

Bringing Our Children to Christ

Luke 18:15-17

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Luke 18:15-17 says

[15] Now they were bringing even infants to him (Jesus) that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. [16] But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. [17] Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."

May God bless the reading and the preaching of His Word.

We are facing a new year and we've talked about a theme for this year concerning the next generation. Our new property is geared toward the next generation and we certainly want our children to come to know the Lord. This passage points us in that direction.

There is a statement I'd like to share that speaks of a child and his parents but we don't know who wrote it. It says "When you thought I wasn't looking I saw you hang my first painting on the refrigerator and I wanted to paint another one. When you thought I wasn't looking I saw you feed a stray cat and I thought it was good to be kind to animals. When you thought I wasn't looking I saw you make my favorite cake just for me and I knew that little things are special things. When you thought I wasn't looking I heard you say a prayer and I believe there is a God I could always talk to. When you thought I wasn't looking I felt you kiss me good night and I felt love. When you thought I wasn't looking I saw tears come from your eyes and I learned that sometimes things hurt and it's all right to cry. When you thought I wasn't looking I saw that you cared and I wanted to be everything I could be. When you thought I wasn't looking I looked and wanted to say thanks for all the things I saw when you thought I wasn't looking."

We have influence on our children when we're not even aware we're having influence but notice in this passage the desire of the parents in Jesus' day. Luke 18:15 says [15] *Now they were bringing even infants to him (Jesus) that he might touch them.* When we read the other Gospels of this account it says that He

would take them in His hands and bless them. Those parents wanted their children blessed by Christ who was right there. If you had been there and had little children would you have brought them? I bet you would have but we bring them today. He is not here physically but He's here. We have the same desire and in a sense the same opportunity.

Children can come to know the Lord at an early age. Samuel in the Bible came to know the Lord at a very young age. The Lord revealed Himself to Samuel. If you read Christian biographies you'll see Jonathan Edwards, a famous evangelist in this country became a Christian at 8 years old. Richard Baxter, a famous puritan preacher, became a Christian when he was 6 years old. Count Von Zinzendorf, the one who basically brought into existence the Moravian church, a great missionary church, hundreds of years ago came to know the Lord at an early age. My children came to know the Lord early on and I imagine a number of you did too. We all desire that our children come to know Him and walk with Him at an early age and we desire that for other children around the world.

We have other desires for our children as well. We desire they have a good education, a good vocation and be in a good social setting. Sometimes our other desires for our children can conflict with our spiritual desires for them and run contrary to that. We have to be careful that we don't undermine our spiritual desires for them with other desires for them.

Notice the deterrents of these parents bringing their children to Jesus by the disciples. The last part of Luke 18:15 says, *And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.* The disciples rebuked the parents for bringing their children. They thought Jesus doesn't have time for this. He has all these things He has to do so He must not have time for these children. So these disciples deter these parents.

There can be all kinds of things that deter our children. We can be disciples ourselves and hinder it. Children are idealistic in a sense and if they see hypocrisy in us that can be a real stumbling block when we talk to them about spiritual things. The same thing can be true in the church. If they see hypocrisy in the church that can be a real stumbling block.

There's a book out titled *If I Could Change My Mom and Dad* by Bill Orr who is a children's evangelist. He asked children to write him and answer this question. If I could change my mom and dad, here is what I would want to change. He then published a book based on the answers he received. A thirteen year old girl writes if I could change my mom and dad I wouldn't change my mom but I would change my dad. I would want him to read the Bible with me, pray with me, love God, confess his sins, care for me, treat me as equal as my sisters, love me and not beat me. A girl at age fourteen writes if I could change my mom and dad I would like for them to discipline me in love and not in anger. I would also like for them to show love more each day instead of anger or impatience. Here is another one. If I could change my mom and dad I would have them talk to me

more. My mom talks to me but it's not like the good close talking I really want. My father doesn't talk to me at all and I would like a closer relationship with him. I would like to share my feelings with them and help me with my problems. Another says if I could change my mom and dad I would have them spend more time with me.

As I think back of raising my children I really regret not spending more time with them. There were all these things that I felt I had to do and I neglected a crucial thing of spending time with my children, as much time as I needed to and should have. I did find in the time I did spend with them that each one was different and not just the time I spent with all three of them together. I needed individual time with each one and they were different in how we'd spend that time for it to be effective. I remember I would take my older daughter out for lunch just the two of us. The best thing I could do with my younger daughter was to go into her bedroom when she was getting ready to go to bed and have a time of hearing how her day went and then have prayer with her. With my son I felt we'd have a good time playing tennis but he didn't know how and I didn't really have the time to train him. So one of the members of the church at that time asked what he could do for me and this member had been a tennis teacher so I said he could train my son to play tennis. This member would come by and pick my son up after school a couple of times a week for several months and taught my son how to play tennis. It helped and worked.

A boy age seven wrote if I could change my dad I would have him play with me more often because he hardly plays with me. A fifteen year old girl writes if I could change my mom and dad I would like to be able to talk to my dad freely without being yelled at or preached to. Another wrote if I could change my mom and dad I love them greatly and I see no great faults. I think my mom should enforce her rules a bit more especially with my brothers. Another writes if I could change my dad I would stop him from smoking and swearing and if I could change my mom I would take her temper away. Another writes I'd like to get my parents back together again because they are separated. I really like my mom and dad together. A boy age twelve wrote if I could change my mom and dad I would change them into Christians because my mom and dad don't know Christ. Could that be true of someone reading this? It certainly could be. I try to tell them but it's just impossible. Another writes I wouldn't want to change my parents because I love them the way they are. They are kind of strict but that's okay with me. They don't spoil me and I'm glad they don't. A final one wrote I wouldn't want to change my mom and dad because they're Christians and they love the Lord and that's all that counts. It's not all that counts but it's huge.

We see here the cruciality of bringing our children to the Lord, modeling it and spending time with it. If your kids were to write you a letter like that what do you think they might say? Why don't you go home and ask them to do that. Are you up to that?

Notice the direction by Christ here to the disciples when they began to hinder the people. Luke 18:16 says *[16] But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.* In other Gospels it says when Jesus saw it He was much displeased when He saw what the disciples were doing. Now notice the reason He gives which is for to them belong the Kingdom of God.

William Hendrickson, a famous commentator on Scripture, says "The fact that the Lord regarded these little ones as being already in the Kingdom must not escape our attention. He regarded them as holy seed. It must be born in mind that those who brought there children to Jesus there must have had faith in Jesus and when you have faith in Jesus you are in a covenant relation with Jesus." You enter into that covenant when you have true faith and the covenant extends to your children early on when they are born and as they grow up. If they don't come to Christ early on then at some point they move out of the covenant and have to move back in but they start off in the covenant and that's why in the Old Covenant they performed the sign of the covenant on a boy when he was eight days old.

The sign today is baptism and that's why we baptize infants. We are saying this child is starting off in the covenant. It doesn't mean he is born again but they start off in this covenant which has all kinds of implications for the parent and the child. There are those who believe that when you baptize the child they are born again but that's not what Scripture teaches. It does teach that a child starts off in the covenant.

William Hendrickson, the commentator quotes I Corinthians 7:14 where Paul is writing about a Christian married to non-Christian. Scripture forbids Christians marrying non-Christians but let's say you have two non-Christians and one becomes a Christian after they marry. So should the Christian then divorce the non-Christian? No, instead of the non-Christian being a bad influence on the Christian, hopefully the Christian will be a good influence on the non-Christian and be instrumental in that person coming to Christ. I Corinthians 7:14 says *[14] For the unbelieving husband (partner) is made holy because of his wife (spouse), and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.*

So my child is holy? Not in the sense of automatically a Christian but in the sense of starting off in the covenant. If you have one Christian parent then the child starts off in the covenant and the implications of that are big. God told Abraham when He established His covenant with Abraham, "I will be a God to you and to your seed after you." That's a great promise. He's not promising that every child of every believer is going to become a true believer. It's not a hundred percent promise but it's a general promise. That's a huge encouragement and promise there.

This covenant that we talk about is based on the atonement by Christ that He would die for us. The Mohammedans, a very militant group in history, at certain times almost took over the world. On one occasion they were conquering most of Europe and Spain. King Alfonso of Spain was defending the capital of Spain and the Mohammedans were besieging the city. The King was defending it well until they captured his son. The Mohammedans erected a gallows right outside the capital city where it could be seen from the walls of the city. They had the King's son stand under with a big sign above it that said "Alfonso, the city or your son dies." Everyone saw that and then they looked at the King to see how he would respond. His answer without hesitation he sent back the word "Let my son die that my people may live."

That's what God did. God let His Son die so that we might live. His Son would become God and man, live under the Law, obey it perfectly and then go to the cross to undergo the punishment not just of the cross but in a sense hell when He said "My God, my God why has Thou forsaken Me?" He wasn't just going through crucifixion but damnation from the cross where hell was moved up invisibly as He was going through it. He paid for our sins so that God could forgive us without overlooking His Law where the wages of sin is death, meaning eternal separation from Him in hell.

When we put our faith in Jesus Christ as the One who died for us then we are legally cleared when we surrender our will to Him in true repentance and put our trust in Him alone. We are justified and we get His perfect record credited to us and our sinful record is credited to Him. God made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. I never need that again. I'm also adopted into His family and I'm indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He begins to change my life and I begin to bear the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, self control, etc. These are qualities in us that are Christ like which is the evidence we really did commit our lives, our growing trend of obedience to Him. In the Old Testament you brought a lamb and the lamb's blood couldn't pay for the man's sin but it pictured a lamb like person, Jesus Christ, who was going to die for their sin and our sin. When we surrender our will and put our trust in Him we are legally cleared. The basis of that was the death of Christ.

We want our children to understand this and respond to the Gospel. We have to train them. God says He'll be a God to you and to your seed after you but He expects us to do our end of this thing for it to become a reality. He also says to Abraham in Genesis 18:19, *[19] For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.* Abraham had to train them and command them to keep His ways. He had to model it, pray for them, teach them and discipline them. When you do this we'll see this happen where they will come to know the Lord and personally commit their lives. God will draw them to Himself. Andrew Murray a famous

preacher from South Africa said "God's faithfulness in men in this covenant are linked by indissoluble ties there."

Now you can have people who train their children right but they don't turn out right. Samuel actually did that. As you read Christian biographies you find this happens in some and as you look around you can see this happening today but there is still this huge promise that if we train them right, pray for them and model it ourselves they will respond, come to Christ and they will walk with Him. It may not happen at an early age. In my case, I was raised in a Christian home where they modeled it and I didn't come to Christ until I was in my mid to late twenties. It doesn't mean it will happen right away but that's our desire that early on they would come to Him.

Christ talks about in Matthew 8 a centurion coming to Christ. He was a non Jew who comes to Christ and he says "Master my servant is very ill. Would You please heal him?" Christ says "Yes, I'll go with you." The centurion says "You don't need to come with me. I'm an army officer and I understand how authority works. You just command him to be healed and he'll be healed." Jesus says "I've not seen such faith in all of Israel. So your servant is healed." His servant was healed at that moment but then Jesus went on to say "Many will come from the East and the West and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven while the sons of the Kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness." Like this non Jew, the centurion who had come, many will come from the East and the West, you and I, while the children of the Kingdom, those who had all this privilege of Light speaking of the Jews, would be cast into outer darkness. What went wrong? They had all the Light. The Gentiles didn't have any Light. Now the Gentiles have come to Christ and the majority of the Jews haven't. What can go wrong?

The promise didn't fail but they didn't do their end of it. They began to twist the teaching of Scripture. They began to teach that you're saved not as of a gift by grace through surrender and trust in Christ, like Abraham who believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness, but that you're saved by your obedience to the Law. What is the function of the Law? The Law is to show us our need of the Lamb, Christ. Sure He had them offer the lamb but they weren't earning their salvation by that. They made the Law a means of salvation and we're to obey the Law but we're not saved by it. We are saved once we've trusted in Christ and all but obeying the Law is the evidence of being saved. That's how we grow spiritually. So this was wrong doctrine that was taught. Is there any wrong doctrine in the church today that we're aware of? It is crucial that our children get a solid, Biblical foundation starting with their family and the church and whatever else you can use.

Then there are false values. Jesus kept saying not to lay up treasure on earth where moth and rust destroy but we are to lay up treasures in heaven. Get your values right. Then they love the praise of men more than the praise of God. Many

of the religious leaders and Pharisees believed that Jesus was the Messiah but they wouldn't confess Him, why? It was because they were afraid they would be thrown out of the synagogue. They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Peer pressure was a real factor of me not coming to Christ early in my life.

Then there is the lust of the flesh. Now think of our culture. Our culture is not very Christian. There is a book titled *Reaching the Heart of Your Teen* by Gary and Anna Ezzo and in it they say "We live in a society that believes morals are relative and as a result, communities sharing common moral standards are virtually non-existent. That's why today you can be a good parent and still turn out a wayward child. Without a moral community surrounding and upholding your values you must fight alone against television, pornography, drugs, premarital sex, value based education, degrading schools, negative peer pressure and so on." We need that Christian community around us and around our children to help us with it.

Then it goes on to speak of things that really help like strong families. It says you need common traits of strong families, a core of shared values that all members embrace and parents who are not afraid to say "I was wrong." We need teens who are willing to accept 'no' for an answer and parents who are approachable about their own sin. We need marriages that are recognized as a priority to the family health. We need family members who take time to be with each other and to attend each others events.

John Croyle spoke in our church a number of times who is head of the operation the Big Oak Ranch which reaches out to troubled teens and children. He talks about bringing out the winner in your child, make them a champion. He says the first thing he does when a child comes to the Big Oak Ranch is he looks them in the eye and says "I love you." Many children now a days are not accustomed to a grown man expressing that to them. Then he says that you're children need to know beyond a doubt that you love them and that you're not manipulating them. Secondly, he tells the new children at the ranch that he will never lie to them because children have been deceived and manipulated often before coming to them. Most of these kids are unsure if there is anyone they can trust. Thirdly, he tells the children he will stick with them through thick and thin. This lets the children know they have a future and that someone will be there for them.

The fourth thing he tells them is if they do wrong "I'll get you." This sounds harsh but they want their children to know that there are boundaries within which their conduct is acceptable. If they cross those boundaries they will be dealt with accordingly. He wants the children to wonder what he means when he says "I'll get you." Then at the right moment when they are tempted to do something wrong he wants them to see the look on his face when he said that and realize the seriousness of the consequences they will suffer if they choose to commit the offense. Are they willing to commit the act knowing there will be negative

consequences equal to their actions? He wants them to hear his voice in their hearts saying "If you do wrong, I'll get you." They have had a lot of success in training children to walk with the Lord.

Finally, notice the demand of becoming a child. Have you become a child? Luke 18:17 says [17] *Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.* To receive the Kingdom of God like a child we have to humble ourselves like a little child in a sense instead of being proud and rebellious. Have you heard of the father and his son and their prayers? Last night my little boy confessed to me some childish wrong and kneeling at my knee he prayed with tears "Dear God, make me a man like daddy, wise and strong, I know You can" and then while he slept I knelt by his bed, confessed my sins and prayed with bowed head "O God, make me a child like my child here, pure and guileless, trusting Thee with faith sincere." We need to humble ourselves. Be childish. Be childlike in that sense.

For those of us who have children or grandchildren, this also applies to grandparents and grandchildren and even great grandchildren. I just became and great grandfather. There is a great promise here. I will be a God to you and to your seed after you but there is a great responsibility on our part to train them in the ways of the Lord. Look to Him to enable us to do it, for strength to do it and impact their lives. It is a great responsibility.

Years ago I used to teach the Youth Communicant's class that kids go through when they're around 10 or 11. There was a young boy in there who became a Christian as he was coming along but his daddy was not a Christian. He talked to his daddy about it but his daddy wouldn't respond. One day they had come to church and heard me preach and as they were driving home the boy said "Daddy what did you think of the sermon?" His dad said "It was good." The boy said "Mr. Barker said if you hadn't ever committed your life to Christ would you do it right now and then he prayed a prayer, did you pray that prayer with him, Daddy?" His dad said, "No I didn't, son." The boy said, "Why not Daddy?" His dad said "There are some things I want to do first, son." The boy said "Some things that Jesus doesn't want you to do, Daddy?" They got home and the dad called me up and asked me to come to his house and he was ready to commit his life to Christ.

Are you a daddy or mother that hasn't made that commitment? Are you a child and haven't made that commitment? Why not? Are you doing some things that Jesus doesn't want you to do and you're not ready to quit? Don't play that game. How crucial it is that we bring our children to Christ but we have to bring ourselves there first. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Where are you in all of this? Some of you are helping us bring our children and we thank for it. Lord, we thank You for raising up people here to teach Sunday

school, vacation Bible school, nursery and all those type things. We thank You for that. Lord, we pray that You would help each of us to do our end of raising our children. For those who haven't made that commitment to Christ, would you in your heart right now, make it? Just pray like this. Lord, Jesus I want to become a child. I want to humble myself before You or I am a child and I invite You into my life as Master and I trust You alone as my Savior. Come make any changes You want to, in faith I thank You, Amen.

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