

1 Corinthians 14:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

Analysis

Brethren, be not children in understanding—Greek *mē paidia ginesthe tais phresin* (μὴ παιδία γίνεσθε ταῖς φρεσίν, "don't be children in mind/thinking"). *Phrenes* (φρένες) means understanding, judgment, thought. **Howbeit in malice be ye children**—the positive contrast: *tē kakia nēpiazete* (τῇ κακίᾳ νηπιάζετε, "in evil/malice be infants"). **But in understanding be men** (*teleioi, τέλειοι*, "mature, complete, adults").

Paul calls for moral innocence (childlike in evil) but intellectual maturity (adult in thinking). The Corinthians' fascination with showy tongues reveals immaturity—prioritizing spectacular experience over the hard work of understanding and teaching. True maturity discriminates between gifts based on edification, not impressiveness.

Historical Context

The Corinthians' childishness manifested in divisions (3:1-4), tolerating sin (5:1-2), lawsuits (6:1-8), and now, prioritizing flashy gifts. Paul consistently calls them to mature discernment.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does the Corinthians' misuse of tongues reveal immaturity?
2. What's the difference between being 'childlike' (positive) and 'childish' (negative)?
3. In what areas might modern Christians be 'children in understanding'?

Interlinear Text

Ἀδελφοί	μὴ	παιδία	γίνεσθε	ταῖς	φρεσὶν	ἀλλὰ	τῇ
Brethren	not	children	be	G3588	in understanding	howbeit	G3588
G80	G3361	G3813	G1096		G5424	G235	
κακία	νηπιάζετε	ταῖς	δὲ	φρεσὶν	τέλειοι	γίνεσθε	
in malice	be ye children	G3588	but	in understanding	men	be	
G2549	G3515		G1161	G5424	G5046	G1096	

Additional Cross-References

Romans 16:19 (Parallel theme): For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.

1 Peter 2:2 (Parallel theme): As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

1 Corinthians 13:11 (Parallel theme): 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.

Matthew 18:3 (Parallel theme): And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

1 Corinthians 2:6 (Parallel theme): Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:

2 Peter 3:18 (Parallel theme): But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

Mark 10:15 (Parallel theme): Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

Matthew 11:25 (Parallel theme): At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

Philippians 1:9 (Parallel theme): And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;

Isaiah 11:3 (Parallel theme): And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: