

Go to an art gallery with a small child and you can guarantee that you will hear them asking, “When can we go and get an ice cream” every five minutes. (They’re bound to ask that because that’s how you bribed them to go there in the first place.) The same is true of going to see a ruined castle or historic house. And it is also true of a museum, UNLESS that museum features dinosaurs. Because all children LOVE dinosaurs. They love the size of them. The sharpness of their teeth and the sound that they make. Children have a wild-eyed wonder when it comes to dinosaurs.

The same is true of many other things that they don’t encounter on a daily basis. Show them the night sky and tell them how far away all those stars are and their mouths drop open. One of the first films Rebecca went to see in the cinema was Star Wars episode seven. When the cinema went black, the words “A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away came on she was transfixed. But when the sudden explosion of sound that is the opening bar of music alongside the huge words “STAR WARS” blazed on the screen she simply uttered the word, “Awesome.”

Appreciating the world in such a child-like way is something that we, as adults, have largely lost. We forget that growing old is mandatory whereas growing up is optional.

But to behave and appreciate things in a child-like way is not the same as operating in a childish way. Someone who is childish is behaving improperly for the company and circumstances in which they find themselves. In the main, people don't like to be told that they are behaving childishly. We don't like to be thought of as petulant children, prepared to throw our metaphorical dummies out of the pram if we don't get our own way. When confronted with the stark reality of their attitude, people who behave in this manner often become even more childish in their response.

It's not a new phenomenon – even in the church – and it's one that prompted St. Paul to put pen to paper almost two thousand years ago.

The Church in Corinth was arguing in this fashion and Paul reprimanded them by describing them as “babes in Christ”. He blames them for (what he calls) the “sins of the flesh”. Now as soon as you mention the word flesh and the Bible, most modern people will put two and two together and think that Paul's on about sex again – after all, that’s what the church seems to spend most of its time worrying about these days. However, in this passage, Paul defines “sins of the flesh” as jealousy and quarrelling.

Quarrelling and jealousy are, at their most basic level, a childish belief that my opinions are correct and yours are wrong. And everyone has their own opinions – indeed, we are all entitled to have our own opinions. That doesn’t mean that we have to foist them on to others though. A famous soccer manager, Brian Clough, was once asked what happened if one of his players disagreed with one of his decisions. He calmly replied that the two would go to his office, the player would tell his idea, Brian would tell his, They would talk about it and decide that Clough was right. This doesn’t usually apply though. If your opinions differ to other people's the mature way forward is to discuss them – put yourself in the other person's shoes, and see how much you can both change. And key to it all is respect for other people and the way in which their opinions differ to yours. But arguing and shouting are the response of the childish cry-baby.

Many immature Christians are convinced they are right in everything they say and that everyone who disagrees is wrong – you only need to look at the social media to see that. All too often they claim a fundamental approach to the authority of the Bible and Christian tradition for their prejudices, arguing that anyone disagrees with them are not really Christians at all. They can usually be easily spotted as they normally begin their arguments with “It says in the Bible...”

The real reason for this immaturity is the size gap. God is so much greater than the universe that he created. Compared with God, we humans are no bigger than specks of dust – not even that when you look at the sheer immensity of the cosmos. When Voyager 1 was flying out past Saturn, it took a photo of the solar system – at

that distance the earth was just a single pale blue dot in the vastness of space. We really are insignificant. Amazingly, God loves us.

But our language is inadequate when it comes to dealing with God. All we can say is what God is a bit like – a bit like a shepherd – only bigger. A bit like a father – only greater. God made us in his image which means we have the power of choice and the ability to love. But God isn't human – he has no body or gender that we can describe.

God, the creator of time and space, isn't limited by material dimensions – the only way we can think of God is by making comparisons. It's like when a child asks you what it's like to be a soldier, and you answer that it's like being in a playground full of children fighting and you're scared one of them is going to hit you – only much more scary. Our ideas about God are similarly immature because we are only babes in Christ.

That's why God revealed himself bit by bit to the Bible writers. They spoke in pictures based upon things that they all knew and understood. When the people lived by keeping sheep, they described God as a shepherd and us as silly sheep. When they had settled down and started farming, they described God as a farmer driving others off the land he had promised to us. A wife was a man's most valuable possession because she would give him sons to work with him, so the Bible writers were particularly harsh on anyone who tried to steal another man's wife condemning the thief and the wife to death by stoning. In the current age, these things are no longer the case – wives aren't possessions of the husbands, for example, but equal partners. The old images are no longer helpful.

Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount, encourages us to take a fresh look at the old prohibitions. It's as if he is saying, you are no longer babies so take a grown-up look at the rules you abide by. Don't just concentrate on the letter of the law but look at the spirit of the law. Following the letter of the law will often lead us to the wrong answer because we get caught up in definitions and fine detail. Where any law contradicts the law of love (which is the spirit of the law in a nutshell); love should come first. Jesus went behind the commandment concerning adultery to examine our attitude to sex. It's particularly important in modern society when couples get married usually long after they have been living together. The church used to take the stance that this was inherently wrong. But, if sex is an expression of love for someone – someone you care for and will continue to do so, is that the case? Shouldn't the command to love take precedence? Similarly, when we are faced with the relatively modern issue of same-sex marriages, we need to consider the law of love rather than the law of tradition.

In Jewish law, a man could divorce his wife if she burnt the lunch. She would then have no choice but to starve or become a prostitute in order to live. Jesus protested against this, defending women against oppression – he could rightly be regarded as an early feminist. He was sympathetic to prostitutes, who weren't usually doing it from choice. We certainly wouldn't consider incinerated toast as grounds for divorce today, which underlines the problems in trying to apply centuries-old teachings to modern society. We look at the minutiae and forget the overarching command to love one another.

So when we start to judge others by a literal interpretation of the laws of the Bible, we are demonstrating immature behaviour – we are babes in Christ. It's important to apply the spirit of those laws – applied to modern living. We need to grow up and embrace everyone, however different from us they are. We need to embrace everyone with Christ-like tolerance and universal love.