturbed about this, and the boy thinks he is utterly unreasonable to be so finicky about something which wouldn't even cut concrete. After all, what value is it? And the result of this is someone who plays with things that ought to be used. Do you see?

And so, here we find that in the church at Corinth there were those that were babes, because they gave evidence by their immaturity, by their party spirit, their division of heart, by their sectarian spirit, (I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas, I am of Christ) (I Cor. 3:4). They were babes. But the evidence of their infantilism went on beyond that to the place where they

played with the gifts of the Spirit. Here were these glorious gifts that He bestowed upon His church, the gift of the word of knowledge so the church could know what it couldn't otherwise know. The gift of the word of wisdom, so that the church could know what to do in situations where experience wasn't an adequate teacher. The gift of the word of prophecy. The gift of tongues and interpretation. The gift of healing and of miracles. All of these gifts of faith (I Cor. 12:8-10). These nine gifts, given by the risen Christ as compensation to the church for what had been suffered in captivity to Satan. But what was the result? Why, the fact that they had something supernatural, something glorious, something from heaven, moved these people to play with the gifts. And they became more concerned about that than they were about Him. And this is childishness, because that which was to have had noble purpose now becomes an end in itself and is used as a tool for play. And he rebukes them for it. And he says, "In understanding, be men." Recognize that there are places, appropriate proper places for all that God has given, and it is to be in the balance of normal maturity. And so we will have to admit that his rebuke was just and proper.

But I sense another kind of childishness. Because Paul rebuked the gifts of the Spirit in their excess and misuse, we find that in the 20th Century it is now common and proper and approved and applauded for one to condemn them and say, Well if they were abused, they are not for us today. And this is childishness. Just because the child takes daddy's new tool and jabs the floor with it and it does not cut doesn't mean that the tool doesn't have a place and a purpose. And so if he says, Well I am through with tools because the children ruined them and because they have been abused, he is evidencing a childishness. And so we had two extremes that have characterized the church that have given evidence of childishness. The one has been the preoccupation with the supernatural as an end in itself, and the other has been the repudiation of it totally, and these are both evidences of childishness.

And so we come to the fact that – and here is an illustration of it. Now in your own case to what degree have you matured in the things of Christ? First, *have you been born of God?* and do you know by the witness of the Spirit that you have been born of God? Secondly, *have you come to the place of victory, and have you understood how to have in the excruciating experience of temptation to have victory?* Well, then we would equate this with being a young man. *Have you come to the place where you have experiences the fullness of the Spirit and the bequeathment of His Spirit and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the risen Christ filling you?* Have you done that? Well I say... You say, "Well no. I am afraid. I am afraid..." Well look. You never need be afraid of God. You never need be afraid of anything He does to you. This is childish. This is childishness. You say, "Well, I am afraid the Lord might embarrass me." He made you with the reticence that you have. He is not going to embarrass you. It is childish to withdraw from the One who loves us and became flesh and dwelt among us, because something is new or different, or unseen or unexperienced. This is childishness. The desire of the adult is not experience for its own sake, but maturity to enter into the place where things are appropriately used and held and handled.

I remember as a little child when my father one day brought home a pair of flannel pajamas that he had seen somewhere. I do not know whether it was planned or not, but he so surprised me that I had to go to bed as soon as I got home from school. I just couldn't wait until 8 o'clock in order to unwrap that package and get into those pajamas. So I put them on at 4, got into bed, took a nap, and wore them until bed time again. I couldn't wait. Now this was childishness on my part.

I believe that it is appropriate for us to understand that we are to have everything that the Lord Jesus provided, that we are not to be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with impulse and whim and fancy. But then we come in contrast to childishness, to another thing that is highly desirable which is childlikeness. Childlikeness. Oh, that you could see this. Are you childlike? Oh, please do not be childish. But are you childlike? There is all the difference in the world. "Except you have the faith of a little child...And except ye be converted and become as a little child" (Mat. 18:3). You know age isn't a matter of years; it is a matter of attitude. Someone is old at 20 when they have lost childlike expectation and childlike delight, and childlike enthusiasm, and childlike confidence. I would rather be wrong a thousand times than to be crotchety and sour and bitter and discouraged to the point where life is just turned into the bitter acid of vinegar. It is just too long an eternity and too short a time to afford such a luxury as this. No one can afford to become that pessimistic, skeptical adult that says I have tried everything, and there is not anything to it. This is a kind of senility that can overtake one in their teens or their twenties, or any point along the way. But oh, how delightful to meet someone that is childlike.

The think the one who most exemplifies this in my experience is our dear Dr. R. R. Brown² who was with us last September and is going to be with us for our Convention in October. Oh, the delight of this man who is always living in the immediate revelation of the risen Christ. I'll go out of my way any distance to have a few moments with someone whose faith is childlike, who looks to the Lord, and loves the Lord, and who lives that way. Childlikeness. Childlikeness is that anticipation, that expectation, that delight, that thrill, that "Isn't it wonderful?" God grant that we will never get away from that, never become the blasé type that have seen everything, and been everywhere, and nothing moves us.

I have to fly quite often. You know I hope I never come to the place where I can sit with my foot over my knee, reading a magazine when an aeroplane takes off. I get into one of these jet planes, no propellers, no.., there it is. It just cannot fly. Like I told Orville, and I told, Wilbur, you'll never get it off the ground. This is the feeling I have every time I get into one of them. And I sit there on my seat, absolutely thrilled and delighted, exquisitely transformed by the fact that that immense corporation of metal is somehow going to obey laws and it is going to carry us on, up and over. My I hope I never outgrow that. I want to also live with the sunrise, the thrill, and a rainbow of delight, and the dew sparkling on the Lily of the Valley and the rose. I want to be childlike. In understanding I want to be a man, but oh I do not ever want to come away and lose the joy of an hour in His presence, just worshipping, just praising Him, just adoring Him, just loving Him, just inbreathing of His Life.

How about you? Are you childish or childlike? Is there a childlikeness? Is there a delight with the simple, an amenable to the new, and a friend with the future, and a satisfaction with the common? Or are you — just been everywhere, seen everything. What has happened to you? Have you become childish or childlike? When you grow up you do not necessarily when you become old become a man, become an adult. "In understanding, be men" requires that you see and relate and you are a part of all that you have experienced.

But there is something else. God is always new, gloriously new in every experience with Him, in every time of prayer, in every time of worship, in every reading of the Word. Oh, something has happened, dear heart, when you pick the Word up and you say, I saw this before. Old Mr. VanVaulkenburg up in Leslie, Minnesota, where my first church was 25 years ago, the first week called me over. I went over to see Him. He said, "Preacher, you are a new preacher, got any good books?" I said, "Mr. VanVaulkenburg, as old as you are and as sick as you are you ought to be studying for finals. Why don't you read the Bible?" "Oh," he said, "I read it once years ago." He said, "I read Shakespeare, I read the Bible." Now he had to have something new. He had lost the sense of childlike, lost the sense of delight, sweet revelation of Christ on every page, everywhere. May the Spirit of God press that truth deeply home to our hearts. May the Holy Ghost give to us this precious revelation of Himself, until we are going to in understanding be men, seeing the proper place of truth related to truth, and doctrine to doctrine. And then we are going to have a heart that is childlike, an appropriation of all the provisions of His love and grace.

Shall we bow our hearts together in prayer? We thank and praise Thee, our Heavenly Father, that Thou hast given to us the privilege of being children of God, born into Thy family. We thank Thee that if there should be even someone here today that does not have the witness of Thy Spirit that they are born of Thee, this is the time, the moment, when by simply opening the latch on the inside of the door, hearts can be thrown open to invite in the risen Christ. He brings everything. We give Him our need, and He brings everything to meet it. We ask Thee, Father, for Thy children that have been born, that there may not be one of us content to go on in prolonged infancy, spiritually paralyzed at birth, childish, remaining so throughout the years. Oh, save us from this, Lord, Give us that place where we understand Thy Word and love what we understand, and appropriate what Thou dost provide. Grant, Lord, that we may not be childish in quarreling, childish in unbelief, and childish in resentment, and childish in playing with the supernatural. Save us from all childishness. But, O God, give us childlike hearts, hearts that delight in that which is before them, receive gladly all that is there, and find the common place glorious because of the freshness with which it comes. Grant that the time of prayer and the time of reading of the Word, that secret time when we inbreathe of Thy life, the time of sharing in the church, the time of fellowship together. Oh, teach us, Lord, that the childlike Christian, the one who takes Thy Word, and loves Thee for Thyself, and longs only to be that which Thou hast made possible, is the one whose fellowship is nurturing, strengthening, encouraging to others. So we ask Thee, Father, that while in

² Robert Roger Brown (1885-1964) Pastor and Radio Evangelist

understanding we may be men, save from all childishness that there may characterize us as long as we live that faith as of a little child coming with open hearts to receive of the fragrant blessings of Thy goodness. We ask it in the Name and for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let us stand for the Benediction. “Now may the God of peace that, brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the Blood of the everlasting Covenant make us perfect, in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, to whom be the glory now and forever. Amen” (Heb. 13:20-21).

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, March 25, 1962 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

©PRBTMI 1962