

OpenTheo

Matthew 19:13 - 19:15



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In Matthew 19:13-15, people brought children to Jesus hoping that he would bless them. However, the disciples rebuked the children, not seeing them as worthy recipients of Jesus' attention. In response to this, Jesus was greatly displeased and said, "Do not forbid little children coming me". Some argue that children are born in a state of sin, but Jesus believed that children were important and even had guardian angels looking over them.

Transcript

In Matthew chapter 19, beginning at verse 13, we read, Then little children were brought to him, that he might put his hands on them and pray. But the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

And he laid his hands on them and departed from there. Now this story occupies only three short verses in the Gospel of Matthew, but it has much in it for us to consider. Because it has to do with Jesus' general attitude about children, and anyone who would be a disciple of Jesus Christ must, of course, adopt his attitude, and must adopt his viewpoint and his value system.

One cannot follow Jesus and reject his values, and reject his attitude toward things. Now, Jesus did not actually speak about children all that often. And sometimes when he did, he was only speaking figuratively, or he was using it to be an illustration of all of us in terms of our relationship to God.

As for example, in the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus said, Which of you fathers, if his son will ask him for bread, will he give him a stone? And of course, he indicated that no father would be so wicked, we would hope, as to do that. And he says that that is also how God is toward us. We are like children of God, and he cares for us as a father cares for children.

But there are times when Jesus speaks about literal children, literal little children. For example, in chapter 18 of Matthew, it says in verse 1, At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little

child to him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

And whoever receives one little child like this in my name receives me. And then later on, in verse 10 of chapter 18 of Matthew, he says, Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.

Now, Jesus on these few occasions spoke about children and their value. In this particular story, there were people bringing their children to Jesus, and they were hoping that he might bless them and lay his hands on them and pray for them. Now, the disciples, I guess, were somewhat protective of Jesus in his time.

They knew that there were people in all parts of the country that were waiting for Jesus to come to their area so he could heal them and he could cast out demons, he could teach them. And many of these people, I'm sure, probably contributed to the support of the ministry of Jesus and the disciples and hosted them in their areas and housed them and fed them and so forth. And the disciples, no doubt, were mindful of the fact that Jesus had to be selective of how he spent his time.

There were more demands upon his time than he could really meet. Now, of course, it was not up to the disciples to plan Jesus' itinerary. This was not what they were called to do.

They were not the ones who were his secretaries who were to screen calls for him. They were there to learn. They were there to imitate him.

They were there to follow the leader. But sometimes, I guess, they thought it was their role to make sure that Jesus didn't get distracted or waylaid or sidetracked with issues that were of lesser importance. And in their minds, you know, laying hands on little children was much less important than certain other things that Jesus would probably not have time to get around to anyway.

Now, it's hard to know why the disciples felt this way. Some of the disciples, no doubt, had children themselves. And I'm sure it would have been important to them that Jesus bless their children and so forth.

But we find that these disciples were intolerant of other parents who are bringing their children to Jesus for this purpose. I don't want to think badly of the disciples, although the New Testament certainly makes it clear that the disciples were not always commendable in their motivations. It is possible that the disciples were thinking, listen, you know, we need to concentrate the mystery on those who can benefit us most.

If we preach to certain people and heal their disease and so forth, there are some of them who will support us. Some of them will host us. Some of them will.

It'll be good for the ministry for us to reach out to these people. But these little children, what can they do for us? Now, I don't I don't know for sure the disciples were thinking this way, but I wouldn't put it past them because, frankly, I wouldn't put it past many Christians today. Frankly, I wouldn't put it past myself.

I have received many invitations to speak various places, and I accept many of them. And I have to guard against the temptation of thinking, well, I can't go every place, but which of these places will most benefit me? Which of these places, you know, where am I most likely to get some kind of an honorarium or some kind of exposure that will be good for the ministry in the future or whatever? These thoughts are, to my mind, as I sit here today, they're carnal thoughts. They're not spiritual thoughts.

And yet the temptation is there to think that way. You know, I can't minister to everybody. So I might as well select those things that will propel the ministry forward more and will benefit the ministry in tangible ways to accept those engagements.

Now, I have no reason to believe the disciples were free from such considerations. And as they looked at the multitudes that were eager to have Jesus minister to them in some way, little children seemed to them to be the least likely to be able to reciprocate to the disciples or to Jesus for the time he would devote to them. So this may have been what motivated them.

It is also possible, of course, that the disciples were of the opinion of many that children should be seen but not heard and that Jesus, you know, children didn't need the ministry of Jesus, that children were not as important as adults. And by the way, in one sense, that seems true because children are in their early childhood, of course, merely consumers. They are not contributors much.

They can't do much to help with the household chores or to help bring in household income. They are only consumers until they reach a certain age, of course, where they have some of the traits of adulthood where they can responsibly take on some of the duties and the burden of the household, in which case they become not mere consumers, but also contributors and productive members of the household. But these were little children.

In fact, in Mark's gospel, the parallel to this account in Mark chapter 10 tells us they were infants. These were people bringing their infants to Christ. Well, infants, you know, they're not major contributors to anything, financially or otherwise.

They don't seem to be as important in the grand scheme of things as mature people who can do good works and who can accomplish things, who can spread the gospel, who can

propagate Jesus' ministry once they have an appreciation for it. And therefore, whatever the reasons were, the disciples did not seem to feel that children were as worthy recipients of Jesus' attention and time as were other older people. And therefore, the disciples, when they saw that there began to be sort of a trend of people bringing their babies to Jesus for him to bless them, they saw this as a mere sidetrack, as a mere distraction.

Something merely to consume time, which could be better spent in other activities by Jesus. And so they began to take it upon themselves to tell these parents, don't bring your children to Jesus right now. Listen, there's better things for Jesus to do.

And they rebuked the parents, apparently, who were bringing these children. Now, the disciples, of course, were wrong on many counts. First of all, they obviously, as Jesus answered, they proved to be wrong in terms of how Jesus felt about the use of his time.

They were wrong in the evaluation they placed upon children. And they were wrong in the very act of stepping in as if they were Jesus' protectors and bodyguards and call screeners, you know, who were to prevent the wrong types from getting to Jesus. That wasn't their role.

Now, Jesus said to the disciples, and this was in the form of a correction to them. He said, let the little children come to me and do not forbid them. Well, the disciples were doing just that.

They were forbidding them. And actually, in Mark's parallel to this story, in Mark chapter 10 and verse 14, it says when Jesus saw this, that is, when he saw the disciples turning people away, it says in Mark 10 and 14, he was greatly displeased. And then he said, do not, you know, forbid the little children from coming to me.

So he was very displeased with the response the disciples had made to this coming of parents to Jesus with their children. Jesus obviously had no sense that he was wasting his time by praying for these little children and blessing these children. It would seem that they were as valuable to him as anybody else was.

And he was very displeased that his disciples did not share his opinion about this. And so he has to tell them quite bluntly, let these children come to me. Do not forbid them.

For of such is the kingdom of heaven. You know, there are different theories among Christians as to the spiritual state of infants. On the one hand, there is the theory that all human beings are born under condemnation because of Adam's sin, that the whole human race was in Adam when he sinned.

And because of that, it is argued we all sinned in Adam. And that being so, the very moment we are conceived, we are conceived in sin and therefore bear the guilt and responsibility of Adam's sin and measure on ourselves. This being so, it would suggest

that we were born little sinners against God, born condemned until such a time, of course, as we reach an age where we can obtain mercy.

Now, there are some who would say such children are born not in a state of grace. They're born in a state of sin and of alienation from God. But sometimes those who teach this would say if you baptize your infants, if you are a Christian, you can bring your children into the covenant with you until such a time as they are old enough to make their own decision in the matter.

And therefore, there are some who think that baptized infants are in a special state of favor with God that unbaptized infants are not. And this, of course, becomes an issue most poignantly when an infant dies. And the question obviously arises as when anyone dies, I wonder where they are now.

And in the case of infants who have never reached an age where they could conceivably accept Christ or be forgiven for sins, there is dispute as to what their fate is. There are those, as I say, who believe that infants are born with a guilt of Adam upon them, and therefore, especially if they died unbaptized, they would have to be lost. However, the same people sometimes will say if they died baptized, then they were under a special dispensation of mercy because of their parents' actions, and they died in a covenantal relationship with God, even though they were not old enough to have actualized it in their own experience.

This was conferred to them through the extension of covenant benefits from the parents to the child. And therefore, a child who dies baptized is in a better state than one who dies unbaptized. Now, to tell you the truth, I don't really believe any of those things are taught in Scripture.

Those things are extrapolations that are based upon certain earlier assumptions about certain things. Let me say this. The Bible certainly indicates that when Adam sinned, it affected us all.

And as a result of Adam's sin, we were born in a fallen condition. That fallen condition means, among other things, that we find it more natural to please ourselves than to please God. And pleasing ourselves instead of pleasing God is sin.

Therefore, it is more natural for us to sin than not to sin. And that is the result of Adam's sinning. It has involved us in this spiritual condition.

But it's entirely another matter to say that we are born guilty of what Adam did. I hope you can see the difference. If a parent is, let us say, an intravenous drug user and from a bad needle picks up some kind of a terrible disease, and the child is born diseased.

Or let's say the parent is immoral and contracts syphilis, and their child is born blind because of syphilis. Or the parent is a crack user, crack cocaine user, and the child is

born addicted to crack cocaine. Now, what we could say about that, and I think everyone would understand this, is that child is suffering in a condition that was brought on by the parents.

But I don't know anybody who would say, therefore, that child is guilty of the parent's sin. You see, a person might suffer certain temporal consequences because of the parent's sin, but that does not involve the child in the guilt of the parent's sin. Likewise, it is entirely possible to say that Adam's sin involved us all in dire consequences that have to do with our struggle in relationship to God.

That there is a nature in us that has been conferred to us by birth from our ancestor that inclines us more to sin than to holiness. And that makes our struggle greater when we seek to be godly. When we want to follow God, we find that there's another law at work in our members that brings us into bondage to sin and death.

There's this flesh thing. There's this sinful nature thing that's going on. But that's a different thing than saying that we're born guilty of Adam's sin.

And frankly, I don't find the Bible ever saying that we are. Now, I'm aware of that passage in Romans chapter 5, discussing one man, Adam, did this, and one man, Christ, did that. But that passage does not say what many people want it to say.

It does not say that I am born guilty of Adam's sin. To some people's minds, it does say that, and we could discuss that sometime on my live program if you happen to get it on your radio station. Otherwise, you can pick it up at www.thenarrowpath.com, and we can discuss that issue.

But in my understanding, Romans 5, and for that matter, any other passage of Scripture, does not teach that we're born guilty of Adam's sin. We are only born handicapped spiritually and inclined towards sin ourselves, which results, of course, as we live out our sinful nature in our own sinning and our own condemnation because of our sins. Now, an infant, therefore, if this is true, is not necessarily born guilty, but he is born tainted.

He is born capable of sinning, in fact, much more capable of sinning than of doing anything else. It is natural to be selfish and to be sinful for an infant, but that does not mean that the child is born with a taint of Adam's sin in terms of guilt that would condemn him before God. And that being so, if a child or an infant dies, there is no reason to assume that they had to be baptized in order to wash away this original sin.

A child dies, if he dies in infancy, an innocent being. Innocent in the sense that they have not deliberately committed any sin at all. Now, there are Scriptures that say things like this, and this is one of them, really.

Jesus said, let the little children, and in the context it was little babies, let them come to me and do not forbid them for of such is the kingdom of heaven. What does that mean?

That means that the kingdom of heaven is populated by such as these. That means that these babies that were in Jesus' hands as he spoke were representative of the kinds of persons that are in the kingdom of God, and his statement would have to include the very children themselves.

It doesn't mean that the kingdom of God is populated merely by people who are like these babies, but these babies are the very citizens of the kingdom. He says, of such as these is the kingdom, and we saw a moment ago in the 18th chapter of Matthew, he said something similar. Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become like little children, you'll by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Well, if I can become the greatest in the kingdom of heaven by humbling myself like this little child, then is not the little child himself who is the example of this humility? Is he not in the kingdom of heaven too? Jesus says they are. Jesus says that little children belong to the kingdom of heaven.

In fact, he says in Matthew 18 and 10 that they have angels that see the face of God on a daily basis. Now, this is an important thing. Just notice that Jesus said that little children have these angels, what we might call guardian angels or whatever.

Now, in Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 14, we are told that the angels of God are the servants that are sent to minister to those who are the heirs of salvation. In other words, the angels minister and are assigned to minister to those who are saved. And yet Jesus says that little children have angels.

Does this not suggest that they are in the ranks of the saved? Now, of course, a child can reach an age where knowing good and evil, he refuses to be a rebel. He refuses the right choice and violates his own conscience before God, in which case, of course, he then turns a rebel toward God. But an infant is not rebelling against God.

And therefore, by the suggestion, you know, what Jesus said, taking that to its reasonable conclusion, a little child belongs to the kingdom of God, not to the kingdom of darkness. Even though the child given a chance to live out his life will soon become a rebel against God because of the sinful taint in his nature. Yet his own conscience is clear before God, and there is nothing to obstruct his belonging to the kingdom of heaven, which makes Jesus sense.

It makes sense of Jesus statement. He says of such meaning of little children like this is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them and departed from there.

I remember there was a discussion that C.H. Spurgeon had with probably a Presbyterian. Spurgeon was a Baptist. And Spurgeon did not believe in infant baptism.

And he was discussing the very subject with somebody else who did. And the man said,

Spurgeon said, you give me one scripture that proves infant baptism is correct, and I'll give you a scripture that proves it isn't. And so the man who supported infant baptism quoted this scripture, Matthew 19, 14.

He said, let the little children come to me and do not forbid them. And Spurgeon said, quoted another scripture from Job. It says there was a man from the land of us named Job.

And the C.H. Spurgeon's opponent in the debate said that scripture has nothing to do with infant baptism. Spurgeon said, well, neither does your scripture have anything to do with infant baptism. And of course, it's true when Jesus said, let the little children come to me and do not forbid them.

He wasn't talking about baptism at all. If infant baptism is a proper practice, it would have to be based on something entirely different than this kind of evidence. Unfortunately, for those who believe in infant baptism, there isn't really any biblical evidence to support it.

It is a tradition that arose in the early church and has continued to this day in many traditions. But the Bible does not give any examples or any commands regarding infant baptism. And what is said instead, I mean, the Bible does not teach that a baptized infant is secure with God and an unbaptized infant is not.

But rather, Jesus simply says that these infants, he does not he does not even check the religious credentials of the parents before he says this. He says of these infants that are brought to him of such is the kingdom of heaven. These children belong to the kingdom of God.

Now, these, by the way, there's every reason to believe these particular infants that Jesus was speaking of were not baptized because nobody was practicing infant baptism among the Jews in those days. So here are infants brought to him unbaptized. And he says of such meaning of this group is the kingdom, the kingdom of heaven is, of course, that domain of the subjects of God as king.

And these children belong to that group, he said, and therefore we have reason to believe from the authority of Jesus own statement that little infants are God's children. But of course, when one reaches the age where they choose to rebel against God and nobody who reaches maturity does so without rebelling against God, then those people become children of the devil by their own choice. And then, of course, it's necessary to repent and be born again before one can be a child of God after that point.

But children are in a special state, as I understand Jesus teaching on this.