

## Infants in Evil, Adults in Thinking

“Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults.” 1 Corinthians 14:20

Early church struggled with its infancy, its tools for ministry and how they were to be used. We know that speaking in tongues was the most misused gift of the Corinthian church by the concern and focus given to it by the apostle Paul in his letter. It made people proud they could speak to God in a foreign language but its misuse tore up the church. It rarely built up the body of Christ though it was on the list of charismatic gifts. That church needed guidance and correction then as we in this church need it now as we use our gifts to serve God. Paul begs us to “Be infants in evil and adults in thinking.” It is a curious phrase when you think about it. How are infants evil? Does anyone know of an evil infant? No, of course not.

How can the church keep from reverting to childish thinking and infantile behavior? The battle is in the mind. The mind is the battle ground where spiritual warfare takes place. It is the place that can breed attitudes that are un-Christ-like. Superiority over another is anathema in the Christian church. It is the reverse of servant hood and the perverts the equality of the body of Christ where each part of the body is given the same honor. That means the sexton is given the same honor as the priest.

When the mind is informed by the grace and peace of Jesus Christ we cannot help but have attitudes that care for one another and reflect the heart of God. What we believe affects our thoughts and our thoughts ultimately determine how we will behave with each other. Paul implores the church to be adult in its faith. When he writes in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of the first letter to Corinth he points to a more excellent way of serving God in his church. It is the way of love. The gift of love that never ceases makes each of us complete in Jesus Christ. It is the only gift that will make us whole. Of the three cardinal virtues: faith, hope and love the greatest is love. Paul concluded the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter with, “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.” First Corinthians 14:20 he again says, “Be infants in evil and adults in thinking.”

What can prevent childish behavior in a parish? The first thing is to reduce or eliminate any threats. When a child is threatened within an inch of his life to be punished he naturally recoils and if a

parent does this enough you have an abused child. Evil has occurred. Leaders and members alike can create a threat to “dismember” the body of Christ. When we devalue a member we hurt the entire body.

Another way to prevent childish behavior is for everyone to take on adult responsibility for exercising time, talent and treasure. When we look for someone else to do it we give permission for one or a few to “take over,” “they will roll you over,” and they will “make you over.” The church does not need people to take control but to take ownership of the church. When ownership is not taken by the many, control will surely be taken by the few. Apathy, sin, tyranny, and superiority is a sure way to wreck a country and likewise a church.

The last way to prevent childish behavior is spiritual maturity. We mature in love one for another. We act out that love in practical, meaningful service to one another and our community. We become “infants in evil” and “adults in thinking.”