

August 14, 2011

Do Not Hinder the Children

Mark 10:13-16

INTRODUCTION

There has never been a society in human history that has valued children as they should. Of course, under Christian influence, there have been advances here and there. But in general children are viewed as the least important members of society.

- HOW THE WORLD VIEWS CHILDREN
- HOW JESUS VIEWS CHILDREN
- HOW CHILDREN RECEIVE THE KINGDOM

The Big Idea is that Jesus loves the little children because of the big gospel they tell.

Last week we saw how God made every marriage to speak about himself. Now we're going to see that God made children to speak about himself.

DOCTRINE

I. HOW THE WORLD VIEWS CHILDREN

A) There is a Natural Desire for Our Children to Be Blessed

1. *And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them (13a)*. The "they" spoken of here may have been townspeople in general, but it is likely that they were the parents themselves since it specifies their intention to receive a blessing. Luke adds "even infants" [18:15]. At any rate, these were very young children (*paidion*), and many people look at this passage and see that even if doesn't address the sacraments specifically, in terms of a formula, it at least shows a specific attitude of Jesus to err on the side of bringing people to the things of the kingdom at as an early age as possible. That's how I choose to leave it. On the one hand, I don't think this a very good proof-text for any specific practice because this is a cultural practice in relation to rabbis, not a church practice. On the other hand, the

attitude of Jesus is normative and should inform church practice. So just learn from it as we proceed.

2. What we see in the Bible is a constant teaching to teach your children, even mysterious things like how the animal sacrifices symbolized the atonement to come, so the Scriptures are always saying, “Make [the works of God] known to your children and your children’s children...Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so” [Deut. 4:9, 10]; “You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” [Deut. 6:7]. These people in Mark were bringing their children to someone they believed was a rabbi, even if a very great rabbi, so much did they want to bring them near to God. If they only knew! But don’t *we* know—to stop at nothing to bring them, in all of their playtime, in all of their friendships, in all of their subjects in school, directly to Christ, or are we ignorant that there is such a school of Christ and that it covers every subject and every minute?

3. In other words, if you have a natural desire to bless your children, you won’t find any other book or idea that outstrips you in doing good for them: “The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother” [Prov. 29:15]. So the Bible has this theme and we have this natural desire to rise to the occasion of this theme, right? The trouble is that we don’t really mean it. We might think our kids are cute when they’re babies, and we may have very strong feelings about their place in our hearts. But the moment that the Bible demands that we treat them like developing humans, with souls that take in truth through the intellect, souls that will never die, we begin to squirm and change the subject.

B) There is a Natural Aversion to the Futility of Children

1. *and the disciples rebuked them (13b)*. Why? Weren’t the disciples just told that true disciples receive these little ones [cf. 9:37]. Of course: just as we are told again and again, and forget and grow cold again and again. Nature by itself cannot produce in you the appropriate approach to your children, or anybody else’s. Nature is at war with the way things ought to be because nature is cursed. A mother’s love is perfectly natural, but a mother’s love is perverted in the fall. A father’s discipline is absolutely necessary, but a father’s discipline is perverted in the fall. Mere nature has no more blessings left for the child, only a curse. If you leave things up to natural desires and natural wisdom, then you will find two natures at

war; and your natural desire for your child to be blessed will be no match for your natural aversion to “waste time” on your children—whether it’s because of ambition or laziness.

2. Don’t avoid letting the Word expose your heart here by imagining the disciples as these Ebenezer Scrooge characters who are bending down a few feet and barking at these little toddlers. The sense of the words **the disciples rebuked them** means that they were rebuking the parents of these children, which means that it may have been very calm and composed and reasonable sounding. They may have had very mature, prudent, calculated reasons why in this instance the Master could not be bothered with such things so far down on the lists of things we “just have to do.” Test yourself here at *this* point. How far down on the list, for you, is bringing the children directly to Christ?

II. HOW JESUS VIEWED CHILDREN

A) Jesus’ ‘Unhindered’ Love for Children

1. *But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them (14a).* He was **indignant!** God is indignant. The disciples have done a lot of things during the life of Jesus that Jesus responds to with correction, often frustration. But there are few things that the Bible says make Him very angry at his people. And He is indignant toward us when we put the cultivation of our children’s souls anywhere ‘down’ on the list of kingdom priorities. They belong at the top! And of course this applies immediately and mostly to the example we set in front of our children, to the words we use to them, to the things we allow them to continue doing without loving correction.

2. Then He issues a command—**Let** them come to me; **do not** hinder them—or No, stop that, now! The disciples are active and involved in stopping the work of Christ. Can you imagine that there is anything over which God would have to say to you and me, “Get out of my way! Stop stopping me!” I don’t want to be in the way of *that* love. This is not a neutral, passive sin. **Hinder** (*koluo*) is the same word for “stop” in the case of the disciples hindering the man casting our demons in the previous chapter. In other words, we know we are guilty of this sin when we are being intentional about committing it, structuring other things in such a way where we don’t have to deal with our children, avoiding or subverting conversations that put the subject back on center stage, failing to see the eyes of our children or their words and actions crying out “Teach me when my heart is tender, when I’m still here, when I still trust you, please.” We fill our lives with other things in order to pretend

that we can't hear it, and as our heart hardens, we actually can't hear it. But there is no innocence in that deafness. We are still hindering.

B) The King Makes This Exact Kind of a Kingdom

1. Now Jesus anchors the approach we ought to have toward children in the gospel: *for to such belongs the kingdom of God (14b)*. Please do not misapply this! Children do not receive the kingdom *because* they are children biologically! If any child is saved, he or she is saved the same way that anyone else is saved. Children have a special role to play in the kingdom because they are a constant reminder (a sign) of something very important of what a truly born again Christian must be. Do you remember that Jesus has already said that “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me” [9:37]. There is a strong link between what Jesus has already taught them about receiving children and receiving the kingdom. In order to receive, or enter, the kingdom, you have to receive its King. And Jesus is a servant King, a lowly King, when He came the first time, so He promised through the prophet Zechariah, “Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” [Zech. 9:9].

2. This is the kind of kingdom we're talking about here—the kind where only children are allowed, *in one important sense*: lowliness. The King will not have it any other way: “For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar” [Ps. 138:6], and “he sets on high those who are lowly” [Job 5:11], so He says to us all, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” [Mat. 11:29]. In this one sense, the King makes himself like a child so that when He created children (you know God could have just created people full-grown adults when we come into this world!) He carefully constructed them in a way that you would have to push past the offense and the waste to see something of the lowly King.

III. HOW CHILDREN RECEIVE THE KINGDOM

A) The Lowliness of a Child is “Like” Being Saved

1. *Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it (15)*. Matthew is helpful here. In this same context, Jesus says, “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” [18:4]. So humility, or lowliness, is the motivation that causes the motion of being saved. To be saved is to receive God's grace—his

undeserved favor—and so if we just think about what most basically characterizes little children we can see it. A child is totally dependent on their parents, and even though they can't spell or say “dependent,” they are always aware of the parent being the center of their world. There is total trust that doesn't need to be argued. A child doesn't bring an agenda into the world; and a true disciple doesn't bring conditions to our Lord.

2. Notice that there is **one quality** being focused on here in a child—not every quality. For instance, doesn't Paul say, “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways” [1 Cor. 13:11]. It would certainly appear that the Apostle is contrasting a spiritual virtue of maturity against a set of spiritual vices in children. Childishness is not being retained here, only “child-likeness.” There's a difference. So a child is like a parable: created by God to say *something* of the gospel, but not *everything* about it!

B) The Lowliness of a Child is Exalted and Blessed

1. *And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them (16)*. What was despised, God lifts up—just as He did with Christ:

For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not [Is. 53:2].

Since the beginning of the world, children have been humiliated and dehumanized and scarred and left for dead, so that in the dead center of history, God would be humiliated and dehumanized and scarred and left for dead. He made himself a helpless baby and a mutilated Lamb, and “therefore God has highly exalted him” [Phi. 2:8]. God will lift up what was despised and little, with or without your help, but you don't want to lie about Him, do you?

2. Finally this implies that our time instructing our children in the ways of God tells what we really believe about the gospel. If we are intentional about communicating the gospel and Christian worldview to our children, then we really do believe a) that their souls are worth it to us, and b) that their hearts represent the most fertile mission field, the most ready disciples, the most powerful display of glory that we will ever get our hands on.

And when Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, he said to them, “Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to

your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess [Deut. 32:45-47].

It is *not* true that these two decades, plus, that are the finest years of our lives, in which our investment into our children will guarantee that we do much less on the worldly stage—it is not true that this will waste our lives. This *is* life. And if we trade this moment to build a kingdom of our own, in an office or on our gadgets of communication or just for a little bit more suburban breathing room, we will curse the day that we could have sown into them the words of the kingdom. We ought to be indignant with ourselves with the righteous indignation of Christ at the moment of these temptations!

APPLICATION

To a Biblical Doctrine of Education – The first principle of Christian education has already been given by Jesus: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea” [9:42]. We debate all the time the merits of this or that form of education—and the form is not any more neutral than the people who supply the content—but, however parents may work out the details, the principle has more to do with what you yourself are actually causing, given what you have the ability to perform. At that point where you are the actor, what cause “to cause one of these little ones to sin” are you willing to commit? To what degree and by what assumptions are *you* the cause of the child stumbling? What can you do differently to present the child with the biblical view, as opposed to the non-biblical view? Within the limits that society or finances or whatever are imposing on you, at that point where you can do something differently, why aren’t you doing something differently to sow in the biblical truth about all things. What Jesus is saying in these passages is that He has wrath, or indignation, toward the one who knowingly, willfully presumes to stop Him from getting to the child’s heart and mind. Are you willing to stand in his way like that? What makes it worth it to you to slip into those chains that that “great millstone” is tied to: to say that these things are neutral, or that it’s not worth the sacrifice? Incidentally there *are* sacrifices that have to be made, which reminds us that often the results are going to look different, based on legal, financial, medical, psychological issues, and many others; but if you can’t even take in this teaching and begin assessing those factors, your heart is hard. You think children belong to you, but they don’t. They belong to God and you and I don’t have the right to obscure their soul from Jesus.

So go home and love your children with the love of God. Tell them what He has told you. Share with them all the good things that He has mercifully shared with you. None of it is ours, not even our time, not even our best time.

To the Sinful Hinderer – We have all hindered the little ones from seeing Christ. Here's the good news. Nothing can hinder God from getting his own children. No matter how you have messed up, if you have trusted Jesus as your Savior then you are God's child and all of your sins are forgiven. This anger that He has against hinderers between his gospel and his children—it's real and it's the first fruits of an eternal anger—but if you have trusted in Christ's work for you, then this anger has been poured out in Him instead—all of it.