**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**MARK-048**. **CHILDREN AND CHILDLIKE MEN by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"13.* *And they brought young children to Him, that He should touch them: and His disciples rebuked those that brought them. 14. 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. 15. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."*

*Mark 10:13-15*

It was natural that the parents should have wanted Christ's blessing, so that they might tell their children in later days that His hand had been laid on their heads, and that He had prayed for them. And Christ did not think of it as a mere superstition. The disciples were not so akin to the children as He was, and they were a great deal more tender of His dignity than He. They thought of this as an interruption disturbing their high intercourse with Christ. These children are always in the way, this is tiresome, etc.

**I. Christ blessing children.**

It is a beautiful picture: the great Messiah with a child in His arms. We could not think of Moses or of Paul in such an attitude. Without it, we should have wanted one of the sweetest, gentlest, most human traits in His character; and how world-wide in its effect that act has been! How many a mother has bent over her child with deeper love; how many a parent has felt the sacredness of the trust more vividly; how many a mother has been drawn nearer to Christ; and how many a little child has had childlike love to Him awakened by it; how much of practical benevolence and of noble sacrifice for children's welfare, how many great institutions, have really sprung from this one deed! And, if we turn from its effects to its meaning, it reveals Christ's love for children:--in its human side, as part of His character as man; in its deeper aspect as a revelation of the divine nature. It corrects dogmatic errors by making plain that, prior to all ceremonies or to repentance and faith, little children are loved and blessed by Him. Unconscious infants as these were folded in His arms and love. It puts away all gloomy and horrible thoughts which men have had about the standing of little children.

This is an act of Christ to infants expressive of His love to them, His care over them, their share in His salvation. Baptism is an act of man's, a symbol of his repentance and dying to sin and rising to a new life in Christ, a profession of his faith, an act of obedience to his Lord. It teaches nothing as to the relation of infants to the love of Jesus or to salvation. It does not follow that because that love is most sure and precious, baptism must needs be a sign of it. The question, what does baptism mean, must be determined by examination of texts which speak about baptism; not by a side-light from a text which speaks about something else. There is no more reason for making baptism proclaim that Jesus Christ loves children than for making it proclaim that two and two make four.

**II. The child's nearness to Christ.**

Of such is the kingdom. Except ye be converted and become like little children, etc. Now this does not refer to innocence; for, as a matter of fact, children are not innocent, as all schoolmasters and nurses know, whatever sentimental poets may say. Innocence is not a qualification for admission to the kingdom. And yet it is true that heaven lies about us in our infancy, and that we are further off from it than when we were children. Nor does it mean that children are naturally the subjects of the kingdom, but only that the characteristics of the child are those which the man must have, in order to enter the kingdom; that their natural disposition is such as Christ requires to be directed to Him; or, in other words, that childhood has a special adaptation to Christianity. For instance, take dependence, trust, simplicity, unconsciousness, and docility.

These are the very characteristics of childhood, and these are the very emotions of mind and heart which Christianity requires. Add the child's strong faculty of imagination and its implicit belief; making the form of Christianity as the story of a life so easy to them. And we may add too: the absence of intellectual pride; the absence of the habit of dallying with moral truth. Everybody is to the child either a goodman or a bad. They have an intense realisation of the unseen; an absence of developed vices and hard worldliness; a faculty of living in the present, free from anxious care and worldly hearts. But while thus they have special adaptation for receiving, they too need to come to Christ. These characteristics do not make Christians. They are to be directed to Christ. Suffer them to come unto Me, the youngest child needs to, can, ought to, come to Christ. And how beautiful their piety is, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise. Their fresh, unworn trebles struck on Christ's ear. Children ought to grow up in Christian households, innocent from much transgression. We ought to expect them to grow up Christian.

**III. The child and the Church.**

The child is a pattern to us men. We are to learn of them as well as teach them; what they are naturally, we are to strive to become, not childish but childlike. Even as a weaned child (see Psalm 131.). The child-spirit is glorified in manhood. It is possible for us to retain it, and lose none of the manhood. In malice be ye children, but in understanding be men. The spirit of the kingdom is that of immortal youth.

The children are committed to our care.

The end of all training and care is that they should by voluntary act draw near to Him. This should be the aim in Sunday schools, for instance, and in families, and in all that we do for the poor around us.

See that we do not hinder their coming. This is a wide principle, viz., not to do anything which may interfere with those who are weaker and lower than we are finding their way to Jesus. The Church, and we as individual Christians, too often hinder this coming.

* Do not hinder by the presentation of the Gospel in a repellent form, either hardly dogmatic or sour.
* Do not hinder by the requirement of such piety as is unnatural to a child.
* Do not hinder by inconsistencies. This is a warning for Christian parents in particular.
* Do not hinder by neglect. Despise not one of these little ones.