

## **The King's Teaching On Children**

### **Matthew 19:13-15**

#### **Introduction**

In chapter 19 Jesus has been instructing His disciples on the subjects of Marriage and Divorce. It makes perfect sense that we are now given instructions on the care and custody of children. Children are the fruit of marriage and are called both a heritage and a reward (Psalm 127:3). The Psalmist writes “. . . Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them” (Psalm 127:4-5).

In chapter 18 Jesus insisted His disciples be converted, changed and have the heart and humility of a child. Jesus has spoken about honesty, forgiveness, reconciliation, marriage and divorce. And now comes the subject of bringing our children to Jesus for blessing and prayer. Sometimes children are collateral damage in the heart breaking trauma of divorce. But according to the Bible children are a treasure and the fruit of the womb a reward.

I heard J. Vernon McGee in one of his broadcasts say one the most chilling things I have ever heard: He said, “There is one thing far worse than going to hell—my friend—it is going to hell holding the hand of your child.”

Those of us who are parents have a solemn charge to raise our children to love Jesus, to respect God's Word and embrace God's principles.

There's the story about a little girl who climbed up on the lap of her great-grandmother and looked at her shock of snow white hair and earned wrinkles and asked “Did God make you?” “Yes” great grandmother replied. The little girl asked, “Did God make me too?” “Yes the elder lady replied. “Well” said the little girl, “Don't you think He's doing a better job now than he used to?”

Our children and grandchildren and great grandchildren need guidance!

#### **Hindrances In Bringing Our Children To Christ (v.13)**

*Matthew 19:13–15 (NKJV) 13 Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them.*

The little children are brought to Jesus for blessing and prayer. In Luke's gospel in the parallel account (18:15) the wording is “they kept on bringing even their infants (*babies*)”—which suggests bringing them for approval. Mothers and fathers brought their children in the form of dedication.

The word used here is *paidia*; a reference to children ranging in ages from babies to pre-teens.

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Both Mark and Luke use an imperfect verb tense: “they were bringing” indicating a continuous process over an extended period of time. In other words. . .they just kept coming.

We are all fond of saying and singing; “Jesus loves the little children—all the children of the world”.

We then read the sad words; “. . .*but the disciples rebuked them.*”

Why in the world would the disciples do such a thing? Did they resent the intrusion? Did they think the children unworthy of Christ's notice—or time—or concern? The response is surprising in light of Christ's earlier illustration when Jesus asked them “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:1-2).

The culture was very patriarchal—men came first—women came second—children came third. We would be making a serious mistake if we thought this meant that women were never loved or children never cared for.

But sometimes misplaced priorities will cause people to see parents or children as unwelcome drains.

We are left with the impression that Jesus is gentle, tender, gracious towards children. Did the disciples suspect impure motives on the part of the parents? We are not told. Jesus does not rebuke the parents or resist the blessing. It was not unusual for parents to bring children to respected Rabbi's for prayers and blessings. The Talmud encouraged this behavior so that children would grow strong in the principles of the Law, be faithful in marriage and known by good works or kind deeds.

There could be any number of reasons the disciples were hindering the children; inconvenience, time, mission, priorities. For the most part children love to hear about Jesus. Their little hearts are open and willing to know about Jesus or know more about Jesus. We must bring them to Christ. But children—like all human beings have a fallen nature— a bent towards sin.

Many parents come to church exhausted from work; anxious over finances, and disillusioned with the task of parenting.

One of the interesting things about this text is the source of hinderance is not coming from the parents but Jesus' own disciples! How can we as a church make sure we are not hindering parents but rather equipping them to bring their children to Jesus?

On behalf of the church I want to plead **not guilty** to the charge of hindering your children from coming to Christ.

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But if I am wrong—I am open to rebuke and correction!

Some would argue that our own culture like that of ancient Israel has as its focus on adult men first, women second and children third. But I think that ship has sailed. It is been my experience most homes in America are child centered. Much of our activities center around our children. We work to live in the best neighborhoods and send our children to the best schools. We want our children to be active in sports and intellectual pursuits. It is not wrong to want to give our children the best home, the best education and a safe and stable environment.

Most pastors and churches are tempted to beg parents to bring their children to church rather than bring their children to Christ. Please don't misunderstand me. I want you to bring your children to church. We want to provide age appropriate instruction for your children. We always and ever want to point our children to Jesus. To love Jesus and respect God's Word and embrace God's principles for abundant life.

In our text the parents want to bring their children to Jesus for prayer and blessing.

But in our culture more and more parents are making the decision to allow their children to make their own choices about God, Jesus, religion and church. Now less than a third of America's population bring their children to church.

Would you say that your home is a Christ centered home or a child centered home? In his book *The Heart of Anger* Lou Priolo provides a list of behaviors that points to a child-centered home;

- The child interrupts adults when they are talking**
- Use manipulation and rebellion to get their way**
- Dictate the family schedule (meal times bed times etc)**
- The child takes precedence over the needs of the spouse**
- The child has an equal or overriding vote in all decisions**
- The child demands excessive time and attention from parents**

(Lou Priolo adds to the detriment of the other biblical responsibilities of the parents)

- The child escapes the consequences of their sinful and irresponsible behavior**
- Speak to parents as though they were peers**
- Be the dominant influence in the home**
- Be entertained and coddled (rather than disciplined ) out of a bad mood.**

How does that differ from a Christ-centered home?

The Christ centered home is modeled from Genesis 2:24; "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. Two people become a family before any children are born (except in cultures where out of wed-lock births are

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rampant). The parents are the decision makers in the new family unit. The family is not a democracy. The husband and wife are joint heirs with Christ; with the husband as head and the wife as helper. Children are born, welcome in the family, but not as co-equal decision makers, or partners in the physical, spiritual, emotional and even financial responsibilities. The God centered home is the home where everyone is pleased and committed to serving the Lord, instead of serving the husband or wife or child. The Lord's desires are exalted over everyone's desires. Does this mean we ignore or neglect or abuse our children? OF COURSE NOT.

Listen to this tragic letter;

Dear Ann Landers:

I am writing from behind bars. The charge? A felony—child molesting. Not a pleasant subject, I realize, but this letter is not being written to be pleasant or to gain sympathy. You've never seen me in the parks or near playgrounds looking for victims. I don't play ball and I don't give out candy. I don't leer at children or stare at them, yet I've never lacked for victims. I've held several positions of responsibility working with the public. You've probably met me and liked me. Your children have learned that I can fix a bike and will talk to them when no one else has time to listen. When Mom was too busy or Dad was too tired, they came to me. I know more about your children's teachers and their school problems than you because they knew I was interested. The two little girls I molested can never regain what was taken away from them and I will spend five years in prison. I was molested as a child and feel certain that at least two of my victims will grow up to be molesters. I am sick at heart, but the damage is done and I can't undo it. The next time your child has something to tell you, don't be too busy to listen. Ask yourself, if I won't listen, who will?

Can parents hinder their children from coming to Christ?

I think the answer is yes. If parents don't love Jesus; if parents don't respect God's Word; if parents don't embrace Biblical principles in the home; the chances increase dramatically that a child will want nothing to do with Jesus.

What do you say to the child who doesn't want to go to church?

### **Helping Our Children Come To Christ (vv.14-15)**

*14But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."*

The construction of the original language is very interesting. "Let alone" is in the aorist tense; but do not hinder is in the present tense with a negative—indicating a call to action; a call to stop

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immediately—drop everything and stop this! In effect Jesus is saying—allow the children to come to me—starting now! Do not stop them from coming to me (Mark 10:14).

This is in effect a double command. Let the children come. Do not forbid them. Implicit in both commands is a strong warning; never forbid anyone from coming to Jesus. **Do not hinder the children from coming to Christ. Help children come to Christ.**

What do we say to the parent who says; “I don't want to cram religion down the throat of my child”. We say—“Everything you say and do gives your children a sense of what is real and what is important.” You are teaching your children at this very moment your worldview.

Nobody is suggesting you cram Jesus down your children's throat. Jesus is saying; “Bring them to me.” Do not forbid them. Excuse is a form of prohibition. In Mark's gospel (10:14) we read; “But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased” (read angry—read indignant). This was one of those rare occasions in the Scripture where Jesus is angry. He is angry because He loves children and cares about children. He is angry because he has little patience for people who consider children—non-essential, unimportant, a waste of time. No doubt Jesus was angry because of the **presumption** of people who **believe they have the right to keep their children from Him.**

There are several things we should be able to glean from the words of Jesus. The first is the importance of reaching children with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Their minds are receptive and their hearts open. Can you explain the gospel in such a way that even a child could understand?

Second children who want to confess their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ should be given opportunity. The children should be encouraged—not discouraged.

Third no one knows the age when a child is first qualified to go to hell.

I am often asked; “At what age does a child become responsible for his or her sin?” And “Will children automatically go to heaven?”

**Some children are incapable of exercising either faith or willful unbelief.** Does God show special mercy or impart special grace because of age or diminished mental capacities?

What does God do with the innocent? Innocent in this case does not mean freedom from Adam's sin or moral corruption or the sin nature. We are given clues in 2 Samuel 12:23.

We want our children to genuinely know Jesus. We want our children to understand the horror of sin and that salvation is provided to us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

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**Children do not have to become adults in order to be saved. But adults must become like children in order to be saved.**

Matthew 18:3-4; *“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. (4) Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”*

Mark 10:15; *“Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter in.”*

In both Mark and Luke's gospels we learn unless one receives the kingdom as a little child, he will not be able to enter in (see Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17).

The Lord says; *“ . . . for of such is the kingdom of heaven”*.

The citizens in the kingdom of heaven are weak, vulnerable and dependent. It would have brought great joy to Jesus to spend time with the children who have such a simplicity of faith, dependence and trust.

The New Testament provides a sharp contrast between the religious leaders' unbelief and blindness with the simple child-like faith of those who place their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus took time for the neglected, the weak, the sick, the poor, the vulnerable. Does this mean Jesus has no time for the rich and powerful?

Who do you like to spend time with?

We love our children and grandchildren. We love to spend time with them. But sometimes their company wears thin! Our children need time, and discipline and physical, material needs, emotional supports—spiritual supports. It is easy to get frustrated.

*15 And He laid His hands on them and departed from there.*

The text leaves us with the impression that Jesus laid hands on them one by one. This would have certainly taken time. In Mark's gospel (10:16) we read; *“And He (Jesus) took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them.”*

There is a sense not only of urgency but energy! Jesus is never tired of you. Jesus is not tired of the children. We are sometimes exhausted, fatigued, spent. Jesus is never too tired to keep watch.

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**Conclusion**

Where do we find Jesus?

Read the Bible with your child.

Explain the Bible to your child.

Live the Bible with your child.