

BLESS THE CHILDREN

Deuteronomy 31:1-13; Mark 10:13-16 / Genesis 17:1-26

I. How Do Children Fit into the Church?

A. The disciples objected to the problems children bring to church life. “And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and *his disciples rebuked those that brought them.*” (MARK 10:13)

B. Historically, children were an important part of the era in which God organized the Hebrew nation. “And Moses said, *We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters,* with our flocks and with our herds will we go; for we *must hold* a feast unto the LORD. And he said unto them, *Let the LORD be so with you, as I will let you go, and your little ones: look to it; for evil is before you.*” (EXODUS 10:9-10)

C. Children were incorporated into the liturgical life of Israel. “And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, *When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones?*” (JOSHUA 4:21)

D. Christianity is a family religion and family life impacts children; sin and its consequences descend through generations. “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for *I the LORD* thy God *am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;*” (EXODUS 20:5)

E. In contrast, the blessings of grace extend much further than the curse of sin; compassionately incorporating children into the life of the church is obligatory, not optional. “*Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,* and that will by no means clear *the guilty;* visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.” (EXODUS 34:7) “*Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*” (PROVERBS 22:6)

II. Jesus Put Children at the Center of Church Life

A. Jesus not only welcomed children into the life of the church, but He declared that even the adults in the church must be children. “But when Jesus saw *it,* he was much displeased, and said unto them, *Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.*” (MARK 10:14)

B. Newborns are loud, wet, self-centered, and demanding, yet these are the example Jesus chose to describe people of the covenant community; all that newborns bring with them is helplessness and trust. “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, *Ye must be born again.*” (JOHN 3:3-7)

C. The hardness of the human heart sees problems when Jesus sees opportunities; pro-life principles cannot be restricted to the civil realm. “And *when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts,* he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched *it* out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.” (MARK 3:5)

D. Any congregation which fails to welcome children of all ages and problems declares itself not to be the family of God. “Verily I say unto you, *Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.*” (MARK 10:15)

III. Children Must Be Welcome

A. Jesus set the pattern; bless the beginners. “And *he took them up in his arms*, put *his* hands upon them, *and blessed them.*” (MARK 10:16)

B. The education of children and spiritual beginners is a normal and necessary part of daily Christian living. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD: *And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart*, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And *these words*, which I command thee this day, *shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children*, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” (DEUTERONOMY 6:4-7)

C. Through Moses God organized Biblical family and institutional life to nurture the new birth Jesus would bluntly reveal. “That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to *keep all his statutes and his commandments*, which *I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son*, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. Hear therefore, O Israel, and *observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily*, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey.” (DEUTERONOMY 6:2-3)

D. The normal church life is expressed in Psalm 78 (255 in the *Hymnbook*). “Maschil of Asaph. Give ear, O my people, *to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth*. I will open my mouth in a parable: *I will utter dark sayings of old*: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. *We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done*. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which *he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God.*” (PSALM 78:1-8)