

In Understanding Be Men

by Paris Reidhead

Paris Reidhead emphasizes the importance of spiritual maturity and understanding in the Christian life, urging believers to grow beyond infancy in faith.

Duration: 34:08

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 14:1

Topics: "Understanding"

Description

In this sermon on 1 Corinthians 14, the speaker emphasizes the importance of approaching the world with a childlike mindset. He highlights the tendency to touch, taste, handle, and feel things as a natural part of life, but cautions against becoming consumed by worldly desires. The speaker encourages the audience to read the Bible with a sense of delight and to seek a deep understanding of God's truth and doctrine. He emphasizes the need for a heart that is childlike in appropriating the provisions of God's love and grace. The sermon concludes with a prayer for those who may not have had a proper understanding of the Christian life and a desire to be like Jesus.

Transcript

Now please to 1 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 Lord 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 chorus, 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 prophet speak two or three, and let the other judge. If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by, and 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 the 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. If they will learn anything, 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, that all things be done decently and in order. 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 could expect to support the family.

You're born as a babe. You're 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 as 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 or 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 and pardon from past transgressions, and the meat of God, whereby we are established in Christ and strengthened 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 heartbreaking 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 every one 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 into Christ. This is natural. It's 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 in failure and spiritual immaturity.

Just as God puts into the heart of the little girl a deep desire to stand as mother stands and work as mother works and be as mother is to her, so God puts into every one 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, was simply echoing the cry of every one that's born of God. So to be born marvelous, to be born well ensures 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's 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. But 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's evidence to believe that they were pardoned and forgiven and became partakers of his life. But you see, the fact was they'd never seen themselves.

They'd seen Christ, but they hadn't 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's sovereign even of our formulae, and he does it just the opposite. So we're happy about that and we'll always remember this.

So if you're born of God, dear heart, it makes no difference to me whether you're coming to him who is of the formula that I might see as normal or not. Just rejoice and be exceedingly glad. But the fact still remains that somewhere along the line if you're to become a mature Christian, you're going to have to see yourself.

You're going to have to see yourself in his eyes. This is painful. It's excruciatingly painful.

For it was usually our experience to see what we've done. And this caused us consternation, concern, grief, conviction. But God has to show us what we are, and so this requires being cornered in 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's apparently necessary that before we can want something, we have to see the need for it. And if all that you wanted when you came to Christ was pardon from what you've 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 it's another thing for God to want for you. And the mature person doesn't, 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's got to show us how we aren't 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 it pain. And there are those that have a sense of forgiveness, and 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's to save us from what we are. So part of the process of growing up, whether it occurs before we're 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 of it occurs before, on 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's 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 that we see in me and my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing, utterly hopeless, totally impossible of renewal or change. I am, so says the devout heart that's seen himself, utterly incapable of ever living the Christian life on the level that it's set forth.

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 in 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.

Here's a man that's grown up in Christ, cherishing no illusions about himself, but not filled with despair because of what he's discovered. He's not one that's got his head down between his knees in heartbroken despair that he's no good, that there's nothing good in him and he's all bad. He made peace with this somewhere in the past.

He consented to it and he's not tried to fight with God nor gone into the frustrating experience of trying to prove that God is wrong. He's just seen himself as he is. And he said, well, God's right.

He's said it in his word and he's revealed it to my heart. And what I'm not, the Lord Jesus Christ is. The mature man is the one who with Paul can say, I am crucified with Christ.

Here he's dealt with a hopeless self. Nevertheless, I live accepting full responsibility, both to appropriate victory and power. Nevertheless, I live and I'm responsible to appropriate what the Lord has provided.

Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. This is maturity speaking. This is someone that's 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's some difference in age, and then of children, there will be inevitably a difference in age. And so if we were to have a home where all were the same age, it wouldn't 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 a level of maturity, where there was no prospect of growth or development, this would be a dying thing. We're 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're turned to other uses. And God never intended the church to be this way.

It's 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's something, the great dynamic fecundity in the Spirit-filled life.

There's 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, 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's not satisfied with feeling it. Then he has to taste it. It's an amazing thing to me to watch our youngest and discover that the experience is not complete until it's gone into the mouth.

See it on the floor? The part of the experience of equating 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's childish to do this because things which are not intended to go into the mouth often end up there. It's a rather frightening thing, you know, to find some tool that's accidentally been dropped headed toward the mouth, but every time anything gets in the hand, the elbow bends and it aims toward the mouth.

It's just natural, I guess. It's part of being a child. But of course, when Daddy's working with his tools, then son has to pick them up and feel of them, and if it's got an edge, how sharp is it? And the best place to test the sharpness is in the concrete.

If it cuts concrete, it's 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's utterly unreasonable to be so finicky about something that wouldn't even cut concrete.

After all, what value is it? And the result of this is that a child 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 still gave evidence by their immaturity, by their party spirit, their division of heart, by their sectarian spirit, why I'm of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas, I am of Christ. 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'd 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, the gift of faith, these nine gifts given by the risen church as compensation, given by the risen Christ by his 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, he says, in understanding be men. Recognize that there are places, appropriate and proper places, for all that God has given, and it is to be in the balance of normal maturity. And so we'll 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 twentieth century it's now common and proper and approved and applauded for one to condemn them and say, well, if they were abused, they're 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 doesn't cut, doesn't mean that the tool doesn't have a place and a purpose.

And so if he says, well, I'm through with tools because the children ruined them, and because they've been abused, he's just evidencing a childishness. And so we've 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 here's 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've 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've experienced 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'm afraid. You see, I'm afraid.

Well, look, you never need be afraid of the God. You never need be afraid of anything he does to you. This is childish.

This is childishness. You say, well, I'm afraid the Lord might embarrass me. He made you with the reticence that you have.

He's not going to embarrass you. It's childish to withdraw from the one who loved 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'd seen somewhere. I don't know whether it was planned or not, but they were so surprised me.

I had to go to bed as soon as I got home from school. I just couldn't wait until eight o'clock in order to unwrap that package and get into those pajamas. So I put them on at four, got into bed, took a nap, and wore them until bedtime again.

I couldn't wait. Now, this was childishness on my part. I believe that it's 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's highly desirable, which is childlikeness. Childlikeness. Oh, that you could see this.

Are you childlike? Oh, please don't be childish, but are you childlike? There's all the difference in the world except you have the faith of a little child and except you be converted and become as a little child. You know, age isn't a matter of years. It's a matter of attitude.

Someone is old at twenty when they've lost childlike expectation and childlike delight and childlike enthusiasm, childlike confidence. I'd rather be wrong a thousand times than to become crotchety and sour and bitter and discouraged to the point where life has just turned into the bitter acid of vinegar. It's 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've tried everything, there isn't 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's childlike.

I think the one who most exemplifies this in my experience is our dear, beloved Dr. R. R. Brown, 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's 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'll 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 and, you know, I hope I never come to the place where I can sit with my foot over my knee and reading a magazine when the airplane takes off.

I get into one of these jet planes and no propellers, no, there it is, it just can't 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's going to carry us on up and over. Well, I hope I never outgrow that. I want to always live with the sunrise, the thrill, and the 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 don't ever want to come away and lose the joy of an hour in his presence. Just worshipping him, just praising him, just adoring him, just loving him, just in breathing of his life. How about you? Are you childish or childlike? Is there a childlikeness? Is there a delight with the simple and 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's happened to you? Have you become childish or childlike? You see, when you grow up you don't necessarily, because you get old, become a man, become adult.

An understanding to be a man requires that you see and relate and you are part of all that you've experienced. But there's 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's happened to your heart when you pick the word up and you say, I saw this before. Oh, Mr. Van Valkenburgh up in Leslie in Minnesota, where my first church 25 years ago, first week, called me over, went over to see him. He said, Preacher, you're a new preacher.

You got any good books? I said, Mr. Van Valkenburgh, 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. Lost the sense of childlike, lost the sense of delight, sweet revelation of Christ on every, 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're going to an understanding, be man, seeing the proper place of truth related to truth and doctrine to doctrine, and then we're going to have a heart that's childlike in 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're born of thee. This is the time, the moment, when by simply opening the latch on the inside of the door, their 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 be 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, and childish in unbelief, and childish in resentment, and childish in playing with the supernatural.

Save us from all childishness. But, oh God, give us childlike hearts, hearts that delight in that which is before them. Receive gladly all that's there, and find the commonplace 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 in-breathe 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 that takes thee at thy word and loves thee for thyself, and longs only to be that that which thou hast made possible, is the one whose fellowship is nurturing, and strengthening, and encouraging to others. So we ask thee, Father, that with oil and 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 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.

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