

TOPIC XVIII.

AND WHAT OF THE CHILDREN?

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One of the most emotional issues debated over the years concerns the eternal state of an infant or child who suffers death. We need a clear look at this issue from a Biblical point of view. A little common logic would help also.¹

The emotional appeal is that God would never permit a small, innocent child to suffer eternal damnation, and if He did, He would have to be considered a despicable tyrant of infinite cruelty unworthy of our love and worship. The argument continues, "would it not be better that no child be born than to be born only to face the possibility of an eternal condemnation outside of the capability of faith? Therefore, children must be under grace until they are aware of and capable of dealing with their sin."²

Though these arguments appear persuasive, they are based in a humanistic sentimentalism rather than in Scripture. The Word teaches much to the contrary. First, don't Christians believe the entire race is corrupt and depraved in Adam and condemned under the penalty of sin necessitating the cross as the only means of salvation? Is not every man, woman and child born without hope to start with? Are we sure? Perhaps this foundational belief is inaccurate. Let's see.

Paul teaches, in Romans, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly."³ To whom do the terms "helpless" and "ungodly" not apply? "Therefore just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned-for until the Law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come."⁴ "So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men..."⁵ Paul also makes a very firm statement in chapter three. "...for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, 'There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, Together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving, The poison of asps is under their lips; Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; Their feet are swift to shed blood, Destruction and misery are in their paths, And the path of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before

¹. This article is not intended to be exhaustive of all the ramifications of this and related subjects, but only a basis for further consideration and pondering. All Scriptural quotations are from The New American Standard Version.

². Of course, if children are subject to judgment, this view is invalid. No children born would mean no human race at all in very short order.

³. Romans 5:6

⁴. Romans 6:12-14; See also verses 15-21

⁵. Romans 6:18

their eyes.’ Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God.”⁶ One is hard pressed to find an exception to these words. Are children exempt?

The common understanding of Psalm 51:4-5 is that we are born under, and in the state of sin. “Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight, So that though art justified when Thou dost speak, and blameless when Thou dost judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.”⁷ The Jerusalem Bible translates the Hebrew this way, “You are just when you pass sentence on me, blameless when you give judgment. You know I was born guilty, a sinner from the moment of conception.” Job 25:4 states, “How then can a man be just with God? Or how can he be clean who is born of woman?” This is a rhetorical question expecting the answer “he can’t”. Job 14:1-4 confirms this, “Man, who is born of woman, is short lived and full of turmoil. Like a flower he comes forth and withers. He also flees like a shadow and does not remain. Thou dost open Thine eyes on him, and bring him into judgment with Thyself. Who can make the clean out of the unclean? No one!” Job 15:14, “What is man that he should be pure, or he who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous”?

The Word also teaches that, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”⁸ “The whole world is accountable to God”.⁹ Further, the sin of man is neither out of ignorance nor innocence. It is a deliberate act of our natural and free state into which we also bring our children, without thought or apology to them or to God.¹⁰ The whole world is in eternal trouble by it’s own willful and deliberate rejection of God. It is only by the grace and promise of God, in behalf of unrighteous man, that any have the opportunity to be saved.¹¹ The view that all are saved and redeemed and then choose to reject God is cultic and not Biblical. The Universalists and Unitarians are among those who hold these views. Is not the truth such that only by the infinite mercy of God are any saved at all from among those who are deserving of anything but eternal death? The world desperately needs salvation. It does not have it because it procreates.

On the one hand, an argument could be made that a true tyranny in God would exist if indeed children were actually under grace (or saved) at birth, regardless of the condition of mankind, then have God allow “saved” children to grow to a point where they come under condemnation in sin, without hope? Would this not be a reversal of salvation? Would this not be worse than evil? Would it not be more horrendous to allow children to grow into condemnation than to take them into eternity immediately upon birth?¹² On the other hand, one could contend that the process of allowing children to grow and mature is an act of God’s mercy and grace, not tyranny, in that the sinful offspring of fallen man are given the opportunity of salvation.

⁶ Romans 3:9b-19

⁷ This understanding of the intent of these verses is confirmed by nearly every Biblical commentator as well as other Biblical passages. For example, see Dahood, Psalms II, The Anchor Bible. “All men have a congenital tendency toward evil”. Also note: Genesis 8:21; 1 Kings 8:46; Job 14:1-4; Job 25:4. These passages are not commenting on the “sin” of the mother who gives birth. Giving birth is not a sin.

⁸ Romans 3:23

⁹ Romans 3:19

¹⁰ Please read Romans 1:18 through 2:12 as well as 3:9-20 and 5:16-19

¹¹ Genesis 6:5-7; Romans 5:6-8; 6:23

¹² This begs the question, “what is the point at which this would occur?” Those who submit that there is an “age of accountability” fail to recognize this argument as well as fail to find Scriptural foundation for such a claim.

¹³ Please see also: Numbers 31:7-18; Deuteronomy 2:32-34; Deuteronomy 28:58-61; Psalm 137; Romans 9:7-33; Psalm 109:6-13; Hosea 13:16; Exodus 20:5-6; 34:6-7; Deuteronomy 20:16-17; Joshua 7; Matthew 15:4; Malachi 2; Joshua 6:20, 8:24-26; 10:28; etc. I Samuel 15:1-3; 22:18-19 etc..

The destruction of children or the unborn (by abortion) cannot be viewed as an act of kindness leading to salvation, but as an act of human initiated butchery-unless one contends that they are saved prior to or at birth. Then, the greatest means of salvation would be the abortion of fetuses, and the cross would be totally unnecessary. One can't have it both ways. The real cruelty rests not with God, but solely with the spiritual carelessness of unresponsive parents as well as a lethargic church reluctant to share God's Word and provisions in Christ with their own children, let alone the world. It is easier to blame God as "cruel" than admit our own unrighteousness. It is more convenient to speculate about the "lost-ness" of man than to take responsibility for our own ungodliness and the spiritual welfare of people everywhere, children or adults.

The issue is solved by Scripture, not by sentimental speculation and rationalization. Damnation of the children of the wicked world, outside of the community of faith, is a Biblical fact. This includes not only within time and history, but eternally as well. Psalm 58:3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb, these who speak lies go astray from birth" (ff.). "Isaiah 14:20-22, "You will not be united with them in burial, because you have ruined your country, you have slain your people. May the offspring of evildoers not be mentioned forever. Prepare for his sons a place of slaughter because of the iniquity of their fathers. They must not arise and take possession of the Earth and fill the face of the world with cities. 'And I will rise up against them,' declares the Lord of Hosts, 'and will cut off from Babylon name and survivors, offspring and posterity,' declares the Lord." Proverbs 20:20 "He who curses his father or mother, his lamp will go out in the time of darkness." Leviticus 20:9 "If there is anyone who curses his father or his mother, he shall surely be put to death." Ecclesiastes 11:9 "Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things". Psalm 21:8-10 "Your hand will find out all your enemies; your right hand will find out those who hate you. You will make them as a fiery oven in the time of your anger; The Lord will swallow them up in His wrath, and fire will devour them. Their offspring Thou wilt destroy from the earth, and their descendents (children) from among the sons of men". Psalm 9:5, 15-17 "Thou hast rebuked the nations; Thou hast destroyed the wicked; Thou hast blotted out their name forever and ever." "The nations have sunk down in the pit which they have made; in the net which they hid, their own foot has been caught. The Lord has made Himself known; He has executed judgment. In the work of his own hands the wicked is snared. The wicked will return to Sheol, even all the nations who forget God."¹³

Unless the entire world's population is under sin from birth, Christ's death on the cross makes no sense. If people of any age, condition or location could be saved apart from faith in Christ, then God could save far more through some other means. If a person is saved through ignorance or innocence, the same argument holds true. The Scripture would be replete with passages attesting to this fact when in actuality, those espousing this view must rely on a very few obscure passage normally taken out of context. Those who are confused or think the narrow view of the Bible is unacceptable need to review I Corinthians 1:18-25. From the time of Adam on only one holy, innocent child has been born, and that is Jesus Himself. God is not the foolish one, it is man that is the sinner. Man willfully rejects God, teaches his children to do the same, wallows in filth and unrighteousness, and still God mercifully provides the ever present work of Jesus, His Dear Son, as the sure hope for the sewer of humanity. This same humanity spit in the face of the innocent, holy, Child of God, beat Him, crucified and rejected Him and hoped by burying Him that they (we) would be rid of Him. Yet if only one believes, recognizing his own desperate need and the

overwhelming value of Jesus' sacrifice, he is accounted cleansed and God and Jesus deem the cross to have been worth it. This is because God is genuinely good and loving.

The cross of Christ alone should be enough to point to the distorted corruption of man in contrast to the holy, merciful, loving, glory of God. Does not the cross of Christ illustrate the extreme seriousness of the human predicament?¹⁴ Classic Christian theology underscores the total depravity of man from creation onward. Otherwise, Jesus' death on the cross becomes an empty, foolish gesture rather than the supreme act of a loving and compassionate God who fully understands the hopelessness of all mankind, under the death penalty not just from birth, but from the dawn of creation.

The question may be posed as to how mankind falls under this penalty and how is it that newborns are not excluded from this penalty. A clarification is made in the Scriptures. The question now becomes, why are the children of wickedness born without grace by unregenerate people, while the mercy of God appears to grant favor to those children born of the line of promise given to those, who by faith, have been accounted righteous by God. The answer is clear. Though God does not have to grant such favor, the Scriptures are full of this truth. Psalm 103:17-18, "But the lovingkindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep His covenant and who remember His precepts to do them." Psalm 37:18, "The Lord knows the days of the blameless, and their inheritance will be forever." In 1st Corinthians 7:14 we read, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy."¹⁵ This should give great peace and assurance to Christian parents for they are given the opportunity to bring up their children in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord". Each child has the wonderful advantage under God's grace for individual faith and salvation in Christ as they come under the conviction of the Spirit whenever that may be. There are some who teach an extreme "age of accountability" in that a child is not capable of such a decision until 12, 13, 15, 18, 20 or whatever. This, however, collapses under the fact that many a child has a vivid recollection of a full understanding of their sinfulness, repentance and salvation as early as age 4, 5 or 6.

Further, if a child were to die in such a family prior to an overt decision for Christ, then they still share the privilege of saving grace imputed to them under the promise of God to the parental head in faith. This truth and hope is based on the Biblical concept of "the solidarity of the family". This idea is foreign to the Western mind and culture. It is prevalent in Near and Far Eastern cultures and religions. We, in the Western world, are heirs of a Greco-Roman social model which emphasizes personal individuality and achievement. Our nation is built on the foundation of the rights of the individual, (not the family)...to such an extent that the family is expendable if necessary to achieve the goals of the individual member.

This is partly based on the view that some parents have that children are a social commodity for which the parent bears little responsibility because he (or she) is seeking the individual goals he

¹⁴. See II Peter 2:1-3:18 (esp. 2:12); Galatians 2:15-21; Romans 5:6

¹⁵. 1st Corinthians 7:14 does not necessarily mean that salvation is automatic. But it does indicate that a special dispensation of grace covers those within families of believers, setting them apart from the secular to the presence of God and His word. This is an act of God's grace, honoring the faith of the believing parent(s). The word "holy" means "set apart". The "unclean" things were excluded from the place of God and the community of God. Other verses relating to this matter are: Acts 2:39; 11:14; 16:14-15, 31; 18:8, John 4:53 and score of others in both Old and New Testament the reader can research.

(or she) has set for him(her)self. Responsibility for the upbringing of the child belongs to others; the school, the church, the child care provider, etc., anyone willing to allow “me” the freedom to seek “my” fulfillment without interruption. At worst, children are a nuisance or inconvenience relegated to being abandoned or destroyed if they interfere with the goals and pleasures of the individual.

In this light, parental authority has been undermined totally. Government has been forced to step in to prevent further damage by parents to children. Any child can bring charges of any kind against a parent and the court is obligated to hear them. Other parents can wreck havoc with someone else’s family through a simple call to a child protection service agency. Those who seek to raise their children in a responsible and godly manner are not excluded from this perversion of the way God intended it to be. More on this later.¹⁶

So, we are at sea when it comes to understanding the things of family and how this precious unit is understood in the Bible. First, “family” reflects the very nature of God himself.¹⁷ In Genesis 1:26-28 we have a startling picture of God {Elohim (plural)} creating “man” (Adam) in his own image, male and female. “Let “us” make man (Adam) “our” image”. He blesses their union and commands them to procreate. “Adam” is a plural unity as seen clearly in Genesis 5:1-2. “This is the book of the generations of ‘Adam’. In the day when God created ‘Adam’, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named *them* ‘Adam’ in the day when *they* were created.”¹⁸ In light of the fact that the Hebrew for man is “Ish” and for woman “Ishah”, the collective noun “Adam” has been used by God to relate a greater meaning than the word “Ish” or “Ishah” would convey. The Western Church has insisted on defining the nature of God as a “Trinity”. Would it be acceptable to even consider that the nature and characteristics of God might correspond as well or better to the concept of “family” or would it be such a heresy that it would cause great division in the church? The fact is that the latter is true, and wars have been fought and millions killed over this very discussion. Still, Jesus is the “Son of God”, we are the “children of God”, the “family of God”, and Jesus is our “brother”, and God is our “Father”, even “Abba Father”, all family terms.¹⁹

Second, we have a very determined effort in the Scriptures to track the lineage of the family to such extent that Jesus is called “The Son of David” even though David lived a thousand years prior to Jesus’ appearing.²⁰ The Jews stated to Jesus that they “are Abraham’s offspring”, even though Abraham lived 2000 years prior to their birth.²¹ In Hebrews 7:4-10 this idea of family solidarity is confirmed when it is written in verses 9 and 10, “And so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him”. Levi, of course, wasn’t born for several generations after Abraham died. And Abraham is called his “father”. Even Jews today, when Passover is celebrated begin with “when *we* were in Egypt...”. The frequent genealogies throughout the Bible seem boring reading to many, but they convey the importance of one’s lineage and family because there is continuity, oneness, togetherness, a traveling and sticking together that we simply do not have in our culture. Biblical prophecy is grounded in this. Redemption and salvation are grounded in this. As a simple example, note the words of Jacob as he blesses his son Judah in Genesis 49:8-

¹⁶ This is a vast subject worthy of intense study. This dissertation is not designed to cover it fully, but only set the stage for some germane thoughts for consideration of the overall issue.

¹⁷ See footnote 16.

¹⁸ Italics are the author’s.

¹⁹ See footnote 16.

²⁰ Mark 10:47 etc.

²¹ John 8:33

12. Seventeen hundred years later, this is noted as fulfilled in Christ. Nearly 4000 years later, we are still making this point. The promise of God in Genesis 3:15 is applied to His redemptive work in Christ. It is all a matter of lineage and family solidarity. This gives a hint as to how the believing saints in The Old Testament were saved. It was not due to their physical lineage however, but to their faith, in spite of the distortion the historical Jews brought to this truth.²²

It can only be briefly noted at this point, that most Eastern cultures are focused on the solidarity of the family as well as on the ancestral lineage, much the way we see in the Bible. In Acts 16, we have the story of the imprisonment of Paul and Silas at Philippi. When they refused to leave the jail after it was opened because they cared for the welfare of the jailer, {who would be surely executed (and possibly his family as well) for allowing the prisoners to escape} the jailer was so overcome with their understanding and compassion that verses 27-34 tells us a very poignant story. “And when the jailer had been roused out of sleep and had seen the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had all escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘do yourself no harm, for we are all here! And he called for lights and rushed in and, trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, ‘sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ And they said, believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you *and your household*’. And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds and immediately he was baptized, he and *all his household*. And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly having believed in God *with his whole household!*” The household also included any servants.

It is recognized, even by our Western culture that if a family member of a Jewish, Moslem, or any other Eastern, Mid-Eastern or Asian culture takes the independent step to join another religion other than his own family’s, he is disowned, ostracized, and viewed as dead by his immediate and extended family. He is “unclean”. This may shed light on Jesus’ statement in Matthew 10:34-36 when He said, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.” Conversely, in these same cultures, as the father goes, leads and believes so goes the rest of the family. What he does, they do. This is obvious in the Acts 16 story. The Biblical setting is that the family moves together, works together, builds together, believes together, cares for one another, gets old together, and is buried together. To break off from this is tragedy. Tevya, in Fiddler on The Roof, goes through a lot of pain over the marriage of his third daughter Chava to Fyedka outside of their traditional Jewish faith. He disowns his daughter and the play has a very sad ending. While we in this country might applaud the children’s independence, everyone else weeps.

The difference in our culture is that the “father” is not guided by tradition, morals, truth, spirituality, the sense of the divine in the family unity, a responsibility to cherish his family above all else because this is God’s way. A dedication to guide, lead, provide, shepherd, teach, and give his life first and foremost for the “sheep” God has blessed him with and the joy that the more children he has the more he is in God’s favor is lacking in our culture. Psalm 127 notes, Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it...Behold, children are a gift of the Lord; the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them”. No,

²² Note carefully Genesis 12:1-3, 15:1-6, and 17:1-5 and related New Testament passages especially in Romans and Galatians.

sorrowfully, too many of our contemporary “fathers” find children a nuisance at best and a curse at worst.

Where the Scripture teaches to raise our children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4) and to “train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6) one would think it odd to have a family where one child is a Buddhist, another a Hindu, one dedicated to Yoga and another an Atheist while under the roof of “Christian” parents. But this would hardly cause a ripple in our “enlightened” society. “Let them make up their own mind” is the rallying cry. “We don’t want to force our religion down their throats” is the defense. “Let us not chance damaging their little minds or their poor self image” is the excuse. The truth of the Scripture is of little importance next to these magnanimous ideals.

When it comes to the “family of God in Christ”, Paul uses this understanding of the family solidarity to explain how it applies to us who believe, and our children. In Romans 5:14-19 this is illustrated. The family of the first “Adam” and that of the second “Adam” are defined for us also in 1st Corinthians 15:45-49. We have changed lineage in Christ. We have moved from being descendents (children) of the first Adam, to being children of the second Adam. Other key passages are Colossians 1:13-14, 2:8-14; Galatians 3:22-29, 6:15; Ephesians 2:1-10; II Corinthians 5:14-21. In summary, mankind is “in” Adam as his seed and thus comes under condemnation. Those who believe in Jesus are “in” Christ as his seed by The Holy Spirit and come under salvation. (Romans 8:1-2) Believers change headship and the family “curse” is lifted. (Galatians 3:9-14)

Going back to the idea that all children are “under grace” until some accountable time. Our actions belie this belief. We spend much time, effort and money teaching little children about Christ in Christian Schools, Sunday School programs, Camps and Vacation Bible School programs with the goal of leading them to Him. If the salvation of the little ones is sure, would it not appear to be an act of evil to tell them of their sin and need of Jesus, and thus put them under the compulsion to choose and in jeopardy of Hell? Wouldn’t it be better to leave them to be saved by their “innocence” and “ignorance”? In a like manner, wouldn’t it be better to immediately abandon preaching the Gospel to every creature than to bring the possibility of it’s rejection by the “already saved” heathen? If the truth about the salvation of people comes by any way outside of the Gospel proclamation, then the Great Commission is not an act of God’s love and mercy for a dying world, but a hideous, warped and twisted evil command. In this case, God should be rejected and the cross viewed as a cruel joke.

But that is not the case. The fact is that every human being is born in the Adamic seed, under the law of sin and death, without hope. God, “is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”.²³ This verse affirms the need for repentance of all. It does not preach universal salvation as some would affirm. We already know that not all mankind will be saved. The Bible is clear on this. God has made the supreme effort to save all who will come to Him. Man seems unconcerned about his moral and spiritual state let alone the need for repentance for himself or his children. Yet it is he who is totally responsible for the spiritual and moral state of his children and he would have it no other way. Just ask anyone in our western civilization if he would relinquish the spiritual and moral training to some stranger on the street. In most cases the answer would be a resounding “no”. Man controls that environment

²³. II Peter 3:9

adamantly, either according to God's way or not, from the perspective of darkness or light, depending on his own choice. Therefore, the responsibility is his.

One final question remains. Did not Jesus' special blessing on children indicate their being under grace? Is there not some special grace for the "little ones"? The pertinent New Testament passages are: Matthew 18:1-6 (Mark 9:34-37, 42); 18:10; 18:14; 19:13-15 (Mark 10:13-16) (Luke 18:15-17).

Matthew 18:1-6 reads, "At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And He called a child to himself and set him before them, and said, 'Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea.'" If one looks carefully, there is no statement indicating that a child is saved due to being a child. On the contrary, the example of a child was to draw attention to Jesus' hearers the necessity of "being converted", "humbling oneself", and a statement is made about the "little ones who believe in me". We also have a warning about the importance of not causing one of these who believe in Jesus to stumble. Could this in any way relate to parental responsibility? Nevertheless, Jesus pointed to the importance and centrality of their faith, simple and undiluted though it be, as the ground of salvation that no one better tamper with.

Matthew 18:10 reads, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you, that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of my Father who is in heaven." First, these are the same children who "believed in him" a few verses back. The context is the same. The reference to their "angels" is not clear except that it indicates that God is not unaware of their worth in contrast to adults who tend to ignore them or count them as having little worth (note the next passage about the one "lost sheep"). This passage does not indicate that salvation is involved simply on the basis of size or youth. If anything, Jesus still recognizes the innocent, open faith and belief a child can exercise. This, of course, places a fly in the ointment of those who don't believe they are capable of such a faith and must wait until an age of accountability to be able to enjoy an "informed" faith.

Matthew 18:14 reads, "Thus it is not the will of your father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish". Of course not. We have seen this in II Peter 3:9 as well. Nevertheless, the emphasis is on God's emphasis to "leave the ninety-nine and seek for the lost sheep." He is not willing to let one perish without someone (the shepherd in this case) having the compassion for a single, lost, not-very- valuable-in-men's-eyes sheep and making the effort to find it. The lesson is for those who think they are above such dedication and sacrifice.

Matthew 19:13-15 reads, "Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, 'Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.' And after laying His hands on them, He departed from there." From a sentimental point of view we could conclude that the children were automatically saved and members of the kingdom of heaven. However, the way Jesus speaks about the children in no way implies such a fact. The children are an illustration to Jesus' adult hearers. They are coming freely to Him without prejudice or suspicion which adults use to block the truth about their own sin and need of salvation. The only way anyone gets into the kingdom of heaven is to be like the children

(review Matthew 18:3). Contrary to some viewpoints, children appear more capable of faith and more responsive to God than do adults. It is this that Jesus blesses and uses as an illustration for his hearers. His hearers, however, do not seem to be impressed.

One could include I John 2:12-13. "I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for His name's sake...I have written to you children, because you know the Father." In this passage, the "little children" are forgiven because they know the Father, not in spite of it.²⁴ The child's capacity for genuine trust and love of God should teach us all something.

When we opt for salvation for the children or the heathen who have never heard the Gospel, it is because we fail to take man's sin and its consequence seriously. "After all, God would never condemn such wonderful creatures as we". "We really aren't that bad". We hear a lot about "poor self image". Man's problem is not "poor self image", but an exalted "self image".²⁵ His pride and arrogance are well spelled out in the Bible. Rather than be convicted by our depravity, easily demonstrated by our own sin, we would rather demonstrate how righteous we are and how much God appreciates us. We then turn and question God's righteous judgments. We do not take the holiness, loftiness and glory of God seriously at all. We are too familiar with the Father. We sentimentally wink at our sin and corruption and expect God does too. We think we are not so bad and take refuge and defense in the "innocence" of children. This attitude only reveals how genuinely corrupt we really are, for we can neither see ourselves clearly nor God.

Even as Christians, we only see in a "mirror darkly" and reduce the glory of Almighty God to the image of a nice man, the best of our breed.²⁵ We think we have done Him a favor in recognizing Him as superior to a heathen god. Yet He tells us that His thoughts and ways are higher than ours and that all our best righteousness is filth compared to Himself.²⁶ So in reducing the infinite glory of God to the limits of our minds, we therefore do not need to be too concerned about the offspring of our flesh.

We fail to take the responsibility for the spiritual welfare of our children seriously. The cross becomes a curiosity, the great commission optional. We are not our brother's keeper, let alone our children's. We leave that to God and Government. But Jesus gave His life for little children as well as all the rest of mankind. Only by God's mercy does He reach out to us and only by our seeking Him and responding in faith will we escape the fate of unrepentant flesh. Not a single human being has ever merited heaven from the moment of creation, let alone from the moment of birth. If our concern for children and the lost is acute, it is incumbent upon us to do everything in our power to see to it that not a single soul goes into eternity without Christ. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe in Him has been judged already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."²⁷

Speaking the truth about Jesus in love to our children (or others), as loving, humble parents ought to be no hard task at all, because it is clear that children are eager to respond to love and

²⁴. See I John 2:14 also.

²⁵. This is easily demonstrated, but a topic for another time.

²⁵. See 1st Corinthians 13:9-12, and Romans 1:18 ff.

²⁶. See Isaiah 55, 64:6-7

²⁷. John 3:16-18

hope. Who else can we leave this privilege to? What a joy it is to see a little one respond to Jesus and in that way be assured of eternal life.