

Lesson 42

Children

Group Icebreaker:

How old were you when your relationship with Jesus was formed?

Introduction:

A short while after Jesus told the Parable of the Unrighteous Judge, people began bringing their children to Him that He might touch them and pray a blessing upon them. When the disciples saw this they rebuked the people. However, Jesus was indignant with the disciples and replied, *“Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them: for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”* This reply would eventually become one of the great proof texts for infant baptism and resulting salvation.

Although infant baptism and salvation are not the topics under discussion in this lesson it might be well that you have some basic information on the subject. Within Christianity there are **two main** streams of thought concerning who may receive water baptism. Fundamentalist groups, headed by the Baptists, hold that individuals must have a “born again” experience before being baptized. They call their form of baptism, “believer’s baptism”.

The “born again” experience is the result of an individual coming to **faith (believing)** in Christ after hearing the gospel preached. The basis they use for entering into the covenant is an individual’s faith in Jesus. Therefore infants and young children (normally under the age of seven) cannot enter into the covenant because they still lack understanding of the concept of faith.

Fundamentalists do not believe that God will condemn children to eternal damnation before they reach the age of accountability, which many think is around the age of twelve or thirteen. And most of these groups dedicate their children to God at a young age. The child’s parents usually do this by stating that they will raise their child in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

Included, as part of one’s salvation experience a **public profession** of one’s faith in Christ is required. *That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.* (Romans 10:9-10) This is done either before or in conjunction with the individual’s baptism. **Baptism** (see page 136 for “A Picture of Baptism”), which was ordained by Christ, is a prerequisite to joining the church.

When Fundamentalists read Jesus’ reply, *“Permit the **children** to come to Me; do not hinder them: for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these”* they understand it to mean something like this: Children, those who by their own power and who are capable of understanding, may come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ and no one should prevent them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to those who exhibit child-like faith. However, when Jesus’ reply is read to them from Luke’s text, they usually don’t want to deal with it because the text reads, *“Permit the **infants**¹ to come to Me; do not hinder them: for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these”*

¹ The Greek word is *brephos* . . . for example babies.

This brings us to the rest of Christianity, those who believe in an infant baptism. I will refer to this group as Historic Christianity, which is headed by the Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox and Lutherans. Historic Christianity also recognizes the same three elements of a person's salvation experience that the Fundamentalists do: **Faith, public profession and baptism.**

Baptism is viewed as the prerequisite to joining the church and it provides salvation for the individual.² Historic Christianity sights the two following Scriptures:

He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved. (Mark 16:16) Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 3:21)

Historic Christianity's basis for infant baptism and entering into the covenant is the Old Testament Mosaic Covenant model. It views baptism as corresponding to circumcision:

*And in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the **circumcision of Christ**; having **been buried with Him in baptism**, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. (Colossians 2:11-12)*

Children including infants who are baptized have entered the covenant with Christ thus preventing them from being condemned to eternal damnation. Jewish boys were circumcised the eighth day, thereby entering into the Mosaic Covenant and becoming part of God's people. All those who enter the church through baptism as children, are required to take catechism or confirmation classes so they can understand the **faith** they have entered into. When they attain the age of accountability, around the age of twelve or thirteen, they make a **public profession** of their faith at their Confirmation. This would correspond to a Jewish boy studying Torah until he reached the age of twelve or thirteen when he became bar mitzvah (son of the commandment), his public profession of faith. Adults, whether in Judaism or Historic Christianity, had to believe and make a public profession of their faith before being circumcised or baptized.

That the baptism of infants was a practice of the early church cannot be denied. Scripture references that individuals and their **entire households** were baptized. Origen, wrote in the third century that "according to the usage of the Church, baptism is given even to infants" (*Homilies on Leviticus*, 8:3:11 [A.D. 244]). The Council of Carthage, in 253, condemned the opinion that baptism should be withheld from infants until the eighth day after birth. Later, Augustine taught, "The custom of Mother Church in baptizing infants is certainly not to be scorned . . . nor is it to be believed that its tradition is anything except apostolic" (*Literal Interpretation of Genesis* 10:23:39 [A.D. 408]).

² "Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ²This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." ³Jesus answered him, "**Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.**" ⁴Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" ⁵Jesus answered, "**Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God . . .**" ¹²**If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"** (John 3:1-15 – You Must Be Born Again) As the Scriptures say, "it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual," (1 Corinthians 15:46), and it is therefore in this context that we can believe an earthly thing so that we can understand and believe what Jesus is teaching here, every "baby" that is born, must first break the "water" before the baby can be born, and therefore is essential to be born, or as Jesus teaches it, "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

Reading the Scripture:

Jesus Blesses the Children Matthew 19:13-15, Mark 10:13-16, Luke 18:15-17 Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”

And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all." And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands upon them. And after laying His hands on them, He departed from there.

The Commands:

- ❖ Permit the infants to come to me.
- ❖ Do not hinder them.

The Lesson:

We may never know the real reason that people brought their children to Jesus or why the disciples rebuked them for it. But we can tell by His actions and verbal response that Jesus loved children and considered them valuable enough to warrant His time and attention. Perhaps He recalled what His mother had told Him about Simeon in the Temple. How he took Jesus, as a baby into his arms and pronounced a blessing over Him:

“Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, and the glory of Your people Israel.” (Luke 2:29-32)

From the Scriptures, we can observe firsthand the parent’s **determination** and **faith** in bringing their children to Jesus. So it seems that we who are parents of young children should seek to model their behavior since Jesus found it acceptable. And as the church, we should take Jesus’ attitude by not hindering any child from entering into a relationship with Him.

Group Discussion:

1. The “laying on of hands” always denotes a spiritual impartation of some form to the one on whom hands are laid. Name some things that are imparted through the laying on of hands.
 - Giving of the Holy Spirit
 - Giving of spiritual gifts
 - Healing
 - Baptism
 - Ordination of priests, ministers, elders, deacons and other officials.
 - Dedications
 - With spoken blessings

The Point of the Lesson:

Do not stop children from having a relationship to Jesus.