

# The Child Factor

(Sermon Notes) By Warren Zehrung 3/2/2019

We have a beautiful ceremony in God's Church that I would like to briefly visit. We call this ceremony, "Blessing of the Little Children."

We usually celebrate this occasion during the Feast of Tabernacles, or on a Sabbath soon afterward, but it can be performed at any time.

Back in Worldwide days, there were hundreds of new babies each year at the Feast of Tabernacles – and it takes a good while to individually lay hands and pray for each child... So, we settled on the second Sabbath after the Feast of Tabernacles – giving everyone time to get back home and settled in.

When we follow Christ's example; we emulate Christ's example of Blessing the Little Children, **we pray** for a Christian environment in the home where the child will grow up. A home where the word of God is heard, believed and lived.

We find an example in the Old Testament: Samuel was dedicated and given to the Lord's service. (1Samuel 1:28)

We ask God to make His calling evident in the life of the child. We ask for God's protection and blessing on our little ones. It is God who sanctifies; it is God who sets apart – not man.

This story of the "Blessing of the Little Children" is mentioned a number of times in the Scriptures - it is an important lesson. In fact, there was more than one occasion recorded where Jesus was involved with **small children**. We will look at these - in no particular order.

It is obvious that Jesus liked little kids.

Matthew 19:13 Then were there brought unto [Jesus] little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.

Matthew 19:14 But Jesus said, Allow the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

There is something about children that compares to the Kingdom of God. We will be looking at that today.

Matthew 19:15 And he laid his hands on them, [Jesus was blessing them] and departed thence.

Mark 9:33 And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?

They were arguing among themselves who would be "Top Dog" and "boss" over the others in the Kingdom.

Mark 9:34 But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest.

Mark 9:35 And he sat down, and called the twelve, and says unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.

Mark 9:36 And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them,

Mark 9:37 Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receives me: and whosoever shall receive me, receives not me, but Him [God the Father] that sent me.

Luke 9:46 Then there arose a reasoning [argument / dispute] among them, which of them should be greatest.

Luke 9:47 And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by him,

Luke 9:48 And said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receives me: and whosoever shall receive me receives him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great.

That is the answer to the dispute - he that is least among you all, the same shall be **great** in the Kingdom of God. The John 13 Passover lesson here:

John 13:14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.

John 13:15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

John 13:16 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.

Jesus was teaching a great lesson in this role reversal. Jesus took a subordinate Role.

Luke 22:27 For who is greater, he that sits at meat, or he that serves? is not he that sits at meat? but I am among you as **he that serves**.

And, Jesus will **continue serving** all through the Millennium: Notice the time setting – **“when He comes.”**

Luke 12:37 Blessed are those servants, whom the lord **when He comes** shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall **gird Himself** [an obvious reference to the Passover service], and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and **serve them**.

That is God's nature – **to serve**. Let the Children Come to Me.

Luke 18:15 And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them.

Luke 18:16 But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

Luke 18:17 Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.

Matthew 17:24 And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? (Taxes are due)

There is an attitude sometimes found that says, "I'm doing God's work – therefore I can run roughshod over anybody that gets in my way." That was not how Jesus operated. Notice, Jesus was careful **not to offend** – even the public tax collectors!

Matthew 17:27 Notwithstanding, lest we should **offend them**, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.

### —Fish Story—

We have had a raging dispute down in Louisiana since I was a child. And it has to do with which fishing lure is better. Topwater lure, underwater bait, or bottom lure. There's simply no spectacle in fishing like a topwater strike. Whether it's a violent eruption of water or a subtle "gulp," the hit is what keeps anglers coming back.

Ask yourself – How did that coin get into that fish? Did someone on a ship drop it – and as it was sinking in the water – flashing and spinning – did the fish strike it? Perhaps it came from a sunken treasure – and a fish saw the glimmer of it – and gulped it up. How did Jesus know that the coin would be in the fish that first comes up?

God's hand was obviously working things out – to the split second. Jesus had told His disciples before, "My Father works the miracles." (John 5:17)

There is no chapter break between Matthew 17 and Matthew 18.

Matthew 18:1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

Matthew 18:2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

Matthew 18:3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 18:4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 18:5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receives me.

Jesus says this is real serious stuff:

Matthew 18:6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

Mark 10:13 And they brought young children to Him, that He should touch them: and His disciples rebuked those that brought them.

Mark 10:14 But when Jesus saw it, He was **much displeased**, and said unto them, Allow the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the Kingdom of God.

Jesus knows that, "all things work together for the good," so why would He be **much displeased**? I would like to make a point right here.

More than anyone, Jesus knew and understood His Father's "hands-on" involvement in EVERYTHING in His life. God the Father had revealed to Jesus how He would pay the tax with the coin in the fish's mouth. Why then, was Jesus **much displeased** in what was going on here?

It was because His disciples were not on track. The people wanted their children to be blessed by Jesus – and the disciples were running interference "for" Jesus. It was a teachable moment.

It had to do with **conversion** and the **Kingdom** of God. A remarkable statement: The Kingdom of God has a **child-like** quality to it!

Mark 10:15 Truly I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall **not** enter therein.

Mark 10:16 And He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and **blessed them**.

Back in the days of Worldwide, there were many people who felt that they were fully **converted**. There was a lot of conduct that was decisively not Christian in appearance: 70 % went out.

The conversion process had begun in them – then it was interrupted... They are not ready for the Kingdom now... Will they repent – and go on to conversion? Pray for their repentance - when the time of trouble comes.

When the apostasy came against our beliefs and core doctrine – they kicked us out – they disfellowshipped us – They did not check on us to see if we were okay – they didn't care if we made it into the Kingdom or not. They did not call us – because they did not consider us to be their brethren. We must pray for their repentance to complete their Christian conversion.

Paul gave us **the test** to see if our conversion is truly growing toward Godliness: Speaking to the converted Church brethren, Paul said:

2Thessalonians 1:3 We are bound to thank God always for **you, brethren**, as it is proper, because that your faith **grows** exceedingly, and the Godly love of **every one of you** all toward **each other** abounds.

John said it this way:

1John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loves not his brother abides in death.

Because he did not complete the Conversion process. A total change in a person's life is the obvious outcome of conversion. Conversion means a break from one's former way of life. It must be genuine.

## The Child Factor

The desire of Church of God members is to be in the Kingdom of God. Except for a few holy men like Job, Abraham, and like the Prophets of old, no one understood the concept of Christian conversion (2Peter 1:21).

Neither the Hebrew nor Greek language have a good word to describe the process of **Christian conversion**.

The Scriptural writers had to rely on words like “**turn**” or “**turn about**” when conveying an image of conversion.

Joel 2:12-13 Therefore also now, says the LORD, **turn** ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and **turn** unto the LORD your God:

Christian conversion was **not** generally available to mankind until after the coming of God’s Holy Spirit on that first Pentecost after Jesus’ death. Certainly, the **perception** of conversion was given to ancient Israel – but the will to achieve it was missing in them:

Ezekiel 33:11 Say unto them, As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked **turn** from his way and live: **turn ye, turn ye** from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

Turn ye is a call to **repentance**... our first step in the **conversion** process - **Turn around** from your sinful ways. The concept of conversion was certainly presented to ancient Israel.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And you shalt love the LORD your God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

In the **New Testament** we find the word *epistrepho* that is used alternately for both “turn about” and “**conversion**.” This first example is for “**turn**.” As spin on your heel or *pirouette* – as the French would say. It has **no spiritual** connotation at all.

Mark 5:30 Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that virtue had gone out of Him, **turned** Himself **about** in the throng of people, and said, Who touched my clothes?

That was **not** speaking of Christian conversion at all. Another example for your notes:

Mark 8:33 But when [Jesus] had **turned about** [*epistrepho*] and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan:

That was **not** speaking of Christian conversion at all. But, the same word, *epistrepho*, came to mean **conversion**. Our next example of *epistrepho*, same word, definitely refers to Christian conversion. Jesus said unto Peter:

Luke 22:32 I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not: and when you are **converted**, strengthen your brethren.

The spiritual concept of Christian conversion had to be developed in the New Testament. When first called, a Christian does **turn about** from a life of sin. So in a sense, a conversion has taken place, but there is much more to it.

An acknowledgment of **having sinned** is a start, but it is absolutely insufficient for baptism. There is more to the process of Christian conversion:

Repentance, Faith in the blood of Jesus Christ to cover our sins, Baptism – burying the old man of sin, Hands laid on to receive God’s Holy Spirit.

At that point, too many think to themselves, “I’ve repented, I have faith in the blood of Jesus Christ, I’ve been baptized and had hands laid on me—I’m converted!” They sit back as though they had it made!

The difficulty with that scenario is this: They are still very much in the area of their initial calling when they first **turned about** – they are now facing in the right direction, but they have not progressed very far – they haven’t had time to grow and be tested. They have not yet gone on to perfection (Hebrews 6:1).

God’s Spirit in a Christian only begins the conversion process, which culminates in our being born into the **eternal Family of God**. Yes, Christian conversion begins with God’s calling and baptism, but please understand that Baptism is not the end of the Christian conversion process.

Conversion is a **lifetime process** of growing and overcoming and changing into Godliness. A Christian’s conversion takes place over the time span between his calling and his resurrection to eternal life.

Working in us, God progressively removes our carnality and sin, replacing it with His Holy Spirit, leading to righteous behavior and Godliness. In this lifetime we continuously develop, ever growing—never relenting until God determines that we have run our course. Only God knows just how much spiritual growth we are able to **attain** to in this life. Paul knew that he had a lot of growing and changing to do. He wrote:

Philippians 3:10 That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

Paul is saying - “we have to go through what Jesus went through.”

Philippians 3:11 If by any means I might **attain unto the resurrection** of the dead.

Paul knew that he didn’t have it made yet.

Philippians 3:12 **Not** as though I had **already attained**, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

We **endure to the end** because none of us is completely converted in the flesh. All Christians are in various stages of conversion. When we are literally born into the Kingdom of God, as full members of the Spiritual Family of God, it will not be in these **unconverted** physical bodies.

The process of conversion will not be complete **in us** until we are completely composed of Spirit, and our human nature will have been replaced with **divine nature** (2Peter 1:4). God’s law will become **second nature** in us (pun intended) – after we shed this **human nature** – like a beetle sheds and leaves behind his exoskeleton.

Jeremiah 31:33 ...After those days, says the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.  
[Hebrews 8:10]

That process will not be fully complete until we **are resurrected spirit beings**.

There is one nature in us that is very difficult to overcome. Human nature causes us to seek to have the **preeminence**.

We saw that a moment ago in Christ's apostles striving among themselves to be the **greatest** at Jesus Christ's last Passover (Luke 22:24).

Human Nature causes us to put self **first**. We want to be right. We want to take care of ourselves first... We want to feather our own nest.

Yes, we've said we want to **turn around** and go God's way... But, seeking to have the **preeminence** – that is still facing in the wrong direction! There is a subtle difference in striving for perfection and trying to have authority and domination over others.

There exists an inherent responsibility in each Christian to help every other Christian attain to the Kingdom of God.

What have we been overlooking in the Church of God?

This is a remarkable statement: The Kingdom of God has a child-like quality to it! I call it, "**The Child Factor**." I want to read Matthew 18:3 – closer this time – and perhaps see something we overlooked.

Matthew 18:1-2 The disciples came unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them,

Matthew 18:3 And said, truly I say unto you, Unless you be **converted, and** become as **little children**, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven.

Jesus says there are **two** matters of concern here. Christian conversion is **one, And**, become as little children, – or you shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven.

Let us examine this child-like quality that Jesus tells us is an absolute necessity to Christian conversion. We saw this earlier as well:

Luke 18:16 But Jesus called the little children unto Him, and said, Allow little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the Kingdom of God.

Jesus gives us a definition of the Kingdom here: for of such is the Kingdom of God. What is it about little children that is like the Kingdom of God?

And, what is it about little children that we **must add** to our **conversion** to be in the Kingdom of God?

Luke 18:17 Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.

Over the years, as I ran across one, I kept a list of **child-like qualities** of children – the ones I believe Jesus is referring to – in my margin here at Luke 18:17.

Little children are – gentle – pure – warm – teachable – affectionate – genuine – trusting – innocent – tender, open and vulnerable, naïve, and forgiving, vigor for life, playful, entreatable, and teachable...

But Jesus is saying that we **adults** are to become like little children—so we too must be – gentle – pure – warm – teachable – affectionate – genuine –trusting – innocent – tender, open and vulnerable, naïve, and forgiving, vigor for life, playful, entreatable, and teachable – excitable – lacking expectations, lacking for the most part, arrogance and pride and mean spirited vengeful.

When you see these last attributes in a young child – the child has outgrown his innocence.

Children are not concerned with social status, political clout, and pecking order, name droppers. Can you imagine a Church group that exemplified those child-like qualities? Can you imagine a Pastor having those qualities? Not tough – not so important. People in God’s Church want their Pastors and church leaders to be big shots – so that they can heap praises upon them. But Jesus says that without those **child-like** qualities – we will not enter the Kingdom of God.

When those apostles were fighting over who was the greatest among them, there was one virtue or Christian attribute that was decidedly missing. So Jesus spells it out – just so that we will know specifically which **child-like** quality He was thinking about.

Matthew 18:4 Whosoever therefore shall **humble** himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.

**Humility**, among other things, is admitting that you do not have all the answers. Jesus gives us some things to meditate on.

Matthew 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and **lowly in heart**: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

End: The Child Factor