

Infant Baptism and Membership in God's Kingdom

Matthew 19:13-15

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Why do we have our small children baptized with water? There are a number of reasons that might be cited, but we will be focusing on one of those reasons today. Just as the Lord saves and includes male and female in the Kingdom of God; just as the Lord saves and includes rich and poor in the Kingdom of God; even so the Lord saves and includes not only adults, but also saves and includes children in the Kingdom of God. And since water baptism is an outward sign and seal of God's promises to those who are members of God's Visible Kingdom, our task today is to examine whether Christ teaches that the Kingdom of God belongs to children as well as to adults. If Christ does (in fact) teach that the Kingdom God belongs to children (even infants and small children), then they should not be excluded as a group from the outward sign and seal of membership in the Kingdom of God (namely, water baptism).

Dear ones, we as parents cannot save our children. The Church cannot save our children. Even the ordinances of Christ (in and of themselves) cannot save our children. Only Jesus Christ can save our children (let there be no mistake about that). But one of the most significant means which Christ ordinarily uses to bring children to Christ is the Christian parent. It is this truth (i.e. the important role Christian parents have in bringing their children to Christ) which the Lord makes clear from our text in Matthew 19:13-15. Let us consider today from our text: (1) The Honorable Work Of The Parents (Matthew 19:13a); (2) The Hindering Work Of The Disciples (Matthew 19:13b); and (3) The Response Of Christ (Matthew 19:14-15).

I. The Honorable Work Of The Parents (Matthew 19:13a).

A. In our text, we are introduced to an incident in the ministry of Christ in which believing parents who followed Christ were recorded in the pages of Holy Scripture as bringing their “little children” to Christ.

1. We observe that in both the Gospel of Matthew (in 19:13) and in the Gospel of Mark (in 10:13) the diminutive form for children (i.e. little or young children) is used when referring to those who were brought to Jesus. These were not older children, for they were small enough to be taken up into the arms of the Lord (according to Mark 10:16).

2. In fact, Luke 18:15 does not even use the word, “little children”, but becomes even more specific by calling them “infants” (*brephos*, cp. **Luke 1:41**—John the Baptist in the womb of his mother; **Luke 2:12,16**—Christ being wrapped in swaddling clothes; **Acts 7:19**—the infants who were to be destroyed after their birth at Pharaoh’s command).

B. Now note that these “infants” were brought by the parents to Christ for a particularly stated purpose: “that he should put his hands on them, and pray” (Matthew 19:13). What was it that the parent desired from Christ? These parents sought Christ to bless their small children, and to pray for them by placing His hands upon them (Mark 10:16—note also that Jacob blessed his grandchildren by laying his hands upon their heads in Genesis 48:14).

C. What type of blessings did these parents seek? A physical blessing or healing? No, that would not seem to be the case at all since there is no mention in the text that these infants were sick. Then it was the spiritual blessings of Christ and His Kingdom which these godly parents sought as we shall see more clearly.

1. It is noteworthy that these believing parents did not view

their children as too young to receive the spiritual blessings of Christ. Although these little ones were not yet able to articulate words, not yet able to profess their faith in Christ, and not yet able to understand the meaning of the outward actions of Christ as He placed His hands upon them and prayed on their behalf, yet these believing parents believed their little children had a place in Christ's Kingdom, and they desired His blessing upon their children.

2. The action of these parents in bringing their children to Christ was not simply one in which they dedicated their little children to the Lord, but one in which they sought Christ's gracious blessing upon their little children.

3. What the parents here sought for their children from Christ was neither presumptuous (i.e. doing something they had no warrant from God's Word to do) nor premature (i.e. doing something at such a young age which they should have done at a much older age). For the Lord takes even the little infants into His arms and blesses them even before they were able to profess faith in Him (in Mark 10:16).

D. What these believing parents did in bringing their little children (even infants) to Christ was precisely what they should have done. They were seeking to be obedient to God and were seeking the spiritual interests of their children. But had they believed their infant children (at that age of their young lives) had no part in Christ's Kingdom, they would have had no warrant to bring them to Christ in the first place. Where did they find such a warrant in Scripture to believe that their infant children had an interest in Christ's Kingdom? They no doubt knew of the spiritual promise made to Abraham and to Abraham's children in Genesis 17:7. There the Lord promised to be the God of not only believing Abraham, but the God of his children as well. And in order to remember that this covenant applied to the infant children of Abraham (who is the father of all who believe whether Jew or Gentile), there was given the outward

sign of circumcision (which the Apostle Paul declares was a sign and seal of the imputed righteousness of God received through justifying faith, Romans 4:11), and this outward sign of circumcision was to be applied not only to Abraham who could believe, but even to the infant males who were 8 days old (who represented the infant females) and who could not yet profess their faith in the Lord.

E. Dear Christian parents, there is no greater blessing which we should desire from the Lord for our children than the free and gracious blessings of Christ to be poured out upon their souls. We should desire and fervently pray daily that Christ might enlighten their dark minds, renew their rebellious wills, and grant them the faith to embrace Christ as He is freely offered to them in the gospel.

1. We should not only desire such blessings for our children, but we should actively bring them to Christ through all of the ordinances appointed by Christ for their blessing: fervent prayer even before their birth and afterwards as well, water baptism (which I will address in greater detail in a few minutes), the reading and explanation of Scripture (with an emphasis always upon their need of Jesus Christ), the catechising of our children in the foundational truths of our faith, the faithful worship of God (in secret, with the family, and with the Church), a sound Christian education, effective discipline (with much love and encouragement, and with correction and the rod when necessary—not fits of anger, shouting, and calling names), and help in selecting a godly spouse.

2. Dear parents, if we would bring our children to the Lord for His blessing, we must set an example before them by bringing ourselves in all of these ways unto the Lord for His blessing. Our faith in Christ cannot be dead, lifeless, and cold if we would desire our children to have a living faith in Christ. If our children see that we are merely going through the outward motions of our faith and that our religion is a mere outward form rather than an inward reality, why should we be surprised

to see them despise that which we ourselves inwardly despise?

3. Dear ones, we must not be deterred from such holy desires, prayers, and actions for our children by any impediments we might see (whether in the rebellion of our children or whether in the apparent inaction of the Lord Himself—remember the Canaanite mother in Matthew 15:21-28). If we would desire for our children sufficient food, clothing, shelter, good health, and a good education, how much more we should desire for them the forgiveness of sin, everlasting life, and an obedient faith?

II. The Hindering Work Of The Disciples (Matthew 19:13b).

A. Whereas the work of the parents was honorable, the work of the disciples was reprehensible; for our text states that the disciples “rebuked” those parents who brought their infant children to be blessed by Christ. The disciples censured or reproved these believing parents for doing a good work.

B. The disciples again believed they knew what was right for Christ to do in a particular situation (as we see in Matthew 15:23; Mark 8:32; and in Luke 9:54). The disciples saw these little children as a hinderance and interruption to the ministry of Christ, and thought that Christ should return to what He was teaching the multitudes before this unnecessary intrusion by these godly parents. However, the disciples had no warrant from Christ to turn these parents and their children away. The Lord then takes this circumstance in order to demonstrate the interest little children have in Christ’s Kingdom.

C. The root sin of the disciples at this point was presumption. They exercised presumption and not faith. For you see, presumption has no warrant from God’s Word, but proceeds according to one’s own thoughts

and will. However, faith has a Divine warrant from God's Word, and proceeds according to the revealed will of God found in Scripture. The presumption of the disciples here is the very foundation of all exercises of religion that proceed from the mere heart of man, rather than from the commandment of God. Paul calls this, "will worship", in Colossians 2:23. The disciples thought they knew what was best to do in the exercise of religion in that situation, but they had no warrant from Christ. They acted as though they were wiser than Christ. Whenever we think we can introduce into the New Covenant worship of God what God Himself has not authorized (whether it be uninspired hymns, instruments, choirs, images, holy days like Christmas etc.), we, like the disciples, are guilty of presumption and acting as if we were wiser than God Himself. The believing parents of these little ones had the warrant of God from the Scriptures to bring their infant children to Christ for His blessing (Genesis 17:7); whereas the believing disciples had no warrant from God in the Scriptures to keep these children from receiving the blessing of Christ.

D. The disciples of Christ sought to prevent these children from receiving the blessing of Christ. Dear ones, whenever we prevent (even by our mere negligence) the outward ordinances and blessings appointed by Christ for our children, we have sinned grievously as did the disciples of Christ.

III. The Response Of Christ (Matthew 19:14-15).

A. The Lord actually responded in three distinct ways according to our text: in His emotions, in His words, and in His actions. Let us consider each of these responses of the Lord briefly.

1. Christ first responded **in His emotions** ("He was much displeased" Mark 10:14a). The Greek word translated "much displeased" does not mean that Christ was a little unhappy with His disciples, but

rather that He was righteously angry or indignant with what they had done. It is a very strong word of emotion. Christ demonstrates how His whole being was repulsed by those who would prevent babies from being brought to Him that He might bless them. If Christ was indignant, we too ought to be indignant when these little ones are prevented (by either parents or ministers) from receiving the blessings of Christ (this is why we line out the Psalms for our children in public worship).

2. Christ then responded **in His words** (Matthew 19:14).

a. The Lord here rebukes the disciples with a command and a prohibition. **The command** of the Lord is this: “Suffer (i.e. permit) little children . . . to come unto me.” **The prohibition** of the Lord is this: “and forbid them not, to come unto me (literally, “stop hindering them from coming to me”). Thus, we are (on the one hand) to positively do everything within our power to bring our children to the Lord by all of the outward means God has appointed, and we are (on the other hand) to discontinue doing anything that would hinder their coming to the Lord by way of these outward means. Dear ones, might not our anger toward our husband or wife hinder our children from coming to the Lord? Might not our critical heart do the same, or our profane speech, or our proud and haughty hearts, or our impure eyes, or our heartless prayers, or our worldly heart and attitude? Then for the sake of our children’s spiritual welfare, we must cease and desist from such behavior according to Christ.

b. The Lord then gives the reason why the disciples are to permit the little children to come to Him and why they must stop hindering them: “for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14). Literally, the Lord said, “for of such ones is the kingdom of heaven”, i.e. of such little children (yea even infants) that I am holding in my arms is the kingdom of God. Some have objected that the words, “of such”, really mean, “of such like these”, or “of such resembling these”, i.e. those who have child-like qualities, theirs is the kingdom of God. However, this cannot be the case for a couple reasons.

(1) The Greek word used here in our text for “of such” has the definite article “the” in front of it (literally, “of the such ones”). Without the definite article (“the”), it would have an adjectival or descriptive use by which it would refer to child-like qualities rather than to the children themselves. However with the article (“the”) before it, it refers not to the qualities of the children, but rather to the children themselves: in other words, for of the such ones (the very ones as I am holding in my arms is the Kingdom of God). The Lord was clearly declaring that His Kingdom belonged not only to adults who could profess faith in Christ, but even to infants whom God should regenerate and could not yet profess faith in Christ.

(2) The words of the Lord here must refer not to those who resemble children in certain respects, but to the little children themselves for it would make nonsense of the passage. Little children are brought to Christ that he might bless them, place his hands upon them, and pray for them; and Christ according to the interpretation of some is made to say, “Suffer little children to come to me, that I may lay my hands on them, pray for them, and bless them because the kingdom of God is composed of persons who in some respects resemble them.” The word “for” gives the reason for Christ’s command and prohibition which command and prohibition address little children not those who resemble little children (“for of such is the kingdom of heaven”).

(3) To what does the “kingdom of heaven” here refer or the “kingdom of God” (in Mark 10:14 and Luke 18:16)? It speaks of the kingdom over which the Lord rules, i.e. His church (whether the church militant upon the earth in Matthew 21:43 or the church triumph in heaven in Luke 13:28).

(4) Thus, Christ teaches that even little infants may be members of the Kingdom of God, which is the Church of Christ. And if members, then they are entitled to the outward sign of that membership: Baptism.

(5) Let me propose the following propositions which if the major and minor premises are true, then the conclusion must necessarily follow. 1. All visible members of Christ's Kingdom are to receive the sign of membership into that Kingdom, namely water baptism. 2. The infants of believing parents are visible members of Christ's Kingdom (according to the words of Christ here in Matthew 19:14). 3. Therefore, the infants of believing parents ought to receive the sign of membership into that Kingdom, namely water baptism.

3. The Lord responded **by His actions** (Matthew 10:15).

But someone may ask, why do small children need to be baptized? Surely, they are not accounted as sinners in need of Christ's salvation? Dear ones, this is where we must cast away our own human wisdom and concepts of justice and rely upon the instruction from God's inspired Word ("Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" Proverbs 3:5).

Scripture teaches that our children are conceived in sin and corrupted from the moment of conception with Adam's sin ("Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" Psalm 51:5). The consequences of Adam's sin upon the human race (including infants) are spelled in detail in **Romans 5:14-19**: sin (both original sin and imputed sin), death, and condemnation. In these verses, Paul is not talking about the individual sin of each person as being the reason why one is accountable to God as a sinner (though that is true as well), but rather Paul is talking about Adam's sin in transgressing the Law of God by having eaten the forbidden fruit as being the reason for the sin of mankind, death, and condemnation ("Adam's transgress" in **Romans 5:14**). Note God's just judgment upon all of Adam's posterity (by ordinary generation) due to Adam's sin.

1. **Romans 5:15**: "through THE offense of ONE [Adam—GLP] many be

dead.”

2. **Romans 5:16:** “the judgment [i.e. God’s judgment—GLP] was by ONE [by Adam—GLP] to condemnation.”

3. **Romans 5:17:** “by ONE man’s [Adam’s—GLP] offense death reigned by ONE.”

4. **Romans 5:18:** “by the offense of ONE [Adam—GLP] judgment came upon all men to condemnation.”

5. **Romans 5:19:** “by ONE man’s [Adam’s—GLP] disobedience many were made sinners.”

6. And just in case one doesn’t believe this applies to infants and small children, we must ask: Why do infants die? After all, Paul says, “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Paul tells us why death has affected all mankind (even infants), because all mankind (except for Christ, who died voluntarily as God’s sacrificial Lamb to bear the guilty and penalty of sin for His people) are accountable before God for the sin of their covenant representative, Adam. Paul states in Romans 5:14 that between Adam and Moses (when the Law was given), there were those who did not consciously sin by breaking a commandment of God (as did Adam), and yet death reigned over them. Why? Because they sinned in Adam and fell with Adam in his first transgression. These verses indicate that God made Adam a federal head in representing all people (including infants) conceived by ordinary generation, just as God made Christ a federal head in representing all those that were chose in Christ before the foundation of the world (1 Corinthians 15:22; Ephesians 1:4). Thus, when we read in Romans 5:12, “and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned”, we must understand from the rest of this chapter that death passed upon all men because all men (including infants) sinned in Adam.

Dear ones, we are all by nature (not only by acts of personal sin we commit) children of God’s wrath according to Ephesians 2:3 (we and our

children). Anyone who denies one is a sinner deceives himself and the truth is not in him (1 John 1:8,10). The fact that we as parents have infected our children with the disease of sin and corruption ought to drive us all the more to seek to lead them to the only One who can save them from eternal death—the Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism does not save our children (only Christ can do that), but baptism does point our children to their need of Christ and the promises of the Gospel that are extended to them, and which salvation is realized through faith alone in Christ alone.

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