



Luke 18:15-17
“A Childlike Faith”

15 Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.

16 But Jesus called them to Him and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.

17 "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."

We have in these verses two distinct things being taught, first a teaching about children and their place in the kingdom of God, and then an exhortation from Jesus to all believers to be like children in regards to the Christian faith. What I'm going to do is address those two aspects one after the other.

What's going in these verses? First, let me mess with the setting most people put these verses in. Most people either because they've seen a painting or because they just think of Jesus as a teaching outdoors think of him sitting outside with mothers bringing their children to him. It is just as likely though, that Jesus was teaching inside a house, and parents (not just mothers) were bringing their babies to Christ to be blessed. William Hendriksen thinks that disciples began trying to shoo them away from the door, but Christ stopped them and told them to allow the parents to bring their children to them.

Why did they bring them, they didn't bring them for healing, the disciples had already seen Jesus heal sick children, they were bringing babies for a benediction or blessing. The disciples apparently felt that this kind of thing was beneath the dignity of their master. Here is the Messiah teaching about the kingdom, surely the things of the kingdom are not intended for children, this is adult stuff. It is not for babies! When these infants have grown up and come of age, then they too may sit and learn at the feet of the master. And then Jesus blows that misconception right out of the water. He says that the parents are doing the right thing by bringing their children to him for a blessing. That in fact they are already part of the kingdom.

How can that be? These are in the Greek *brephos*, new born children, little babies. They cannot understand the things of the gospel! But yet as children of believing parents, they are members of the covenant community, and they can be the subjects of Christ's blessings. That is why Paul was able to speak in 1 Cor. 7:14 of the child of even one believing parent as Holy. For in his promises God has always dealt not merely with adults but with their children as well.

Think of Genesis 17, God's covenant with Abraham. God doesn't just establish it with Abraham but what does he say: "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you." Then in the New Testament you have Acts chapter 2 where Peter after preaching the gospel and saying

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" tells them *"For the promise is to you and to your children"*

So God's people are not to merely to bring their children to Christ once, they are to continually be bringing them into his presence. Paul again says in Eph. 6:4: *"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord."* The children of believers are to be raised from infancy in the church as members of the church. That is why we apply the sign and seal of the covenant to them.

Now there is a tendency I know to assume that if you say that the children of believers are members of the covenant community and members of the church that you are saying that they are definitely saved. That isn't the case, they are set apart, they have been given the promises of the covenant, they are part of the church of God by birthright, they have the sign and seal of the covenant, they have many blessings that the children of unbelievers do not have. But all of those things were also true of Esau, the son of Isaac, and yet he sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. He never came to saving faith, he may have had that circumcision of the flesh, but never the more needful circumcision of the heart.

R.L Dabney put it this way *"When our standards say, "All baptized persons are members of the Church," this by no means implies their title to all sealing ordinances [by which he means the Lord's Supper], the vote, and office. They are minor citizens in the ecclesiastical commonwealth, under tutelage, training, and instruction, and government; heirs, if they will exercise the graces obligatory on them, of all the ultimate franchises of the Church, but not allowed to enjoy them until qualified. Yet they are, justly, under ecclesiastical government. The reasonableness of this position is well illustrated by that of minors under the civil commonwealth."*

Merely being in the visible church and a baptized member of the covenant community does not in and of itself save, now I must emphasize that this is true of both baptized infants and baptized adults, J.C. Ryle made that part very well when he wrote:

"I am aware that many do not admit the truth of what I have just said. Some tell us that all baptized people are members of Christ by virtue of their baptism. Others tell us that where there is a head knowledge we have no right to question a person's interest in Christ. To these views I have only one plain answer. The Bible forbids us to say that any man is joined to Christ until he believes. Baptism is no proof that we are joined to Christ. Simon Magus was baptized, and yet was distinctly told that he had "no part or lot in this matter" (Acts 8:21). Head-knowledge is no proof that we are joined to Christ. The devils know Christ well enough, but have no portion in Him. God knows, no doubt, who are His from all eternity. But man knows nothing of anyone's justification until he believes. The grand question is: "Do we believe?" It is written, "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." "He that believeth not shall be damned" (John 3:36; Mark 16:16). If Bible words mean anything, to be without faith is to be "without Christ."

But what then is the duty of Christian parents regarding their children? To bring them to Christ so that they might receive his blessings! So how do you do that? How do you place your children in the arms of Christ? By bringing them under the ordinances that he has ordained to be his means of blessing, his means of grace. Prayer, the sacraments, and the word read and preached. Now obviously they cannot yet come to the Lord's table, but they should be brought for baptism, and then they should be raised bathed in prayer and surrounded by the reading and preaching of the word both in the church *and at*

home. Now many people make the mistake of only doing one or the other but both are absolutely necessary. They cannot come under the preaching of the word or be baptized at home, but at the same time, the church cannot assume the responsibility of fathers to ***bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord***. **The Bible assumes that children will be brought to Christ in both settings.**

Well so much for the first part – the place of children in the kingdom, what of the second – the exhortation of Jesus to you to have receive the kingdom of God as a little child? It means that even as adults you should have a childlike faith. Such a faith has two essential traits.

First it is a ***humble*** faith. It is a faith that does not think too highly of its self, and just as a child is absolutely dependent on his parents, so too a humble faith is absolutely dependent on Jesus. I don't really need to spell out its essential qualities in great detail because in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector that we looked at last week, we saw its essential nature. The humble faith is the faith of the Tax collector. It is not vain, it is not puffed up, it doesn't depend on works. Just as a child is totally dependent on His parents, a humble faith rests entirely on Jesus alone.

Secondly it is a ***trusting*** Faith.

Let's talk about the trust of a child. I was talking to a member of the church recently about the natural tendency that children have to implicitly accept that whatever an authority figure tells them must be true. They tend not even to consider the possibility that anything else might be the case. Now at the time we were talking about the long term harm that can be done because of that. For instance in public schools, museums and the like, the theory of evolution is presented to children as if it were an established fact, and children tend to accept it – why after all would a teacher tell them something that wasn't true?

I mean even adults go into grand institutions like the Natural History Museum in New York – which really is a kind of humanist cathedral, with giant vaulted halls, marble everywhere, huge dinosaur skeletons, where even a life-sized model of blue whale hanging from the ceiling is dwarfed by the immensity and grandeur of the building – and in the midst of these giant vaulted halls, and confronted by all of these impressive displays showing us Cro-Magnon family life, and the evolutionary development of men from fishes, and we have a tendency to simply accept what we are being shown. It must be true, I mean look at the models! You could reach out and touch them if they weren't behind glass!

Institutions like the natural history museum are particularly successful not only because they are so imposing but because they weave together fact and pure speculation without telling you which is which. We are awed to see the bones of a woolly mammoth, we have fun pushing buttons on an exhibit which explains how bat sonar works, and then when we see a Neanderthal tribe diorama we just take it as a given that this is a fact no different from bat sonar and mammoth bones.

They conveniently leave out the fact that while the mammoth bones are a fact the diorama is pure speculation. When they talk about evolution, they show you diagrams asserting a progression in the development of a species but they leave out the fact that they've never found any "transitional fossils." For instance, people take it as an article of faith that birds developed from lizards, but they've found no fossils showing the link – and they never will. For instance, most modern paleontologists are only too well aware that a structure in-between an arm and a wing that was actually neither, made for a life-

form that even under the concept of "survival of the fittest" would be "deleted." We have fossil arms and we have fossil wings, we have fossil arms and fossil flippers, but no transitional forms in between. They've generally given up on searching for biologically untenable "links" so the modern explanation for this is usually rapid mutation. I.E. Mamma lizard gives birth to a bird, said bird finds another similar mutant and the bird species begins. But that's not what is taught to 6th graders in biology, they read Darwinian evolution in their text books, they learn it from their teachers, and they accept it. So this tendency to implicitly believe what you are taught can be twisted.

People lie, and as children begin to discover that fact as they get older, they often have a tendency to become less and less trusting, sometimes they end up becoming downright cynical, which is a shame.

But you see the problem there isn't that we trust, trust is good and necessary quality. The problem is in whom we trust. What does our currency say? In Science we trust? In Government we trust? No, it says IN GOD WE TRUST.

Why should we trust in God? Because unlike scientists and politicians and every different kind of man. God never *lies*

NKJ Titus 1:1 Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, 2 in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began,

Why should we have faith in Christ? Because he too is not merely a philosopher or a sage, but God himself, in fact it is for this reason that the Gospel of John which starts with the words "NKJ John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Speaks of Christ as *the truth* so often.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

John 16:13 "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

14 "He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.

Your faith should be in him because he is absolutely true, absolutely dependable, and because his Word is a sure testimony of His Will: Jesus himself said of the bible in the midst of his great high priestly prayer: John 17:17 "Sanctify them by Your truth. ***Your word is truth.***

Now kids, that is critical, I hope you haven't thought that I've said that everyone is going to lie to you as you grow up. Rather that there is one person who is always true and one word that never lies, then that word the bible, needs to be your standard as you grow up. Acts 17:11 11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so.

It does mean you should have a childlike faith but it doesn't mean you should have a ***childish*** faith:

"God's children are to remain forever in a state of childlike awe and trust of their heavenly Father. There is an appropriate exercise of implicit faith here. God deserves to be trusted implicitly. Indeed, it is foolish as well as foolhardy not to trust Him implicitly. He is altogether trustworthy. The mature Christian never outgrows this sort of childlike faith. There is a vast difference, however, between a childlike faith and a childish faith, though the two are often confused. A childish faith balks at learning the things of God in depth. It refuses the meat of the gospel while clinging to a diet of milk. For this, the childish Christian receives an admonition... The call of the New Testament is to maturity. The apostle Paul says, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Corinthians 13:11). Paul makes a further distinction between the way in which we are to remain as babes and the way in which we are called to adulthood. He says, "Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature" (1 Corinthians 14:20)." – ***R.C. Sproul***

You are called to receive the great good news of the kingdom, the good news of the Gospel, with a childlike trust because of who it comes from and because of what it promises to all who will receive it.