

March 27, 2022
Faith. Hope. Love.
1 Corinthians 13:11-13, 14:20

The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees drag out a woman who has been caught in the act of adultery. They put her on display in front of the crowd (presumably a man was also caught in the act of adultery, but he seems to have been let go). They say to Jesus, *"This woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses tells us to stone her. What do you say?"* Jesus stoops down and writes in the dust with His finger. They keep demanding an answer. Eventually, He says, *"All right. But let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!"* He writes in the dust again (I'd love to know what He was writing).

When her accusers hear this, they slip away, one by one, beginning with the oldest. Only Jesus is left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Jesus says to her, *"Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"* "No, Lord," she replies. Jesus says, *"Neither do I. Go and sin no more."* (John 8:3-11)

On the one hand, Jesus actions and words are incredibly wise. He brilliantly exposes the men's hypocrisy. On the other hand, they are incredibly simple. With simple, childlike love and mercy, Jesus forgives the woman. He gives changes her life. He gives her hope.

As we read the Bible, we come across sayings that seem contradictory.

Jesus says: *"Let the children come to me ... For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children"* (Mark 10:13-16). Peter says, *"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk so you will grow into a full experience of salvation"* (1 Peter 2:2-3).

Yet Paul writes, *"I must talk as though ... you are infants in Christ. I have to feed you with milk, not solid food, because you aren't ready for anything stronger"* (1 Corinthians 3:1-2). *"Do not be immature like children ... Instead, speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ"* (Ephesians 4:14-15). *"When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things"* (1 Corinthians 13:11). *"Stop thinking like children. Regarding evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults"* (1 Corinthians 14:20).

In certain ways we are to be children. In other ways, very adult. They key is to get it right.

At the end of 1 Corinthians 13, Paul comments, *"Three things will last forever – faith, hope, and love – and the greatest of these is love."* As we think about childhood and adulthood, let's think in terms of these three of great virtues.

FAITH - Regarding evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults

Childhood is characterized by **faith**. I recently spoke with a someone about a child who

loves coming to church, who loves being “with God.” Children often have no problem believing in God. They believe God can do amazing things. Their minds are not limited by what they “know” is possible. Their imaginations inspire them to step out, in faith.

As adults, our **faith** can become bitter. We can become cynical. If-I-can’t-see-it-and-touch-it-I-won’t-believe-it it isn’t true. In Jesus’ time, it’s the disillusionment of the Sadducees, who trust in their wealth and political connections rather than God. It’s also the disillusionment of the zealots who want a violent revolution. They no longer believe God can actually do anything, so both groups take things into their own hands.

We do live in a tough, tough world. We know that. Let’s not pretend otherwise. Regarding evil, be a child. **Like a child**, keep your **faith** in God. Refuse to give in to the cynicism in our society. We may put our faith in a political movement, a news feed, our bank account, or YouTube teacher. We lose our genuine faith in the God of the galaxies, the Jesus who rose from the dead, or the Spirit who is with us, to save us and our world.

As an adult, think about what **faith** really means. Thinking as adults, we see we cannot solve all our own problems; we need help from other people and we need help from God. Adult thinking realizes sometimes we need childlike faith: *“Unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of God. Anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of God”* (Matthew 18:1-4).

Thinking as adults, we know we cannot solve all the world’s problems on our own; we need help from God. Thinking as adults, we put our faith in God – our Creator, Saviour, and ever-present Lord. Only God can deal with the sin and evil in our hearts and in the hearts of people like world leaders dragging us into war. However, as adults, we also think through what we can do. We can pray. We can give to help refugees. We can wrestle with ways we may be able to make a tangible difference to deal with issues in our own community, our own school or workplace, our own family, our own lives.

In a world of war, oppression, natural disasters, and plagues, Jesus calls us to be people of faith. People with an adult faith that knows that people need God. And an adult faith that knows that people need practical help, practical love, and practical care as well.

HOPE - Regarding evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults

Childhood is characterized by **hope**. Children often have a sense of innocence. They see the difference between right and wrong and want to do right. They see good in the world, not just all the problems. There is a certain – holy – naiveté, that, in hope, believes God, justice, goodness, and love can win the day.

As adults, our **hope** can flicker. The innocence of childhood seems too idealistic. We look at the world around us, we don’t see much to be hopeful about. We worry. We despair. We give up. Some of us can hide away with too much news or YouTube. We may even get excited about end times prophecies because they offer us an escape. After all, there is no

hope for this world. So the sooner all hell breaks loose and Jesus returns, the better ...

Paul says, regarding evil, be a child. **Like a child**, hold on to your **hope** in the power of God – here, now, not just for the future. Hold on to the naïve innocence of childhood that believes right and wrong matter. That believes God wins. That believes how we live – justly and lovingly, now – matters. Don't give up, saying there's nothing we can do. People in Jesus' day lived in as hard a world as we do, yet Jesus brought a message of hope. Peter, Paul, and others shared good news of faith, hope, and love in a divided, hurting world.

We are people of hope. **As adults**, we share the hope we have in Jesus. Yes, one day, someday, Jesus will return and make all things right. One day we will be with Him, forever. But change happens now. Lives are transformed now.

So right now, believing God is very much alive and active in our world, we are people of hope. *"For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors. God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, 'Come back to God!'"*(2 Corinthians 5:19-20).

In hope, we are people who help the world see hope. Yes, we share the hope of an eternal destiny with God. But we also help people see that God is changing lives and doing amazing things, here and now. As adults, we live rightly, godly, holy, good lives of compassion, mercy, and love ... We are people of hope, in word, and in deed.

LOVE - Regarding evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults

*"Three things will last forever – faith, hope, and love – and the **greatest** of these is love"*(1 Corinthians 13:13). Is "love" a big deal? Absolutely. After all, *"God so **loved** the world He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life"*(John 3:16). God is love (1 John 4:8, 16).

Childhood is characterized by **love** – unconditional, uninhibited acceptance of everyone, regardless of ethnicity, ability, or anything else. Kids have a delight in expressing affection. Kids often have a sense of love and justice that expresses itself as a wonderful desire to help others (like a boy in London, ON, who emptied his piggy bank to help Ukrainian refugees).

As adults **love** can be elusive. It can lose its idealism as gracious, self-giving, unconditional, bearing all things and enduring all things. I can believe love is just an emotion. Love can become trivialized as sexuality. If I've been hurt, I can believe love is an idealistic myth. As a child of 70s/80s, I can resonate with Nazareth's lyrics, *"Love hurts, love scars, love wounds and marks any heart not tough or strong enough to take a lot of pain. Love is like a cloud, holds a lot of rain. Love is just a lie made to make you blue. Love hurts."* Ouch.

Regarding evil, be like a child. **Like a child**, model the highest ideals of **love**. Reject the disillusionment that says that love – real self-giving, unconditional, sacrificial love – is

impossible, foolish, or weak. Reject the narrow definition of love simply as sex.

As an adult, think about what love really means. Love is not an emotion. Love is an action. *"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance"* (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). This kind of love changes how I live. It doesn't come naturally. Love requires thought. Effort. Intentionality. Commitment. Determination. Idealism. Perseverance. Discipline.

Yes, it's a tough world out there. In a crazy world like ours, becoming cynical, skeptical, and disillusioned is understandable. Becoming an adult means fighting through those quagmires. Being an adult leads us to rediscover faith in Jesus and share our faith in Jesus. To rekindle our own hope and to be those who inspire hope in others. To be those who know the love of God and who choose the hard work and discipline of loving others as God has loved us.

"Stop thinking like children. Regarding evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults."
Choose to walk with God's Spirit, moment by moment, day in, day out.

- **Choose to keep faith in Jesus.** Think through how you can live with authentic faith in God. How can you help other people discover faith in Jesus?
- **Choose to hope in Jesus.** Live in confidence, knowing your life is safe in God's hands. Be a person of hope. How can you share hope through what you say and do?
- Most of all, **choose to love in the name of Jesus.** *"God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so we might have eternal life through him. This is real love, not that we loved God, but he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Since God loved us so much, we surely ought to love each other. Let us love one another, for love comes from God"* (1 John 4:7-8). How do we love one another? In 1 Corinthians 13 terms – in action terms?

A broken woman is dragged before Jesus. With a few simple words, He forgives her. He blesses her. He restores her jaded faith in a loving, gracious God. He gives her hope. He loves her. He changes her life. Who can I love, in the name of Jesus? What is that love going to look like, in action? Who knows what difference a few simple words or a small simple action can make?

Copyright ©2022 by Bruce Martin
First Baptist Church
1614 – 5th Avenue South, Lethbridge, AB T1J 0W3
(403) 327-2082
bruce@firstb.net