

1 Corinthians 13:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

Analysis

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child (ὅτε ἦμην νήπιος, ἐλάλουν ὡς νήπιος, ἐφρόνουν ὡς νήπιος, ἐλογιζόμην ὡς νήπιος, hote ēmēn nēpios, elaloun hōs nēpios, ephronoun hōs nēpios, elogizomēn hōs nēpios)—Nēpios means infant or immature child. Paul uses three verbs to encompass all aspects of childish thinking: speaking (communication), understanding (comprehension), and reasoning (logic). Children's cognitive abilities are limited—they think concretely, not abstractly; they're self-focused, not other-aware; they lack perspective and wisdom.

But when I became a man, I put away childish things (ὅτε γέγονα ἀνήρ, κατέργηκα τὰ τοῦ νηπίου, hote gegona anēr, katērgēka ta tou nēpiou)—Anēr is adult male, mature man. Katargeō (the same verb as verses 8, 10) means "I abolished, rendered inoperative." Maturity requires putting away not just childish actions but childish ways of thinking. The perfect tense katērgēka emphasizes a completed action with ongoing results—childishness was decisively left behind.

The analogy extends verse 10's argument: just as childhood gives way to adulthood, so this age's partial gifts will give way to eternity's completeness. The Corinthians' obsession with showy gifts is spiritual infantilism; maturity pursues love.

Historical Context

Paul repeatedly chastises the Corinthians for spiritual immaturity: "I could not address you as spiritual but as fleshly, as infants (nēpioi) in Christ" (3:1). Their jealousy, strife (3:3), arrogance (4:18), tolerance of immorality (5:2), lawsuits (6:1), and chaotic worship (14:20, "do not be children in your thinking") all evidence childishness. Paul calls them to adult maturity marked by love, not competitive displays of gifts.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. In what ways might your approach to spiritual gifts, worship preferences, or theological debates reflect childish rather than mature thinking?
2. How does Paul's analogy challenge the common assumption that spectacular gifts are marks of spiritual maturity rather than spiritual infancy?
3. What 'childish things' in your faith—whether theological immaturity, relational selfishness, or spiritual consumerism—might God be calling you to 'put away'?

Interlinear Text

ὅτε ἦμην νηπίου ὡς νηπίου ἐλάλουν ὡς νηπίου
When I was a child as a child I spake as a child
G3753 G2252 G3516 G5613 G3516 G2980 G5613 G3516

ἐφρόνουν ὡς νηπίου ἐλογιζόμην ὅτε δέ γέγονα ἀνήρ
I understood as a child I thought When but I became a man
G5426 G5613 G3516 G3049 G3753 G1161 G1096 G435

κατήργηκα τὰ τοῦ νηπίου
I put away G3588 G3588 a child
G2673 G3516

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 14:20 (Parallel theme): Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

Galatians 4:1 (Parallel theme): Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;

Ecclesiastes 11:10 (Parallel theme): Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.