

## Grow Up! (1)

“You need to grow up!” Many of you young people have heard these words before. Most of the time you who really do need to grow up give a smirk, a grin, laugh it off, and go on living in the same immature way as before. Along with our worldly society enamored with youth and immaturity you go on taking nothing seriously and amuse yourself with your disrespectful, impulsive, irresponsible life, living with a swagger as though you are proud of it. If that describes you, then you need to grow up!

Not only do your teachers and parents call you to grow up, but your God and Father in heaven calls you: “Be no more children!” But rather, “Grow up!” Let every young person (and adult too!) take heed to God’s injunction. For all of us, young and old, have some growing up to do.

### **Proper Childlikeness**

There is a certain kind of childishness that all of us need to put aside. However, there are times when God calls us to be child-like. Let’s remember Jesus’ words, “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3–4).” The disciples in Jesus’ day, along with many leaders of the church, looked down upon the young children. They thought of themselves as better. They spoke and thought those words in pride, “These children are so immature. They need to grow up.” And so Jesus addressed their pride by showing them that they needed to become like a child again. First, he taught them to humble themselves like a little child who thinks and feels smaller, weaker, and naughtier than everyone else. Second, Jesus instructed them to take on the child-like characteristic of trust. Like the little child who trusts his parent and believes everything his teacher says, we must learn to trust and believe everything that our heavenly Father says. Although we are called to put aside childishness, Jesus actually calls us to have a childlike humility and faith.

However, the focus of this article is on God’s calling of us to put aside certain childish characteristics. Notice especially four characteristics that are not only biblically based, but also very pertinent to us as Protestant Reformed people and young people.

## **Petty Fighting**

The first kind of childishness we are to put aside is petty fighting. 1 Corinthians 3:1 says, “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.” Yes, Paul tells the church in Corinth that they are behaving like big babies! He explains in verses 3–4, “For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?” The church back then was arguing over petty matters— even over who had the better minister! Some argued, “I was taught of Paul. He is a better preacher.” And others contended, “I was taught of Apollos, and no way is Paul a better preacher than he!” Paul says, “You are behaving like babies! How childish!”

We know this is how children behave. As they are playing together, suddenly you hear a bossy voice say, “My toy is better than your toy,” or, “My dad is better than your dad.” Fights break out over the smallest issues.

Is that the kind of childish behavior that we are engaging in? Do we compare ministers as though there is some kind of competition between them? Are we ripping on each other’s churches by calling one “liberal” or another “legalistic”? Do we divide ourselves over petty issues or separate ourselves into cliques even within our own congregation? If so, God says we need to stop behaving like spiritual babies. We need to grow up! The mature Christian will engage in controversy over truth and righteousness, but not over trifles.

## **Legalism**

The second type of childishness we must put away is legalism. This term is frequently used wrongly, so we must understand it carefully. Legalism is not a love for God’s law or a dedication to obeying God’s law. It is not a stringent application of God’s law in every part of our lives, or even a rebuke of others who stray from God’s law. That’s not legalism—that’s godliness! Even if your godliness is called legalism, I encourage you to continue living in your piety in the midst of a church world that disdains those who uphold God’s law. Beware, however, of true legalism. Legalism is the proud belief that your obedience to God’s law saves you. It is also the addition of man-made rules to God’s law in such a way that you see yourself as

better than those who do not obey your man made rules. Scripture calls that legalism childishness.

Paul says in Galatians 4:3, “Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.” Before Christ came, both Jews and Gentiles lived as though their obedience to God’s law and their man-made laws saved them. Because of that childishness they were in bondage—they had become slaves to the law. Paul says that Christ came to redeem us from that bondage and childishness, so that we realize that we are sinners saved by grace alone!

Young people who sing, “Oh how love I Thy law!” be careful that your healthy love for God’s law does not morph into legalism. This is a danger for us. As children who grow up in godly families we are taught distinctly what is right and wrong. But maybe we begin to feel after a while as though obedience somehow saves us. Perhaps we begin to feel that our obedience to certain laws makes us better than others around us. We are by nature totally depraved sinners and must be constantly reminded that though we emphasize thankful obedience to God’s law, *Jesus alone* saves us. Are we legalistic? We need to grow up by constantly repenting of our legalistic tendencies by remembering the simple gospel of grace.

### **Shallow Thinking**

A third childish behavior is shallow thinking. In Hebrews 5: 13–14 we read, “For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” The author of Hebrews compares the most simple teachings of God’s word to milk. He calls the more difficult doctrines of God’s word meat. As a young Christians, we drink in the more simple truths: the milk. But as we grow up, while we continue to drink in the milk, we also need to eat the meat of God’s word. We need to grow up and learn how to take meaty chunks of doctrine, the deep things of God’s word, and chew on them. Oh yes, such are more difficult to ingest intellectually, sometimes harder to accept emotionally, but chewing on deep truths is what a mature Christian does.

You have seen that child before, who loves to drink his milk but leaves all his meat on his plate. When his mother puts a piece of meat in his mouth, you see a grimace after the first few chews as the child stores it in the side of his mouth (we call it “chipmunk mouth” in our home).

He refuses to do the work of ingesting that protein. Instead he will eventually just spit it back out. Is that who you are spiritually?

Young people, do you read your Bible regularly? If not, you should start. When you do so, you will find some parts that you will understand easily, but you will also find difficult concepts. If you pick up the *Beacon Lights*, *Standard Bearer*, or another good Christian magazine or book you're not always going to "get it" immediately. When you sit in church on Sunday, it's going to be difficult at times to understand everything the pastor says. What are you doing with the meat? Are you leaving it on the plate for someone else to chew? Are you storing it the side of your mouth half chewed ready to spit it out? That's childish! You need to grow up. Read! Listen! Then THINK to digest the deep and beautiful truths of God's word. These kinds of mature Christians are dwindling in number.

### **Lack of Conviction**

The final childish behavior we must put aside is a lack of conviction. Ephesians 4:14 says, "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." The picture of that verse is of a ship on the sea in a storm. Paul, who had been shipwrecked three times, knew what this was like. The wind would form huge waves that would smash against the boat. And whatever way the wind blew, the boat would blow, out of control, up and down, side to side, soon to crash on the rocks. That is a picture of childish behavior. For example, take a child who is in second grade and allow her to be taught evolution by a nice teacher. Put her in front of the television and let the world teach her all about beauty. Any parent knows that a young child at that age is going to believe almost everything she hears. Children are easily swayed, are not very discerning, and will be like that ship tossed this way and that, if their parents do not carefully guide them.

But young people, you're not in second grade anymore. You aren't new to the faith. You've been taught the truth of the scriptures by faithful parents and churches. You ought not to be like children or boats in a storm tossed to and fro, believing everything new that comes your way. Hold on to your convictions. Be discerning of what is truth and what is lie. Don't doubt what the word of God, the confessions, and the creeds teach. Be convicted about these truths, believe them, love them, and never give them up. As Paul says, "But continue thou in the things

which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them: (2 Timothy 3:14).”

As you live in this world you will come into contact with many who call themselves Christians. You will surely hear new teachings, interesting perspectives, and persuasive logic from very nice people. The temptation on your part will be to doubt everything that you have been brought up with and open your mind to all that others say. They will say things like: “Don’t be so black and white!” or, “Be more open-minded.” What will you do? Your childishness will want to doubt what you have been taught in your formative years. Your childishness will want to oscillate from one doctrine to another. Your childishness will want to refuse to take a stance and to flip-flop to what the majority of your acquaintances believe. Your childishness will want to take on that post-modern mentality that no one really knows for sure what is right. Childishness is dangerous. If you are unwilling to take a stance for the truth, then the winds of false doctrine will shipwreck your faith. You must grow up. The mature Christian will be resolute and unwavering in his convictions of the truth.

To be continued....