Childlike Faith

Luke 18:15-27; Mark 10:16
SS Lesson for 05/22/2016

Devotional Scripture: Ps 127:3-5

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Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary
Commentary from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

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From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

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- God can do all things because nothing is too hard for Him (Jer 32:17)
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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reviews the essence of Childlike Faith. The study’s aim is to realize we must have childlike faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The study's application is to increase in childlike faith in all areas of our personal life and struggles.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Luke 18:17

Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Luke placed this short section here to follow up on the message of the previous parable. Jesus had taught that it was necessary to be humble before God. In these verses He compared that humility to childlikeness:

Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. In these words Jesus was stating that a person must come to Him in humility in order to enter the kingdom. Children come with expectation and excitement. They come realizing that they are not sufficient in themselves. They depend totally on others. If these same attitudes are not present in adults, they can never enter into the kingdom. A certain ruler (who was very wealthy, v. 23) came to Jesus to talk about how to inherit eternal life. This man was perhaps a member of the Sanhedrin or perhaps an official in a local synagogue. “To inherit eternal life” meant to enter the kingdom of God (cf. John 3:3-5).

The man wanted to know what actions (what must I do) would make him right with God. The man had called Jesus Good Teacher. Jesus responded that God alone is good, that is, only God is truly righteous. Apparently the man thought Jesus had gained a measure of status with God by His good works. Jesus was implying that if He were truly good, then it would be because He is God. This, then, is another of Jesus’ claims of deity. Jesus responded to the man’s question by instructing him to keep the seventh, sixth, eighth, ninth, and fifth commandments (Ex. 20:12-16), each of which pertain to man’s relationship to man. (The first four of the Ten Commandments pertain to man’s relationship with God.) The ruler’s reply that he had kept all these since childhood was probably correct. He may have been a model citizen. Jesus then told the man one other thing he needed to do: he needed to follow Jesus, and in order to do that he had to give the money from his possessions to the poor. This action would touch on the 10th commandment against coveting, which included the idea of greed and holding onto things which are one’s own as well as wanting things that belong to others. It was at this point that the man faltered. Jesus’ reasoning was clear: (a) one must keep the Law perfectly in order to inherit eternal life (cf. James 2:10). (b) Only God was good—truly righteous. (c) Therefore nobody can obtain eternal life by following the Law (cf. Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:21; 3:21). The only course of action left to an individual is to follow Jesus in order to obtain eternal life. The ruler was not prepared to take that step (but contrast Zacchaeus, 19:8). The ruler was more attached to his wealth than to the idea of obtaining “eternal life” which he had so nobly asked about at the beginning of his conversation with the Lord. Jesus responded that riches are a hindrance to one’s obtaining eternal life. Riches often cloud a person’s thinking about what is truly important in life. Jesus used a common hyperbole of something that is impossible—a camel going through the eye of a needle (belonēs, a sewing needle, not a small door in a city gate). Likewise it is most difficult (but not impossible; cf. Zacchaeus, 19:1-10) for a rich person to be saved. The disciples were dumb-founded. They had the mistaken impression, like the Pharisees, that wealth was a sign of God’s blessing. If a person such as the ruler could not be saved, Who then can be saved? Jesus, by His reply, did not rule out all wealthy people from salvation. He noted that God can do the impossible. In response to the disciples’ sacrifice in following Him, expressed by Peter, Jesus affirmed that they would be amply rewarded. Though they had left their families (cf. 14:26-27), their reward would consist of many times as much in this age and also eternal life. Jesus was obviously referring to the community of believers who would share with the disciples during their ministries. Those believers became a closely knit family, all sharing together, so that none had any need (Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37).
Commentary from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

I enjoy watching my three beautiful nieces. When we go to the park, I chuckle while I observe them racing toward the playground with wild abandon. Watching them, there is a part of me that mourns each time they develop a bit more. Although I am glad that they are becoming more mature, I feel sad when a little more innocence is lost. There is something bittersweet in the nature of witnessing the children in your life grow older and change before your eyes. When you consider the word "childlike," which other words come to mind? For me, the other words include: "innocent," "trusting," "open," "sincere," "loving," and "honest." That is what the word "childlike" conveys to me—a sense of purity and simplicity. We do not stay that way for long. As we grow, we are altered. We find ourselves losing that innocence and becoming more sophisticated. We catch ourselves withdrawing due to hurts inflicted upon us. We are no longer as trusting, no longer as receptive to people or circumstances. We develop a hard shell. This is what Jesus was addressing in this week's passage. When the disciples pushed the children away, they felt that those little ones were bothering the Saviour. They thought that He had more important things to do than mess around with the neighborhood kids. After all, He had a serious mission to accomplish. Christ took a very different attitude toward children, and He set the Twelve straight. In correcting them, He made them realize something very important. When we approach God, He wants us to come like children. He expects us to trust Him and to depend on Him for what we need. He asks us to be honest and open to wherever He may lead us. We have to check our game playing at the door. Attempting to approach Him with pretensions or agendas will result only in useless struggle. This is not to say that we should be childish. There is a distinct difference between being childlike and being childish. A childish person is foolish, silly, self-indulgent, and immature. Paul reminds us that we are not to behave foolishly (Eph. 5:17). In fact, we are repeatedly admonished to grow and become mature in our faith (Jas. 1:4). We should do this so that we are not constantly wavering in our walk (Eph. 4:14-15). We need to think maturely (1 Cor. 14:20). When we are thinking as mature believers, we set aside foolish things (1 Cor. 13:11) and strive to grow (2 Pet. 3:17-18). This means that we should be wary of the world and its ways. Our Lord cautioned us to be "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16). What does this mean? It means that we should stop and consider our faith. Do we approach God the way a child would—full of trust in His will and reliance on His provision? Or do we find ourselves attempting to barter or play games with Him? How sincere and loving are we toward Him? Do we love Him as long as things go the way we want and then ignore Him when we do not get what we expected? Remember that our attitudes contribute to the depth of our faith. Are you childlike or childish?

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The headline of August 14, 2013, read “Average cost to raise a kid: $241,080.” That figure summarized the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s report that estimated the 18-year cost of raising a child born in the U.S. in that year; another projection has costs in Canada to be similar. The USDA’s estimate includes just about every expense one can think of except for college. Adjusted regionally, the costs in some parts of the U.S. can reach nearly $450,000, while dipping to less than $150,000 in other parts. Even assuming the lower figure, a family with three children can find itself being pushed toward half a million dollars in child-rearing expenditures, before even considering the cost of college! As a minister, I have experienced many occasions when a young couple told me they were expecting a baby. I first say, “Congratulations!” Later, however, I will tell them, “Your life has changed forever,” and I’m not speaking just about the financial aspect. The differences between a family with children and a family without children are significant. Parents agree that children can bring some of the greatest joy available on this earth; at other times, they can bring some of the deepest heartaches. Rearing a child is not a part-time commitment. It is a serious, long-term responsibility. These and other factors are behind a growing movement among women to choose voluntarily not to have children. Critics see the so-called child freedom movement as driven by selfishness. Yet there are serious arguments that childless adults are able to contribute more to society because of their lack of family obligations. The idea of remaining voluntarily childless within marriage would have seemed strange to the people whom Jesus walked among in the first century AD. To them, having children was not only the norm but also required (Genesis 1:27, 28). Children were therefore present and prevalent in all aspects of daily life in the Israel of Jesus’ day. He drew on this fact to illustrate what it means to be a child of God in the best possible way.
Children were valued differently among Jews and Gentiles in the ancient world. Many Gentile households saw children as a necessary nuisance. This is illustrated by the idea that slaves and children had the same status in a Gentile household (compare Galatians 4:1). This is not because slaves were valued, but because children were not. The main value of a child in the Greco-Roman world was that he or she would eventually grow up and become a productive adult. In that light, children could be treated like assets that would mature at a later date. This was the reason for educating and privileging them in special ways. In particular, male children were valued for their potential to provide for parents in their old age. These cultural assumptions regarding children were “a given” for many of the earliest readers of the Gospel of Luke, which the author seems to have directed toward Christians who came from a Gentile background. Indeed, that probably was Luke’s own status. The Jewish people, on the other hand, viewed children differently. Children were seen as gifts from God to be cared for and nurtured. The future of the nation and the retention of its heritage depended on children. They were to be brought up to appreciate their responsibilities and to be faithful to the covenant they had been given. Children were to be taught Scripture and have its precepts embedded deeply in their hearts (Deuteronomy 6:7; compare 2 Timothy 3:14, 15). Large families were prized (see Psalm 127:3-5), and childless women were disappointed (see Luke 1:24, 25). Children were not coddled in extreme ways in Jewish households, however. Early on, they were given work tasks around the home and in a family’s business. We assume that Jesus learned the trade of his earthly father’s carpentry business from a very early age, by both observing and doing (Mark 6:3). Although Jesus himself was unmarried and without children, the fact that he was the Son of God meant that his teaching on the subject of children was and is authoritative.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Simplicity of Faith (Luke 18:15-17; Mark 10:16)

15 Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.
16 But Jesus called them to Him and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.
17 Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."
Mark 10:16 And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them.

Simplicity through seeking to experience (15)

Experience God personally, not just learning through the Scriptures (John 5:38-40)
38 nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. 39 You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

Experience God through trials (Job 42:3-6)
3 [You asked,] 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. 4 ["You said,] 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' 5 My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. 6 Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Experience God through healing (Matt 9:1-2)
1 Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. 2 Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."
Experience God through obedience (Jer 35:13)

13 "This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Go and tell the men of Judah and the people of Jerusalem, 'Will you not learn a lesson and obey my words?' declares the Lord.

Simplicity that is often misunderstood (16)

Misunderstanding through using worldly thinking (1 Cor 2:14)

14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Misunderstanding through using human ideas (Acts 17:16-21)

16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. 18 A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. 19 Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? 20 You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." 21 (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

Misunderstanding through using human wisdom (1 Cor 1:16-21)

16 (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel — not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. 18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

Misunderstanding through the mind being veiled by Satan (2 Cor 4:3-4)

3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Simplicity through innocence (17)

Innocent humility (Matt 18:2-4)

2 He called a little child and had him stand among them. 3 And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Innocent soul (Ps 131:2)

2 But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

Innocent desires (1 Peter 1:14)

14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.
Innocent wisdom (1 Cor 3:18)

18 Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise.

Simplicity that is rewarded by blessings (10:16)

Blessings of good names and productivity (Gen 48:14-17)

14 But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn. 15 Then he blessed Joseph and said, "May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, 16 the Angel who has delivered me from all harm — may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth."

Blessings of being close to God's heart (Isa 40:11)

11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

Blessings of being welcomed by man and God (Mark 9:36-38)

36 He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."


18 Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"
19 So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.
20 You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.' "
21 And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth."
22 So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."
23 But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.
24 And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!
25 For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Challenges to be good (18-19)

Doing good by showing integrity (Titus 2:7)

7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness

Doing good by being productive in our daily lives (Titus 3:14)

14 Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.

Doing good by encouraging others to do good (Heb 10:24)

24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Doing good by sharing with others (Heb 13:16)

16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.
Challenges to obey commandment (20-21)

*Obey by being a slave to righteousness (Rom 6:15-18)*

15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

*Obey by living a life that proves obedience (2 Cor 9:13)*

13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

*Obey by living in God (1 John 3:24)*

24 Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

*Obey by being ready to do whatever is good (Titus 3:1)*

3 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good.

Challenges to give up treasures (22-25)

*Give up treasures that cause us to think we don't need God (Luke 12:18-21)*

18 "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."' 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' 21 "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

*Give up treasures that are the wrong type (Matt 6:19-20)*

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

*Give up treasures that cause us to lose integrity (James 5:1-6)*

5 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. 2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. 4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. 5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.

*Give up treasures that causes us to glory in ourselves (Dan 4:28-33)*

28 All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. 29 Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, 30 he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" 31 The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. 32 You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is
sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes." 33 Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.


26 And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?"
27 But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

**Reward of salvation (26)**

*A salvation that God appointed through Jesus (1 Thess 5:9)*

9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

*A salvation Jesus will bring with Him at His second coming (Heb 9:28)*

28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

*A salvation through justification by Jesus' blood (Rom 5:9)*

9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

*A salvation that is gained through belief in Jesus (John 6:40)*

40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

**Rewards from God who can do all things (27)**

*God can do all things because His plans cannot be stopped (Job 42:2)*

2 "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted.

*God can do all things because nothing is too hard for Him (Jer 32:17)*

17 "Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.

*God can do all things because nothing is impossible for God (Luke 1:37)*

37 For nothing is impossible with God."

*God can do all things because no one can stop Him doing as He pleases (Dan 4:35)*

35 All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

**Conclusion and Other Thoughts**

*Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh*

In both Matthew and Mark’s accounts, the immediately preceding context is that of our Lord’s teaching on divorce. Can it be that when Jesus held to a very high view of the sanctity of marriage, the people concluded that He also highly esteemed the family, and that they were thus encouraged by His words to bring their children to Him to be blessed?
Whatever the reason, a number of people brought their young babies to Jesus to be blessed. Unlike the other two gospel writers, Luke emphasized the fact that these children which were brought to Jesus were infants—babes. The parallel accounts of Matthew (19:13-15) and Mark (10:13-16) make it clear that these babes were being brought to Jesus to bless by placing His hands on them (Mark 10:16) and praying for them (Matthew 19:13). We are told that Jewish children were brought to the rabbi for a blessing on their first birthday.

There are several questions which arise from these three short verses, questions which are essential to understanding this incident, its meaning, and its application:

1. Why did Jesus react so strongly to their efforts to hinder the children from being brought to Him?
2. Why did the disciples seek to prevent the parents from bringing their children to Jesus?
3. What is the specific characteristic of child-likeness to which our Lord is referring, which is necessary for anyone to enter into the kingdom?

Let us seek to find the answers to these questions, so that we can ponder the meaning of this event.

First, why would Jesus react so strongly to the actions of His disciples? From our text in Luke, the distress of our Lord is not directly referred to, but in Mark’s account we read that Jesus was “indignant” because of the actions of His disciples. Jesus really was greatly distressed by His disciples’ actions.

The answer to the first question, I believe, is both simple and clearly stated in the text: the gospel itself is at issue. Jesus’ very emphatic words end this paragraph:

“Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all” (Luke 18:17).

The way in which children were freely accepted by our Lord was similar to the way in which all men must enter into the kingdom of God. For the disciples to hinder children’s access to Him was therefore a distortion of the gospel itself.

There is a very forceful parallel to our Lord’s strong reaction in the response of the apostle Paul to Peter’s actions with regard to his withdrawal from eating with Gentiles, after the arrival of a Jewish delegation. The account is recorded in the book of Galatians, chapter 2. Peter had gladly eaten with Gentile Christians until a group of legalistic Jews arrived. At this time, Peter withdrew from eating with the Gentiles and ate with the Jews. Paul’s reaction was a strong one. He publicly called Peter to task for his hypocrisy.

Paul went on to explain the seriousness of Peter’s actions, actions which on the surface may have seemed to be only a misdemeanor, a social blunder. Peter’s actions were, however, a denial and distortion of the gospel, for his separation from the Gentiles gave credence to the Jewish contention that Jewish Christians were superior to Gentile believers. The Jews wanted to maintain a superior posture. They wanted the Jews to convert to Christianity by converting to Judaism as well. Paul reminded Peter and the rest that the Law made all men equals, for all men were equally condemned, without distinction, by the Law. And it was not by law-keeping, but by faith in Jesus Christ that all men were saved. Thus, there is no distinction between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. The church is a new body, which tolerates no distinctions other than that between a believer and an unbeliever. There is one new body, one new man, made up of all saints. When this truth is compromised, the gospel is corrupted. Thus, Paul reacts strongly. This is precisely the same situation with our Lord’s response to the actions of the disciples. A rebuke was required because a clear demonstration of the gospel was being threatened.

The second question has to do with the reason why the disciples sought to hinder the children from being brought to Jesus in the first place. It is my opinion that the disciples resisted the children for the very reason(s) the Lord welcomed them. It is not difficult to imagine how things may have gotten to this point. The disciples had probably taken on themselves the self-appointed task of “filtering” those who were allowed to “get through” to Jesus. There were just too many people, they could have reasoned, for all to be allowed to approach Him. The disciples may have encircled our Lord, something like the President of the United States’ secret service people. When a powerful or influential person sought access to Jesus, I think that the disciples facilitated his approach, reasoning that this man could do much for their cause. When someone who was very sick approached Jesus, the disciples might have allowed them to get through because the miracle which Jesus performed would be good publicity. (If all this seems too crass, too calculating, too unspiritual, take a second look at the disciples’ discussions and disputes among themselves, as to who would be the greatest, and who would sit closest to our Lord, with the greatest power.)
When babies were brought to Jesus, to be blessed, it seemed like an unnecessary and an unprofitable bother to the Master, and so the disciples took it upon themselves to send the parents and children away, giving them the impression that they should not “bother” Jesus in this way. They hindered the children from coming to Jesus because they were not significant enough, because they had nothing to offer. They were “takers,” but not “givers.” They were a liability, not an asset, to the cause of the kingdom, or so the disciples thought.

Jesus set the disciples straight. The children were to be allowed to come to Him for a blessing. But why? Why were they encouraged to come? And more importantly to our study, in what way must everyone come into the kingdom as these children came to Jesus? In what way(s) must everyone who is saved receive the kingdom of God? The answer to this question, my friend, is crucial. It is crucial to all who would understand our text, for it is the key to the entire passage. And it is crucial to all who would enter into the kingdom of God, for this childlike quality is required of all who would enter.

The third question is the most important one: What is it that characterizes a child, which must characterize the way we receive the kingdom of God? There are two answers which are most frequently proposed, both of which, in my opinion, fall short of reality, and of biblical teaching. The first child-like characteristic is that of humility. I must begin with the biblical assertion that children, like their parents, are sinners, and they are born this way (Psalm 51:5; Ephesians 2:1-3; Romans 3:9-18). Proverbs speaks often of the foolish, wayward way of the child, which necessitates correction and warning (Proverbs 22:15; 23:13-14). A child is not naturally humble. In fact, children, from the very beginning they are very demanding, they expect our attention, now!, and if we fail to give it to them, they let us know. Children often butt into conversations, because they fail to have a sense of humility.

The second “virtue” of a child, according to many, is that of faith. We are told that children are naturally trusting, by nature. I believe that the book of Proverbs tells us that children are naturally gullible, and this is not the same as faith. Faith trusts in the right people; gullibility trusts in the wrong people. This is why Proverbs speaks so much about the kind of people to associate with, and those with whom we should not associate. It tells us of those people who would lead us astray, whom we must avoid. Children do not possess faith in a virtuous way, in my opinion.

What, then, is it about children that we must imitate? Our text provides us with several important clues. First, our text informs us that the children who come to Jesus are very young children. Luke tells us, in fact, that they are babies. Babies do not trust, nor do they practice humility. Babies are carried to Jesus. They make no conscious decisions. They speak no words. They understand no words. The next clue comes from the next paragraph: the rich young ruler speaks of his “works” from the point of his childhood onward. It is just as though Luke has put these two paragraphs side-by-side in order to show us something very important by contrast. The rich young ruler wishes to talk about that which he has done, since childhood, in order to earn God’s favor. Jesus takes children in arms, and tells everyone that they must enter the kingdom of God like these children come to Him.

Let me approach this matter from an Old Testament mindset. There were essentially two covenants which governed God’s dealings with men. The first covenant was the Abrahamic Covenant. This covenant contained God’s promise to bless men of all nations through Abraham and his seed, based solely upon His goodness and character and faithfulness. The sign of this covenant was circumcisions, which was performed on boy babies on their 8th day of life. The second covenant was the Mosaic Covenant, in which God promised to bless Israelites, on the basis of their obedience to His law. The Mosaic Covenant, as I understand it, was not binding upon a Hebrew youth until he was 13 years old (the Bar Mitzvah of today is the entrance into this relationship, making the child a “son of the law”). The sign of the Mosaic Covenant was the keeping of the Sabbath.

The Pharisees constantly harassed Jesus about His breaking of the Sabbath. They, along with virtually all of Israel, viewed the blessings of God as coming through the keeping of the law and thus through the Mosaic Covenant. The blessings of salvation, which God promised, were to come through the Abrahamic Covenant, and ultimately through what the Old Testament prophets spoke of as a “new covenant” (cf. Jeremiah 31:31). I believe that Jesus was using the coming of the children to Him to be blessed as an illustration of the way in which all men must come to Him for a blessing. That is, if we would come to Jesus for a blessing, we must not come in our own strength (the babes were carried), we must not come through our own understanding, our own wisdom, our own good works. We can only come to Christ in our helpless state, looking to Him and to His grace alone. We must come out of our weakness and helpless state, not out of our own righteousness. Here is the difference between all of those who came to Jesus and were “saved” and those who were “healthy” and thus never were saved, because they were too healthy, too good, too pious to need grace. The thing which commends
children to Christ is their helplessness, not their goodness. And this is precisely what must characterize every person who comes into the kingdom—they come as those who are helpless and undeserving, entering into His blessings because of God’s goodness and grace, not due to their own merits. Here is the child-like quality which must characterize all who would enter into His kingdom.

(Adapted from URL:https://bible.org/seriespage/blessed-babes-and-miserable-millionaire-luke-1815-30)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentator

One of the first songs I learned in church told me that “Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world.” This was often paired with another favorite song that proclaimed “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” My simple thinking of those formative years connected all this. I figured that if Jesus loves all the children of the world, then I was one of them. And when I was told to sing that Jesus loves me, I couldn’t help but love him back. What a great truth to teach our children: Jesus loves you! The Son of God loves you! Today’s lesson reveals that Jesus was disturbed when his disciples tried to keep children away from him. He wanted to be with the children, to hold them, to bless them. This truth has not grown old for me; I have never forgotten it. The Jesus who held and blessed the children so many centuries ago is the risen Christ who held me spiritually throughout my childhood. The love that Jesus exhibited for children is one of the things that endears the human Jesus to us so much. He did not see them as a bother or a nuisance; he saw them as a treasure. The ministries in some churches are tilted overly toward adults because, after all, little children cannot give much in the way of offerings or serve on committees. But those who teach and minister to children are the guardians of one of the church’s greatest treasures. The people of Israel knew they needed to train their children so they could be future leaders. So also Christians need to care for the souls of their children so that the work of the church will continue into the next generation without faltering. Neglecting or shortchanging ministry to children may seem prudent in the short term, but in the long run it is the most unwise plan that any church can possibly follow! We have children in our churches who are the future of the church, but too often we let them slip away. They are not nurtured in ways that result in a smooth transition from the childlike faith of “Jesus loves the little children” to “Jesus loves me forever.” When picking up their children from Sunday school, the parents’ first question should not be “Did you have fun today?” but rather “What did you learn about God today?” May we never neglect the spiritual development of our children!

In addition to the tender picture of Jesus holding, loving, and blessing children, our lesson has a second focus: we are reminded that we must be like children to be proper members of the kingdom of God. God wants our trust. God wants us to be humble. God wants a childlike faith. On some of my darkest days as an adult, I have sung those songs “Jesus loves the little children” and “Jesus loves me, this I know” from my childhood to remind myself that I am still loved by the Savior of the world. I am still a child in his kingdom. If children ruled the world, the result would be chaos. If children led the church, things would be a mess. But if the world and the church were led by responsible, spiritually mature adults who had childlike faith and humble spirits, what a difference we would see! What will you do in the week ahead to make that difference a reality?

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. We need to grow in wisdom and knowledge but remain childlike in our trust (Luke 18:15-17)
2. Our idea of “good” falls woefully short of God’s (vss. 18-19)
3. Keeping the commandments is good but will never save us; we must give our lives to Jesus (vss. 20-22)
4. If we are holding on to the things of this world, following Jesus will seem an impossible challenge (vss. 23-24)
5. God has brought many camels through the needle’s eye of eternal life (vss. 25-27)