

New Hope sermon: Putting away childish things 1/21/18

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 THE WAYS
OF CHILDHOOD
BEHIND ME.



1 Corinthians 13:11 NIV

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In order for us to build healthy relationships, we need to put away our childish misconceptions and areas of hurt or pain that drive us. Last week we spoke of the issue of damaged emotions. Jesus is Jehovah Rapha; he has come to heal us from all our infirmities and weaknesses, as well as our shame, and guilt. Through the Holy Spirit believers can now put away childish thinking and behavior that wrecks relationships. The apostle Paul said “*when I was a child I thought like a child, but when I became an adult, I put away childish things*” (I Cor. 13:11).

Now at the onset, we need to clarify the distinction between being child-like in faith, which Jesus commends, and acting childishly in our faith, which Paul condemns. Jesus told us we are to become like little children – people who trust God, people who respond openly to God’s love, people who understand their dependence on God. Seamands, in his book *Putting Away Childish Things*, says, “the word childish is *nepios* in Scripture. It suggests an adult who displays the irresponsible characteristics of a child, an adult who has been arrested... Such babyish-ness does not go away by itself with the mere passing of time. Age will not necessarily fill you with maturity – just wrinkles. Therefore babyish behavior has to be dealt with very decisively” (David Seamands, *Putting Away Childish Things*, Victor Books, 1982, p. 102). There can be an innocence in children that is very endearing and devoid of all the scheming and political me-firstness of adults. Obviously that innocence is not always operative. Childish behavior is often irresponsible and irrational. Childish behavior is self-centered, which leads to a me-centered Christianity as an adult, acting entitled, demanding immediate gratification of desires, unable to wait patiently on God, overly dependent of feelings, and uses pouting, sulking, passive aggressive behavior to manipulate and get its own way. None of these traits work well when we take them into relationships in the adult world.

That’s why Paul tells the Ephesians and the Corinthians that they are to act no more like children – “*tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine* (Eph. 4) or fighting over allegiance to one super leader rather than another – in the case of the Corinthians some boasted that Apollos was their leader; others that Peter was, still others that Paul was (I Cor. 3). Those inner political feuds were marring their spiritual growth as a church and causing them to act childishly with one another. It’s what’s causing church splits today. Acting in a childish way is a major barrier to healthy relationships and to healthy, growing churches.

Seamands in his book also talks of childhood mottos that have been ingrained through parents or childish thinking theologically. I think it will help to look at these briefly.

One childhood motto is “measure up” – where the parents hold a very high standard of performance up to their children. When this is a parental expectation over years, it creates the immature, childish and neurotic perfectionist”, and ultimately the Super You idea that is devastating in relationships (Seamands, pp. 30-31).

Another childhood mantra is that a person can find ‘the perfect mate, their one and only.’ “This breeds romantic infantilism, a fantasy-filled, feeling-centered love” (pp.53-54). Often as young people that love starts with eros – the Greek word for desire, usually sexual desire. But that understanding of love is unstable, because it will fade over time. It is the reason why there is so much divorce. People go into marriage with a distortion of the marriage covenant. They pledge to love and cherish each other ‘as long as we both shall love.’ But the covenant is as long ‘as we both shall live’. “The Bible

calls for another-regarding, self-sacrificing love grounded not in the emotions but the will. It is the commitment to love, in spite of and regardless of.” (p.56).

In fact, continuing with this issue of marriage, “we say, ‘the two shall become one.’ That’s fine, but the trouble is four people marry...There are two adults and there are the two children of the past inside the adults. It’s perfectly alright as long as the adults are running things. But home is where we relax, where we let ourselves go and become again those little children of the past” (Seamands, p. 12). And this childish behavior plays out in conflicts, escalating anger, defensiveness, insistence of one’s own way, inability to walk in the other’s shoes and work for their best interest. (We will talk more about what love really looks like as the sermon series moves to the positive New Testament ‘one anothers’ next week.)

There can also be childish thinking about the will of God. You will hear many people say in a catastrophe, ‘that was God’s will.’ But that thinking is really fatalistic Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist thinking. From a Biblical perspective there are 3 different aspects to the will of God: the perfect, intentional will of God, the circumstantial, permissive will of God, and the ultimate will and purpose of God fulfilled in history over time. “We must realize that the intentional, perfect will of God can be defeated by the will of man for the time being” (Seamands, p. 66). Seamands gives the example of a church whose leaders were praying with a member about her pending divorce. She didn’t want the divorce, but the husband did; he had another woman he wanted to marry instead of her. The leaders prayed for the couple’s reconciliation and convinced the woman that God would make that happen. But God does not overrule people’s will; he does not dictate our moral choices and in the end, the husband did force the divorce through because the other woman was more desirable to him than reconciliation with his current wife. The divorced woman now had two heartbreaks – her own marriage failure and seemingly the failure of prayer and God to intervene and work out a reconciliation. Surely we can pray for God to work in people’s hearts to turn them from sin to His love, but God doesn’t force that to happen on anyone. So the divorce was within the circumstantial, permissive will of God.

There are also childish reactions we have to life’s problems, and again, if we bring this thinking into adult relationships, it will create blaming and resentment. The quote is: “Some people create their own storms, then get upset when it rains.” If we are the troublemaker, creating storms through our false expectations, our self-centeredness, or our dominant sinful desires, there will indeed be rain. An adult can take the blame for such storms and seek to rectify the problem. A childish reaction is to blame-shift the cause of the problem into someone else.

So let’s transition to adult thinking. Again, repeating Paul’s words in I Cor. 13, “*When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child, but when I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.*” v.11.

A mature person takes responsibility for the results of their thoughts and actions. As this quote says, “My mind is my garden, my thoughts are my seeds. I will harvest either flowers or weeds.” I’ve thought about this a lot as I have been meditating on the character of love – the positive theme that launches our healthy relationship focus. Am I thinking positively, with God’s perspective, and God’s attitudes? More on that next week!

The wonderful news of the gospel of Christ is that God can bring us to maturity in Him. Paul prays that for the Ephesian Christians: ¹¹ *So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,* ¹² *to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up [and here’s God’s goal]* ¹³ *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.* ¹⁴ *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness*

of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.* ¹⁶ *From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.* Eph.3:11-16.

Childish thinking is tossed back and forth by doubt, swayed by the values and pressures of the world or our community around us. Mature thinking is anchored in the faith and knowledge of Christ and leads to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ in us. It happens as we are connected to each other and to the body of Christ – with each of us doing our part to help each other grow into Christ’s image. God gives His gifts to each one of us as part of that maturing process – leaders in Christian mission, prophetic people, evangelists, pastors and teachers. But he also gives gifts of encouragement, and leadership, and giving, and mercy and faith and miracles that enable us to come alongside each other and help each of us get to that mature place of Christ’s control in our thinking, our words and our actions.

Then as our focus is supremely on Christ, God promises that the Holy Spirit can transform us. The word is metamorphosis, increasingly into His image. Spring is often the time when we see this process lived out dramatically in the sage of the caterpillar, the chrysalis and ultimately the emergence of the butterfly. It’s an analogy of that process of transformation in Christian character.

I believe this is God’s plan for us individually and corporately as a family of faith. As we mature we will have the joy of building healthy relationships as we put away our childish thinking and behavior and allow God to heal whatever childhood issues and abuses have been part of our past.

What’s so encouraging about all this is that Christians have the indwelling Holy Spirit who longs to help us become like Jesus if we will follow the Spirit’s lead. So I want us to sing the song “Spirit Song” that describes how this can happen.

Oh, let the Son of God enfold you with his Spirit and his love;
Let him fill your heart and satisfy your soul.
Oh, let him have the things that hold you, and his Spirit, like a dove,
Will descend upon your life and make you whole.

Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs.
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs.

Oh, come and sing the song with gladness as your hearts are filled with joy.
Lift your hands in sweet surrender to his name.
Oh, give him all your tears and sadness, give him all your years of pain,
And you’ll enter into life in Jesus’ name.

Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs.
Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs. (words and music John Wimber)

Amen. Let’s pray.

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