



“Having The Heart Of A Child”

Kevin Presley

The Bible tells us on one hand to *be no more children*, but then it tells us to *become like children*? Is that a contradiction? We often emphasize the need to grow up as Christians; how that growing as a child of God means putting away childishness. For example, **Ephesians 4:14** says, “*That we henceforth be no more children...*” We’re to become of full age when it comes to our understanding, our spiritual appetite, our tolerance for different opinions, in our treatment of others, and so forth.

Yet, on one occasion, in the ministry of Jesus, He said that we could not take part in His kingdom if we did not become *like* children.

Mark 10:13-16 “**And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.**”

So, if the point of Christian growth is to mature, in what ways should we remain as a child? Well, when we think of a child, we think of innocence and purity. Some of the worst crimes one can perpetrate upon society are ones that harm children and that take away their innocence and childhood. It is disgusting to see the sexualization of children in our current culture. Through the internet, mass media, and the overall culture, we are exposing children to worlds that should be unknown to them. Children should be allowed to be children and their innocence preserved as long as possible.

Jesus loved children and He used them in His ministry to teach some of the outstanding principles of His kingdom. In fact, Jesus did not seem to espouse the later doctrine that children are born as dead and

corrupt sinners unable to respond to righteousness, because He made children models of what it means to come to the kingdom.

Matthew 18:3 “And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

How can a child lead us in righteousness if that child is sinful from birth and depraved, as John Calvin and his disciples and other theologians through time have suggested? No, the Bible instead teaches that children are our pattern in righteousness. When prophesying of the coming of Christ and His kingdom, Isaiah said this:

Isaiah 11:6 “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.”

This is figurative language, of course, describing the meek, lowly and peaceful nature of the kingdom of Christ and those who would inhabit it. However, the disciples of Jesus viewed the promised kingdom as a political power and they were looking forward to seizing that power when they overthrew Rome and once again became sovereign with Jesus as their king. Therefore, in their minds, they wouldn't think that Jesus would be interested in the children that people were bringing to Him. But, that wasn't the idea of Jesus' kingdom and their response actually angered Him. He didn't rebuke the children or their parents. Rather He rebuked His disciples.

Matthew 19:14 “But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

What did He mean? How are we to be like children in order to enter the church and follow after Christ? In what way, as Isaiah says, does a child lead us in the kingdom in paths of righteousness? Well, in many ways, a child is the perfect picture of the innocent life and pure heart that we must possess if we have any hope of following Jesus and ultimately entering heaven.

First, I would suggest that a little child is a great example of humility. We need that example because we sure struggle with pride, don't we? That's the problem with the human condition today; pride is the underlying force behind all the sins in our world.

Matthew 18:4 “Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

A child by his very nature is a humble being. A child is not big, strong, or powerful. A child does not exert authority. By essence of what he is, a child is humble compared to one who is grown. Jesus says that we must have the humility that is represented by a small child if we would be citizens of His kingdom. That, of course, went against the idea and the mindset of those at that time who were seeking the wrong kind of kingdom.

Not only in his very being, but in his spirit and attitude, a child is typically loving. A child gets delight out of pleasing others. A child is also teachable or generally correctable. That can't be said for a lot of people today because we grow up to possess pride. The great “Sermon on the Mount” begins with humility.

Matthew 5:3 records the beginning of the Lord's sermon as He said, “**Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**” The poverty that Jesus is talking about is not a poverty of material

things or riches; it has nothing to do with how much money one has. Rather those who are *poor in spirit*. That is, *lowly. Humble. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven*, the Bible says.

To put it another way, a man can't worship and exalt God until he stops worshipping and exalting himself. Humanism is the great antithetical force against godliness. Jesus said the first requirement for any candidate for discipleship is the denial of self (**Luke 9:23**). The very nature of Christianity demands such self-abasement. The very example that Jesus set for us when He became a man is one of humility.

James 4:6 “...Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”

You may recall that Solomon once made a list of six things which God hates; seven things, he says, are *abominations* or *detestable* in the sight of God. The first thing on that list is *a proud look* (**Proverbs 6:17**). God absolutely hates pride. The scripture says that He resists a proud look. Solomon's pearls of wisdom known as **The Proverbs** renounce the pride of man over and over again.

Proverbs 26:12 “Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him.”

Proverb 16:18 “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.”

Proverbs 29:23 “A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.”

On and on we could go. God detests pride. Jesus said we would never enter His kingdom as long as we allow the love and exaltation of self to rule our hearts. You see, pride is what keeps people from accepting the teachings of the Bible. Some folks just cannot admit that they're wrong. They will stubbornly persist in error because they can't bring themselves to admit that what they believed and what they've done in the past is wrong and sinful.

Isaiah 66: 1-2 “Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.”

That's the kind of person who finds favor in the eyes of the Lord. That's the kind of person who seeks and finds the kingdom. The man or woman who can first admit a mistake and confess it as sinfulness, who respects the word of God enough to crucify their old willful pride and simply accept and follow the Bible's teachings.

It was pride that caused Adam to blame Eve in the garden for their sin. It was pride that drove Cain to kill his brother Abel out of jealousy after God rejected his sacrifice. It was pride that caused Saul the king of Israel to disobey God's orders when God told him to utterly destroy the Amalekites. It was pride that caused him to blame the people under his leadership for his own sin. It was pride that caused David to cover his sin by murdering Uriah. It was pride that caused Rehoboam to divide the kingdom of Israel. It was pride that later caused Peter to deny Jesus and Judas to betray Him. It was pride that led the Jews to call for Jesus to be crucified. It was pride that led Demas to forsake the Lord for the world.

You see, pride is the greatest vice entertained within the soul of man, and God detests it and demands that it be cast out before He can dwell in our hearts. Do pride and self-will keep you from accepting the truth? Do you have a problem admitting that you're wrong and need to change? Are you able to admit that maybe you've been misled and willing to embrace what is right, even though it goes against what you've always believed or what a loved one believed and practiced?

Many to whom Jesus preached had to have enough humility to do just that if they would inherit His kingdom. But instead, they let their pride lead them to reject and ultimately crucify Jesus. Their pride caused them to be blind to who Jesus was, why He came, the kind of king that He was, and the kind of kingdom He came to establish. Therefore, they missed it. If you want to have the attitude of a kingdom-seeker, look to a little child for what they teach us about humility. We must *become as a child* in humility.

Second, a little child sets a great example in sincerity. That is another quality that we must possess to seek the kingdom. In fact, I don't know where you'd find a better example of what sincerity and genuineness mean than by looking at your own child. We who are older have a tendency to be more concerned with appearances, even to the point of being hypocritical. You generally have to make your children go to the bathroom and comb their hair, brush their teeth, and straighten their clothes before you go out in public. Most of us who are grown at least spend a few moments in front of the mirror, and that's a commendable thing within reason, of course—but sometimes we go a little overboard with it. We want to put on appearances. Children aren't necessarily that way.

What I'm saying is, with a child, what you see is what you get. In fact, some children are so frank and truthful that they often embarrass us who are parents. Every parent has had that kind of experience. A child is what he/she is and says what's on his/her mind—sometimes to our chagrin. There is no pretense with a child. Unfortunately, we learn that trait as we get older.

Few things are more genuine and sincere than a child and his/her relationship to others, especially God. They may not be the most eloquent, but you'll never hear a more worthy and heartfelt prayer than that which falls from the lips of a small child. They pray for everything that you or I might see as inconsequential. One might even say that some of those things are not worthy to be brought to the attention of God, but those are big things in their world and they tend to express the genuine contents of their hearts. In that, they teach us a great deal about being genuine and sincere before God and others.

The word *sincere* comes from two Latin words that mean *without wax*. We generally use the word to talk about somebody's character and disposition, but originally it had a broader meaning. Woodworkers and other skilled craftsmen used the term to refer to their craft. If a carpenter used wax or something like it to cover up flaws in the wood, the wood could not be referred to as sincere. If a sculptor used an agent to hide or repair a flaw in his work, his work of art could not be called sincere. Even today, the word essentially means the same thing in a moral sense. It refers to something that is *without wax*, in which there is no cover-up. Nothing is concealed or made to look differently than what it really is. That's the way it is with a child. But how untrue with so many of us. Most adults are surrounded by a cloud of pretense, whether we admit it or not. We're very careful to project an image of ourselves that sometimes is not reality.

God expects us to be sincere in what we do and say. For example, our love for the Lord and for one another is to be *without dissimulation* (**Romans 12:9**). That word *dissimulation* (KJV) means *hypocrisy*. Love without hypocrisy. We're not just to say that we love one another or pretend that we love one another; we're really to love one another. We're to prove our love by our words and our actions. On another occasion, Joshua told the fickle children of Israel to choose once and for all whom they would serve: either the idol gods of their past or the God Jehovah. He told them to serve the Lord in sincerity and truth (**Joshua 24:14**). In other words, stop paying lip service to God and give Him your

hearts. The Pharisees in the religious class of Jesus' day were insincere and full of hypocrisy and outward show. Their lives were full of sin and corruption.

Matthew 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

He's not talking about moral purity there, but purity of heart, sincerity, genuineness. Only a person with a heart that wants God and His truth above everything else is eligible for the kingdom of heaven; it's as simple as that. Our children lead us into the kingdom of heaven by their example of sincerity.

Third, a little child can lead us in the paths of forgiveness.

I Corinthians 14:20 "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children..."

That's Paul's way of telling us that we need to imitate the spirit of a small child in dealing with each other. We need to mature and grow up in our understanding, knowledge and wisdom when it comes to the word of God. Yet in our spirit, we need to remain children. We need to imitate the heart of a child in our relationships to one another. That doesn't mean that we imitate every aspect of a child's behavior. We know that children are often childish and they can get into petty squabbles. We recently talked about the fact that that is a mark of spiritual immaturity.

But have you ever noticed how forgiving and longsuffering a child is? Over the long term, children are very longsuffering. Kids don't normally hold grudges. If they do, it usually doesn't last very long. Kids can be playing and get into a fight. They may argue and call one another all kinds of names, they may wrestle one another, stomp away and stop speaking to each other. But it usually doesn't take more than a few minutes or hours at the most for it to all blow over and things are back like they used to be. There are times when we as parents have to discipline our children, and they may resent the spanking or the scolding they get, or whatever punishment we mete out, but it doesn't take long until it's over and they're all smiles again. In some ways, discipline brings relief to a tense situation once the moment of discipline passes.

Contrast that with the average person in the church today. I've seen it over and over again; I've dealt with it firsthand. Let an older person be rebuked for some wrongdoing, let someone be wronged in some way, and they will hold a grudge sometimes for years. They can even harbor resentment and malice for the rest of their lives. That's where a child sets a wonderful and much needed example. Jesus not only forgave, but He taught us to forgive also, even going so far as to say this:

Matthew 6:15 "But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

That's very serious. If we fail to forgive others, we can forget about being forgiven by the Lord. If you want to see what kind of heart God wants us to have before others, watch how children forgive. Lastly, a child leads the righteous in a confiding trust or faith. A child can teach us some important lessons in faith. Our children don't tend to worry much. Why? because they leave the things that bring worry to us, their parents. Children don't typically worry about where their next meal is coming from, whether there'll be money to pay the electric bill or house payment, whether they'll have sufficient clothes to wear or a warm place to sleep. They trust that mom and dad will provide those things. Jesus told His disciples to take note of the lilies of the field and how God takes care of them. He then

reminded them how much MORE God cared for them. That's the kind of faith we need to have in our heavenly Father.

A child usually thinks his/her daddy can do anything. Mother can heal all of their hurts, so they go running to her arms immediately when they fall and scrape the knee or get into trouble. God wants to be that kind of parent to US.

Hebrews 4:16 "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Do you trust God in that way? Do you trust God to yield your life and your all to Him? The invitation of Jesus remains the same today: *Let the children come to Me, for of such is the kingdom of God.*

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