



1200 Lexington Road
Wilmore, KY 40390

Pastor Daryl Diddle

(859) 858-3521
office@wfmc.net

“Childishness”

Sermon Series: “Getting Past the Past,” No. 3

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1 Corinthians 13:8-13

8 Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever! 9 Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture! 10 But when the time of perfection comes, these partial things will become useless.

11 When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. 12 Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.

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We’re in First Corinthians 13 today, if you’d care to look there with me. First Corinthians 13...certainly one of the chapters of the Bible that could win the award for “words most taken out of context.”

The, what’s been called, “hymn to love” that the Apostle Paul writes there in verses 4 through 8...though it is certainly a beautiful description of true love...**and**...though it is entirely appropriate in wedding ceremonies, where most people have heard it...the fact is, it was really written as the capstone of Paul’s pronouncement that the way the Corinthian Christians, who thought themselves **so very spiritually mature**...the way they were behaving was **actually** the **opposite** of true spiritual maturity.

Christ followers are to **live**, Paul says, in this way of love...and **not** in the **demeaning** and **insulting** and **disrespectful** ways those in Corinth were, in fact, living.

Some, there in Corinth, thought that their own giftedness...and especially the gift of speaking in other languages...they thought their gift made them spiritually superior.

But Paul says here that it’s **not your spiritual gift**...but rather your **life of love**...that reveals spiritual maturity.

And contrary to today’s conception of it, Paul explains that **love** is **not** an **emotion**...a thing we **feel**.

No. Paul says that love is a **way of conduct** that **should underlie everything** a Christian does.

In fact, Paul goes as far as to say, up there in verses one through three, that whatever a Christian does...whatever gift they practice...if it's practiced outside of this **way** of **love**...then it all becomes **empty** and **worthless**.

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So, in writing what he does here, Paul was telling those Corinthian believers, who thought themselves more mature than their brothers and sisters, that, in reality, **they** were **actually** the most **immature**.

That's Paul's verdict, which he pronounces, in our text here, in the context of **time**.

In verse 8, Paul reminds us that all the gifts of the spirit...as good and useful as they are...they will all pass away.

Eventually, time will render them useless.

But **love**...the **way of love**...**that** will **last**...and that is what truly mature Christ-followers are concerned with.

So Paul calls them, here, to grow up in their thinking about all this, and in doing so, he uses an illustration, there in verse 11, that everyone understands.

Paul writes, ***"When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; but as I've become a man, I've abolished the things of the child."***

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There's something endearing and cute about children behaving as children, because that's expected of them...that's who they are.

But as we all know...there's nothing **cute** about **adults** behaving as children. It's repulsive, actually, because adults behaving like children are selfish and irresponsible and can wind up being immensely destructive.

The thing is, though...while persons **do automatically** grow up, **physically**, over **time**, people do **not** always automatically grow up **emotionally, relationally** or **spiritually** over time. People who are physically and chronologically adults may well still be emotional and spiritual children in many ways, as those Corinthians, here, demonstrate.

And as the situation at Corinth proves, spiritual children in adult bodies can cause big problems. In fact, childishness in adult persons is really the cause of **most** problems in our world today.

But there **is** a **solution**!

Paul says here that the solution is to **recognize childish behaviors** for what they are, and then **choose to get past them**... [*holds up auto rear view mirror*]

...choose to get past your past child...to grow up. In verse 11 there, Paul says, choose to **"abolish childish things."**

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Some of you know that's the theme of one of David Seamands' most popular books...written over 40 years ago now, and which I'll use in my comments these next couple Sundays.

His title, *Putting Away Childish Things*, reflects the common translation of that phrase of Paul's; but what we think of **today** as "putting away" doesn't really get to the meaning of the verb, katargeo (cat ar GEH oh) that Paul uses here.

Through the years, how many times did my parents tell me, or have I told my kids, "put that away." In all those times, what was meant was, you put whatever it is where it belongs for now, but when you want it to use it or play with it again, you take it back out.

To us, "putting something away" is temporary.

But to katargeo (cat ar GEH oh) something is **permanent**. Katargeo means to make something useless, to abolish it...end it...get rid of it...to do away with it.

So what the Corinthians had to do to become mature Christ-followers was...they had to do away with their childishness. They had to put their pasts...how they acted...what they did, behind them and not go there anymore. [*again holds up auto rear view mirror*]

We've talked about that as staring into the rear-view mirror...trying to live in the ways of the past while also moving forward into the future.

But that doesn't work. You can't move forward while looking backward.

Those at Corinth had to decide to end the childish ways they thought, specifically about self-importance. Their immature thinking about gifts was damaging both them and to those around them.

They had to be done with that childishness in order to become spiritual adults.

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But what about us?

What childishness about us do we need to do away with, so we can become mature in Jesus?

What childishness within us needs to be permanently put away?

That's the question the Holy Spirit wants to answer in all our lives, and we need Him to do that...to show us...because, chances are, we're blind to it in and of ourselves.

The truth is, we all carry childishness within us because we all have that in our past. I mean, I'm pretty sure that we were all children at one time or another, right?

I have pictures to prove it, and probably so do you. [*holds up pictures of his childhood*]

For some of us, childishness was that arrogant, know-it-all kid that drove everyone around us nuts.

For others, childishness was that fearful, insecure little kid who couldn't even **look** others in the eye.

In those, and a thousand other maybe less severe ways, we all, at one time, thought and operated as children because that's what we were.

But as these Corinthians brothers and sisters show us, we ***don't always lose*** those childish operations and ways of thinking simply with the passing of time, and so some of us still carry that childishness within us.

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Now, some people are very aware of that – they know who they were in the past. But instead of choosing to move ***past*** their past, they ***use*** their past to make ***excuses*** for who they are today.

They say things like, “Well, my mom did this to me, or my teacher did that, or that accident or event affected me. If only this or that would have happened, then I'd be OK today.”

If that's you, can I say to you, in love, that that sort of excuse-making is self-defeating and frankly, irresponsible, especially considering the power of God's Spirit, who is able to make real change.

***We*** can't change ***ourselves***; but ***He can*** change us.

We know God can change people. If He couldn't, the New Testament wouldn't be filled with commands that we be different.

But it is.

If God's Spirit couldn't change people, Paul would not have commanded that those Corinthians ***katargeo*** (cat ar GEH oh)...***get rid of*** their childishness.

But he did.

And he did because he knew that God's Spirit can change a willing heart. Paul experienced it personally, didn't he?

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God's Spirit can do for us what we can't do for ourselves.

But...we ***do*** have a role in God's work in our lives, and that role is to honestly open ourselves to His leading, in this case, to invite Him to show us where we're letting our inner child dominate our lives, and to turn that over to Him for change.

So again, what childishness within us needs to be put away, so we can become mature in Jesus?

- It may have to do with forgiveness – to forgive someone or to accept another's forgiveness of us.
- It may be a place where we need healed.
- It may be doing away with some excuse we've used.
- It may be a spirit of fear or competition or mistrust that we have to grow past.
- It may involve a responsibility we need to assume, or some discipline that we need to develop in our lives.

The possibilities are as wide as a child's world

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But how do we know if there's latent childishness in us?

Here's one way to tell: think about it in terms of who we are when we're in the place where we're most comfortable.

You see, when we're out in public, we're usually able to hide the child within us. In the quick, shallow contacts we have with others from day to day, we are all very polite and grown up and reasonable.

But in those places where we're most comfortable – with friends, family, close work relationships – that's where our guard comes down, isn't it...that's where the unreasonable, stubborn, demanding child...or...the shy, fearful and weak child can appear.

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When we react in a self-protecting or self-exalting way, that's the child within.

When our response to something is way out of proportion, that's the child within.

When we fully intend to do or say something kind and loving, but what comes out is the opposite, that's the child within.

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Now, some think it fine to say, "But that's just who I am and I can't do anything about it."

But please understand...Paul tells us right here...that is **not** any sort of Christian response to childishness.

Childishness **needs to be** katargeoed (cat ar GEH oh ed), because if we let the child within us rule our lives...

...we wind up **bound...tied** to the **past**...to looking **backward**. [*again holds up auto rear view mirror*]

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...and we wind up being the childish adult, who is **destructive** and **hurtful**...to both **ourselves** and to **others**...and that is **absolutely not** the way God intended us to live.

God has far more for us than that.

The childish way of our past...that is **not** the way of Godly love, because, you see, the child always turns love **inward**.

Childishness, ultimately, is the love of self...the pre-occupation with self, and if we're preoccupied with ourselves, we'll never have the freedom to love God or others fully, or to bring His sort of love fully into our homes and relationships.

We never really take on the adult capacity to initiate...to love. All our lives, we wind up just reacting to others...reacting as a child.

You see, that's exactly why Paul used this image here.

The Corinthians were constantly competing with others...afraid of someone being better or higher or stronger than they were.

But fear and love can *never co-exist*, and the love that leads to *maturity*, you see, is the *very same love* that *casts out fear*.

But you can't find that love and maturity...and the peace that comes with it...you can't find that love until the inner child of the past is done away with.

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Is there some childishness within you that the Spirit is pointing out...that needs to be put away...for good?

So love can thrive.

So defeat can be defeated.

So maturity can come.

So you can live in peace instead of competition and fear.

As we come to the Lord's Table today, listen for the Spirit's voice pointing out some remnant of childishness. If He shows something like that to you, don't get upset. Instead, ask Him to help you katargeo (cat ar GEH oh) it...do away with it...put it away *for good*, so you can be mature and complete in that place.

He's here and He'd love to do that sort of work in any who will invite Him.

#### **Prayer:**

Holy Spirit, we do invite you...we open ourselves to you so that you can show us ourselves as we really are. Would you free us from dwelling in the past – from the chains that bind us to childish ways and thoughts and conceptions. Show them to us and free us, so we might be mature and complete...as grown up in Jesus as we can be.

#### **Communion:**

#### **Closing Word and Benediction:**

May the Lord help us all to do away with every childish thing of our past that threatens to keep us there in our past...to keep us from being mature and complete in Jesus. May we have the courage to seek that...to seek Him...to identify that and to agree with Him in anything He says...to say, "Yes, Lord, I will go into the future...I will go into the future with you as an adult...as mature...as complete.

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Thanks for coming to worship this morning. The Lord bless and keep you. Amen.

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