

Receiving The Kingdom Of God As A Little Child

That God Almighty in exercise of His infinite love for mankind has prepared an everlasting, righteous and universal government of perfect peace and happiness for His faithful worshippers is a revealed truth of the Holy Bible. However those to be approved to live in that Kingdom must be renewed in spirit so as to have the wholesome natural qualities of children.

This fact was aptly illustrated by Jesus Christ himself when during his earthly ministry children were brought to him for blessing. The action of the parents was no doubt informed by the fact that it was a custom of the Jews, which grew from the law of God, that each child should be taken to the priest for presentation to God after the mother's days of purification. (Leviticus 12:1-8) The disciples of Christ who thought this was an unnecessary distraction to the work of Christ, rebuked those bringing the children. But our Lord and Saviour overruled his disciples. Instead of the cold shoulder or even a shove Jesus Christ welcomed the children with open arms.

The account of the incident as recorded in Mark 10:13-16 states that Jesus said to his disciples, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." He added: "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein." Thereafter, Jesus Christ took the children "up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them"

Thus, by precept and example, our Lord Jesus Christ drove home the very important point that those who will be approved to enter God's Kingdom must have the character of children. From the account just cited, one could see that our Lord Jesus Christ taught that children are living pictures of the virtues Christians need to cultivate to be called his disciples.

It should be pointed out however, that, Christ's statement is not a ground or basis for infant baptism as baptism is a rite meant only for adults who alone can take the decision to accept the Christian faith. (Acts 8:26-39) The text does not mean that children automatically become inheritors of the Kingdom because of their age. It also does not suggest that we should engage in foolish adventures or be playful like children but that we should cultivate the plainness and lowliness so well expressed through the natural faculties of children.

Children are generally humble, obedient, forgiving, tolerant, trusting and inquisitive. They are neither proud nor malicious. Their humility makes them teachable and obedient. It is true they sometimes fight and quarrel over small possessions, but they easily forget about it and resume their play. Their anger, sadness, shame, disgust, guilt do not remain in them for long. Parents who because of their quarrel instruct their children not to play with each other have found to their chagrin that they were merely trying to hold the wind.

It is these qualities of humility, obedience, forgiveness, etc. that Jesus Christ wants his disciples to have if they deserve to be called his followers. David, a prophet and king in Israel had this understanding and thus declared: "LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child."- Psalm 131:1,2.

Humility

It is only those who humble themselves to serve God with sincerity of heart and who diligently obey His commandments that He will bless with everlasting life in perfect peace and happiness. One who is not humble is proud. That was why the Scriptures say that "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble". (James 4:6; Proverbs 3:34) The prophet David

states that “ though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off”(Psalm 138:6) Children readily carry out errands or chores adults will ordinarily shy away from. It is the humble ones who accept their faults, regret their wrongdoings and strive to forsake evil that God in exercise of His loving kindness forgives and sustains in His Kingdom. God Almighty declared in Isaiah 57:15 “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

By practical demonstration, Jesus Christ emphasized the importance of humility. After he had finished his supper, he laid aside his garment, and in the manner of a servant to whom belongs the office of washing the feet of guests, he proceeded to wash the feet of the apostles. Peter, out of respect for the master, did not consent to having his feet washed. He said “Thou shalt never wash my feet.” But Jesus answered him, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” Simon Peter then said to him, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.” After Jesus Christ had finished that assignment he told his disciples, “Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.” (John 13:3-15) Drawing from the example of Christ, we should not make much of condescending to do the most humble services for the benefit of others. We should serve one another. St. Peter exhorted: “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.- 1 Peter 5:5,6.

It was by his humility that Jesus Christ was able to accomplish his mission on earth to the glory of God and was consequently highly exalted above all creation. (Philippians 2:5-11) If we follow Christ’s example of humility, God will by His grace promote us to honour. Truly grand and illustrious are the blessings that accrue from humility. The prophet Solomon declared: “By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life”. (Proverbs 22:4) The Bible further states: “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted”.- Matthew 23:12.

To the humble ones God reveals His truth and these are the ones He chooses to do His work. During his days on earth Jesus Christ stated: “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.” (Matthew 11:25,26) Indeed “The meek will He (God Almighty) guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.”- Psalm 25:9. See also Isaiah 28:9.

Sincerity

Another quality children have is sincerity. They express things the way they see them. God requires us to serve Him with sincerity always. In the days of Joshua, he passionately exhorted the people to “fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth” while St. Paul prayed that, “grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity” – Joshua 24:14; Ephesians 6:24.

Only a child-like simplicity can measure up to St. Paul’s exhortation to wit: “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.” (2 Corinthians 1:12) Thus, it is required of people of God to be plain, straightforward and frank all the time. The Bible says “the way of the righteous is made plain”. – Proverbs 15:19.

The opposite of sincerity is hypocrisy. According to Bible scholars, a hypocrite is “one who, like a stage-player, feigns to be what he is not.” The epithet is generally applied to those who assume the appearance of virtue or piety, without possessing the reality.” Jesus Christ declared: “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of

the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:20) What Christ is saying is that anyone who is hypocritical in the service of God like the Pharisees will not get life in God’s Kingdom. – Luke 12:1; Matthew 23:27,28.

Obedience

Another quality we must have if we are to be like little children in God’s service is obedience. To obey means to follow the commands or guidance of, to conform to or comply with. Children are generally obedient to their parents and elders. The child who is disobedient is seen as a foolish child, the exception to the norm, a deviant. We must be completely obedient to the laws of God in order to get life in His Kingdom.

When the children of Israel came out of Egypt the first command God gave them was to obey His voice so that it might be well with them. “For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.” – Jeremiah 7:22,23. See also 1 Samuel 15:22,23

Some people may regard the Christian position on obedience as foolish, but in the end it is more rewarding. (1 Corinthians 1:18,19; 3:18) It is by patiently obeying the commandments of God and the instructions of the elders of the Church- like a child – that one will, by God’s grace, get life in the end. Job the prophet says: “Then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity. If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures.”-Job 36:9-11; Isaiah 1:16-20.

Forgiveness

Many who call themselves Christians today find it hard to forgive. Some of them even boast “I can forgive but I will never forget.” This is unlike children who not only forgive easily but also forget completely. Christians ought to forgive those who wrong them as long as such ones own up their faults and show penitence. In our Lord’s prayer Jesus Christ taught us to pray thus: “And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12) But many so-called Christians today do not forgive their neighbours, husbands, wives or children who may have wronged them, even after such had come to apologise. And yet they say the Lord’s prayer every day! This is unchristian. Such ones forget that, if God were to punish each and every one of us for our sins, no one will remain. We should always bear in mind the words of David, the sweet psalmist of Israel who stated: “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.” (Psalm 130:3,4) Also, Jesus Christ warned: “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.” – Luke 17:3,4.

When the issue of how many times one should forgive his brother was put to Jesus Christ in Matthew 18:21-35, he told them “seventy times seven” and then followed up with a parable about a certain king, who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. One of them owed him 10,000 talents (the equivalent of \$10 million) “But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.” But due to his pleadings the master forgave him by writing off the debt. But when the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, who owed him an hundred pence (about \$2000), he cast him into prison despite his pleadings. The servant was reported to his master who directed that he be delivered to the tormentors “till he should pay all that was due unto him.” Jesus Christ then added: “So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.” Every time one says the Lord’s prayer, he should ask himself if he is keeping that part of the prayer which says: “Forgive us the wrong we have done as we have forgiven those who have wronged us”. –

Matthew 6:12, New English Bible

If we readily forgive trespasses against us, then we would not keep a diary of wrongs by storing them in our memory to be dredged up whenever there is a small misunderstanding. That way such ones store up malice and hostility to each other and make it difficult for them to love as brethren. St. Paul declared: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger and clamour and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." – Ephesians 4:26,29,31,32; Colossians 3:12-14

St. Peter further exhorted us saying: "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." – 1 Peter 2:1-3

Faith

It is amazing how trusting children are to promises made to them. This teaches us faith or trust in God Almighty. Jesus Christ said: "...Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall ... say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." -Matthew 21:21,22

Apostle Peter further exhorts us thus: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." – 1 Peter 1:13-16; Leviticus 11:44.

From the afore stated, it could be seen how it came to be that it is the child, not the adult that is the model for those who seek to enter into God's Kingdom. However, we should be childlike, not childish. This was made clear by St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthian Christians when he exhorted: "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men." (1 Corinthians 14:20) Indeed, a lot is expected from those who had been Christians for a reasonable number of years. Such ones should behave maturely and put away what St. Paul called "childish things". (1 Corinthians 13:11) The learned apostle, chastising the Hebrew Christians, wrote: "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." – Hebrews 5:12-14.