



Christ Reformed Community Church

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June 5, 2022

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“Stop Hindering the Little Ones” Mark 10:13–16

As you take your Bibles, I’m sure you already have, to Mark chapter 10, we’re just going to look at verses 13 through 16, this short little passage of Scripture. The title of the message: “Stop Hindering the Little Ones.” And I want you to stand to your feet in honor of the reading of God’s Word, as I read this brief passage and then we unpack it together. God’s Word says:

And they were bringing children to him [that is, to Jesus] that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

This is God’s pure and perfect Word. Please be seated, and let us ask Him for His help as we look at this passage together.

Father, we thank You for this beautiful passage of Scripture that gives us a view and a window into the heart of our Lord. We ask that You would give us wisdom as we study, Lord, not only the interpretation of this passage but the application of this passage, the implication of this passage for our lives and for the new covenant in particular. We pray these things and for the grace and strength of Your Spirit as we do so. In the blessed name of Christ, our Savior, we ask. Amen.

In the context here of Mark chapter 10, the beginning part of Mark chapter 10, we saw last week that Jesus has just addressed how radical discipleship to Him—that is, if we want to radically follow Him—will affect the way that we view marriage. In verses 1 through 12 we saw that, and specifically, how we will view divorce. Are there any legitimate grounds, biblical grounds for divorce from the Scriptures? That was the question that was posed to Jesus by the scribes and Pharisees, and Jesus sort of turned the argument a different way to elevate marriage. He turned the discussion to marriage, the importance of marriage, and then He began to speak about the legitimate grounds for divorce according to the law of God. But the larger point in all of that that Jesus was trying to make is this; if you are going to be a radical disciple of Jesus, the way you view your marriage matters. The way you view marriage in particular matters, and the way you view your own marriage matters.

Now, in verses 13 through 16, Jesus is going to address rather naturally how radical discipleship will affect the way we view children, and if you have children this morning, in particular, the way that you view your own children. In view here in verses 13 through 16 are covenant children,

covenant children. That is, believers who were disciples of Jesus who brought their children to Jesus. There does exist in this passage, I think, application for not just covenant children but also children in general, and we’ll speak to that as we work through the text. But what is clear is that Jesus’ attitude toward children demonstrates that covenant children; that is, infants of believing parents and young children are part of the kingdom of God. Jesus explicitly says that in verse 14: *“Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.”* That should not surprise you because earlier in chapter 9 Jesus said the same thing, verse 36: *“And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.’”* Jesus received children. We are to receive children.

Now, it is interesting to note that all three of the synoptic gospels record this episode of Jesus picking several children up into His arms and blessing them. Matthew records it, Luke records it, and Mark records it. I point that out because the verses are brief, verses 13 through 16, but don’t allow the brevity to fool you. This is not an insignificant passage. It’s found in three of the gospels to reveal to us a very intimate and sacred and precious heartwarming scene of Jesus around the children; and yet, I would offer a counter warning to that as well. This episode is not focused on the sentimental. It is focused on the theological. Jesus was gentle. Jesus was loving toward children, but He was also perhaps the angriest He ever was during the course of His incarnation in this incident, and His anger was directed not to the children and not to the parents but to the disciples. They tried to forbid the children from coming to Jesus. So, while on the one end, He was loving and gentle, on the other hand, He was righteously angry at the disciples. The reality is that children of any kind were never viewed as a nuisance to Jesus, and He often spoke about children. For example, in John 16:21, He celebrates the joy of a mother giving birth, saying that the joy of a human being born into the world is something that a woman possesses even after the anguish of childbirth. He celebrates the birth of children. He elevates the love of a father to answer the requests of his children in, for example, Matthew 7:9. *“If your child asks for a piece of bread, what father won’t give it to them?”* Jesus says, and then He says, *“A father always desires to give good gifts to his children.”*

Jesus always elevated the family. He always elevated fatherhood. He always elevated motherhood above most other things, and with that, He always elevated the place of children. As we have already seen, Jesus’ sympathies were clear. They always laid with fathers and mothers and children. You remember in chapter 9 just a chapter before this, Jesus graciously healed the son who was possessed of his man coming to Jesus whose son was demon-possessed. Jesus had grace and mercy on the father by healing the son. He had mercy on the son by healing the son, casting the demons out. Or Mark chapter 5 in the episode of Jairus coming to Jesus, his daughter, and Jesus tenderly using that expression, *“Talitha cumi...Little girl, I say to you, arise.”* Always tender, always gentle to parents. Always tender, always gentle to children. From these episodes and many more, it appears that it is not a heresy for children to sing:

Jesus loves me this I know
For the Bible tells me so
Little ones to Him belong
They are weak, but He is strong

You compare Christ’s attitude toward children, in our own day to the way the world viewed children, which our society has embraced abortion. We saw last week that divorce was a question that was raised in Jesus’ day. We have a tendency to think that divorce is only a problem of the modern day. Not so. Perhaps it was a bigger problem during the days of Moses. They had to have legislation to try to prevent it. And so too in our day we might think that children are hated more than at any other time, but even in Jesus’ day, infanticide was very, very popular. In fact, there’s an apologetic Christian writing written in the early second century referred to as the *Epistle of Diognetus*, which had to actually come out and defend why Christians were against killing babies. That was in the second century of the church, second century of the church.

Then you have the *patria potestas* which was a Roman law, a Roman custom that gave total and absolute authority to the father where the father had the right to determine whether or not his son lived or died. That was the world Jesus was born into, having Himself been on the receiving end of Herod’s public campaign to slaughter babies, to do away with them. That was the pagan world. But in the Hebrew culture, it was much different. For example, Psalm 127:3: “*Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.*” Children in the Jewish society were not viewed as a bother; they were viewed as a blessing. In Genesis chapter 30, Rachel speaks as the mother of her people, and she cries out to God, “*Give me children, or I shall die!*” In 1 Samuel, Hannah was so depressed that she didn’t have children, she prayed that the Lord would give her a child, and out of gratitude she was so grateful that she gave her son to the Lord’s service. But what Jesus does here was radical. He actually categorizes young children as being part—listen to this—of the kingdom of the new covenant. He is not speaking about what was true about the Jewish society. He’s speaking about what is true about the new covenant today.

All parents today are to view their children, if they are believers, as part of the kingdom of God. He is explicit about that in verse 14. This is a testament to the fact, first of all, regarding the sovereignty of God and salvation. It illustrates man’s inability to save himself. For Jesus to say, for example, in verse 15: “*Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.*” What does a child do? A child does nothing. He needs everything done for him, and so it is true of anyone who enters the kingdom of God. This little episode of children around Jesus illustrates the sovereignty of God in salvation regarding man’s inability to do anything to save himself. And this is contrasted with the rich young ruler which we’ll speak about in the next episode, who essentially was viewed as a shoo-in to the kingdom because he obeyed all the laws of God; and he wasn’t in while these innocent children were in the kingdom. It also teaches us, I think, that infants or young children who die prematurely enter the kingdom of heaven. Charles Hodge said, “Of such,” children, “[Jesus] tells us is the kingdom of heaven, as though heaven [itself] was, in great measure, composed of the souls of redeemed infants.”

This passage also teaches us—and this is really what I want to focus on this morning—the special place of covenant children in the covenant family tree. Paul was clear in 1 Corinthians 7:14 that the children of parents are sanctified. They are set apart. They are holy. Paul even goes on to say in that passage, and this is really his main point, that when you have one unbelieving spouse and one believing spouse, the children are still holy. The children are still set apart. When the root is holy, so are the branches, Paul says in Romans 11:16, and all of this is in the context of the new covenant. First Corinthians 7 is speaking about new covenant children. Romans 11 is speaking about branches that are part of the family tree, and in Isaiah 27, it prophesies the days of the new

covenant: “*In days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit.*” These are the days of the new covenant.

So, as heartwarming as the scene is, we must work hard to remove the sentimental and focus on the theological. This is not simply some event that happened in the life of our Lord. This is a ceremony. Ceremonies in ancient times had great significance attached to them. This incident is not merely representative of a Jesus who likes being around children or a Jesus that is amused by children. Jesus is making a theological point by blessing these children, laying hands on them, which signifies God’s blessing on them and His endorsement of them, and His commitment to His Father of these children to be part of the kingdom of heaven. This passage has theological import, specifically regarding how disciples of Jesus, who are adults, who have children are to view their children. Your views of children should be consistent with the way Jesus viewed children, and Jesus said these children “*belong to the kingdom of God.*”

So, as we look at these verses, we see that Jesus’ blessing of these children teach us some theologically significant truths. As the story unfolds, we see three theologically significant characteristics of Jesus’ blessing of the children, three theologically significant characteristics of Jesus blessing these children. The blessing of these children by Jesus, number one, is naturally pursued; secondly, it is covenantal sustained; and third, it is officially administered by Jesus. These are the characteristics that are significant, as we draw out the theology that is behind this passage.

So, notice with me first of all, Jesus’ blessing of these children, number one, was naturally pursued. It was naturally pursued. Notice with me in verse 13: “*And they,*” that is, parents, “*were bringing children to him [Jesus] that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them.*” Now, where this takes place it’s probably natural to conclude is in the same house that is mentioned in verse 10. When they were “*in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter.*” What matter? The matter of divorce, perhaps revealing that this discussion on marriage, this discussion on divorce led Jesus into a discussion on the family, and why not speak about children because children are an important part of any particular family. And so, as Jesus is teaching about the family, as Jesus is teaching, I assume, about children, it says that the parents, very naturally began to bring their children to Jesus “*that he might touch them.*” He had to be teaching on it for them to want to naturally bring their children to Jesus.

Of course, it was a Jewish custom that parents would oftentimes bring their children to rabbis to be blessed. Jesus was teaching. He was playing the part of a rabbi. It’s interesting that that word *they* is a masculine pronoun, indicating that it wasn’t mothers alone bringing their children to Jesus. This wasn’t playtime with Jesus. This wasn’t a playdate with mothers alone bringing their children. No, this was households being led by fathers bringing their children to Jesus, a custom dating all the way back to Noah who blessed his own children in Genesis 9, Isaac who blessed his children, Jacob who blessed his children in Genesis chapter 49. And Mark is clear that these parents “*were bringing their children to Him,*” notice this, “*so that he might touch them*” to bless them. They’re bringing their children to Him. The word *children* there is *paidiá*, and it’s used to refer to young children, but if you turn over to Luke chapter 18 and the parallel account, Luke is very clear that this was not just young children. Luke 18:15: “*Now they were bringing even infants,*” *brephos*, “*to him,*” a different Greek word, “*that he might touch them.*” This is young children and infants, and it’s important to highlight the fact here that they had no medical condition. These parents don’t

want a healing; they want a blessing. They want Jesus to *“touch them,”* and that’s exactly what they received if you just skip quickly to verse 16: *“And he took them in his arms and blessed them.”*

So, here is what is taking place here; they’re hearing Jesus preach in their own area, their own region of Perea. That’s where Jesus is. He’s teaching about the kingdom, He’s teaching about salvation that has been promised, and these parents naturally pursue Jesus to bless their own children. They pursue Jesus to pray over their children that God’s favor would be bestowed upon them, that the blessings of salvation, the blessings of the kingdom He is preaching would come to their children. They are not concerned about the healing of their bodies; they’re concerned about the blessing on their souls. This is a spiritual ceremony. This is not sentimental; this is ceremonial. This is not sentimental; this is theological. This isn’t artificial; this is natural. They naturally understand that this is acceptable by God. These children cannot even receive instruction. They’re too young to receive in depth instruction, so the parents just bring their children to Jesus to touch them. Matthew Henry says in his commentary:

They [the parents] believed that Christ’s blessing would do their souls good; and therefore to him they brought them, that he might touch them, knowing that he could reach their hearts, when nothing their parents could say to them, or do for them, would reach them.

This is a moment of desperation, trusting in the sovereignty of God. “If my children are going to be saved, Jesus, You must do it.” Very natural, bringing their children to Jesus, a natural pursuit of Christ’s blessing on their children. What does this teach us? Well, number one, it teaches us the natural parental inclination of godly parents who are disciples of Jesus, that just as Jesus freely received you into the kingdom by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, so too does He naturally receive our children, those who are yet of age to know how much they need God’s grace.

Secondly, it teaches us that these parents had true and abiding faith in Jesus. These are believing parents; otherwise, they wouldn’t bring their children to Jesus. They had heard the gospel preached. They were converting to Christ through the gospel, and not only did they have faith in Jesus, they were faithful covenantal parents. They believed the promises of God. These would have largely been Jewish parents who had had their babies and young children circumcised on the eighth day, and they understood theologically that that sign of circumcision was pointing to the coming seed. That is, after all, why circumcision was instituted as a sacrament of the Old Testament. It’s because through that physical organ that was circumcised would come the seed of the woman that would crush the head of the serpent. And every time a baby was circumcised, it was pointing forward to the Christ child would come and offer himself as a bloody sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. They had already brought these babies to be circumcised. Now they are bringing their babies to the promise of that sign of circumcision. Randy Booth says this, a Reformed writer:

Since the households of God’s people included their children in the covenant of grace from the beginning of time, it seems fantastic to imagine that they would be excluded from the covenant of grace, these children, without notice in the pages of Scripture. Covenantal birth was highly prized among the Hebrews. For a Jew to be cut off from among his people was incredibly shameful and a dreaded disgrace. How could this privilege have been canceled without at least some mention of it in the Bible?

He’s arguing the fact that these parents very naturally understood their children belong to the same kingdom they were members of. This is not only comfortable, that these parents are comforted in bringing their children to Jesus in some sentimental fashion; no, they are confident that He will accept them based upon Genesis chapter 17, the promises of God to Abraham, the promise that this is for you and your children, for your descendants. There is no doubt, therefore, that the principle of generationally successive covenantal blessing was the framework from which they operated which led them to naturally bring their children to Jesus and a further promise of the outpouring of the Spirit of God on their seed, on their offspring. I read to you Isaiah chapter 59 and the concluding verse of that great chapter speaking about the new covenant:

“And as for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the Lord: “My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children’s offspring,” says the Lord, “from this time forth and forevermore.”

The promise of the Spirit of God being poured down was a promise to the children of believing parents, Isaiah 59:21. Isaiah 44:3 is more explicit: *“For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground.”* That is a prophecy of the Spirit of God which is being compared to water. These parents understand that the Holy Spirit will be poured forth in the new covenant like water, and that that sign is for their children *“from this time forth and forevermore.”* They understand this: the inclusion of their children as members of the covenant just by virtue of the fact that they’ve been born to believing parents—that’s the point to see. This is not abnormal; it is natural. This isn’t artificial; it is covenantal. This isn’t sentimental; this is theological. This is ceremonial. This was important for these parents to do. They couldn’t help themselves to knock on the door of the house Jesus was in and come blasting through with their children in desperation for Jesus to bless them.

Yet, in spite of this natural pursuit, notice what happens at the end of verse 13: *“And the disciples,”* Mark says, *“rebuked them.”* That is an understatement. That is an understatement. Here is the scene. These parents are forming a line at the entryway of this house, and the disciples have seen enough of it, and they go outside of the house and tell these parents to leave. How could they justify this? Well, perhaps they were simply protective of our Lord’s time. He didn’t have time to bother with children. But I think really the answer is found in the fact that they had a wrong view of the kingdom. They were focusing on the here and now of the kingdom and not the future of the kingdom. Jesus had just said twice that He was going to go to Jerusalem and suffer and die. He had established His kingdom and now He’s going to die? The disciples are frustrated. They do not know what to do. They do not have time to play games. They do not have time for children because in their minds the kingdom is in jeopardy. The king is going to go to Jerusalem and suffer and die, and even though Jesus predicted His resurrection, that sort of went past them. They have no view to the future. Their focus is the here and the now, and out of frustration they rebuked, *epitimaō*. They strongly censored. They strongly reprimanded the parents. This is not, “Oh, please. Could you please go away? Jesus doesn’t have time for you.” This is a rebuke. It is a censor. It is a reprimand: “Get out of here!” They are frustrated. This is the same word *rebuked* that is used by Jesus during exorcisms, where He rebuked demons to come out. That’s how strong the word is. It’s the same word that is used in Mark 10:48 to describe the rebuke of the blind man. They *“rebuked him, telling him to be silent.”* He kept calling out to Jesus.

This was hasty because the action on the part of the parents did not deserve the type of rebuke you would give a demon. This is heavenly action by the parents. This is a step of faith. This isn't demonic. The disciples are the ones acting demonic. It is natural for parents in the new covenant, number one, to lift up their children in prayer in Jesus' name and to ask God to bless them with favor and to bless them with salvation. That's what these parents are doing, essentially. It is only natural for covenantal parents to do that, but it is also natural to expect that God will answer that prayer. It was not wrong for these parents to come. It was wrong for these parents to be rebuked by the disciples because the disciples were essentially saying, “Your children have no place in God's heart. Your children have no place in God's kingdom.” And many people today say children have no place in the church. No place to receive the promised blessings to the offspring of believers? That's the whole testimony of Scripture, *“from this time forth and forevermore.”*

Now, what the parents did was natural, acceptable, and thoroughly biblical. For us to want our children to come to the Lord, for us to pray for our children to come to the Lord, for us to do all in our power that our children would come to the Lord, to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, to set before them a godly example, to lift them up in prayer—that's essentially what these parents are doing, trusting in the promises of God. And we see why this is a natural pursuit not only for these parents but for parents today because of the second characteristic of this passage. Notice in verses 14 and 15:

But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

The first theologically significant characteristic of Jesus blessing these children is that we see it was naturally pursued by these parents; but secondly, we see that it was covenantally sustained by Jesus. In other words, He affirms their actions as acceptable and even expected. Notice verse 14 says, *“When Jesus saw,”* that is, He saw what the disciples were doing, verse 14, it says *“he was indignant.”* Now, our Lord was angry on many occasions, but I would submit to you this morning that perhaps He was never angrier than right here. The word *indignant* translates a Greek word *aganakteō*. *Aganakteō*, derived from *ágan*, which means “much” and *agami*, which means “grieved.” Literally, He was “much grieved.” Or another way to translate it is, “He was aroused to anger.” Jesus was absolutely outraged at the disciples' actions. He was irate at their rebuke of the parents. He was indignant.

Turn with me to Matthew chapter 21 for a moment. This is how indignant Jesus was because this word *indignant* is the only time in the entire New Testament that that word is used to describe the anger of Christ, but in Matthew chapter 21, the scribes and Pharisees had the same exact type of anger. The same word *indignant* is used, and notice ironically the context. The blind and the lame were coming to Him, verse 14, in the temple. He was healing them, Matthew 21:14. And then verse 15 says, *“But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ they were,”* what? *“indignant, and they said to him, ‘Do you hear what these are saying?’”* “Do you hear what these [children] are saying? They are saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David.’ That's their song. Do you

hear this, Jesus?” *“And Jesus said to them, ‘Yes; have you never read [the Psalms, that] ‘‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?’’’*

God has prepared praise from before the foundation of the world on children and infants who are part of the covenant, who are children of believing parents. The scribes and Pharisees are as angry with Jesus over allowing the children to sing that as Jesus is angry with the disciples over not allowing the children to come to Him. How ironic. Now, you get a sense that Jesus has a very tender heart toward children, even to the point of defending their praise songs singing about His identity. But Jesus doesn’t say in Matthew 21, “Children, stop singing that. You’ve not made a profession of faith in Me yet.” He lets the children sing and even quotes Psalm 8: *“Out of the mouths of infants and babes this praise was prepared.”* “I’m not going to stop it. I’m going to endorse it, embrace it, and promote it.” The disciples are preventing that. They’re preventing—listen to this—Christ from receiving the glory that is due His name from these little children who can’t do anything except say goo-goo, ga-ga and da-da.

By the way, this is not Jesus losing His cool. He is aroused to anger because He knew God’s clear words in Scripture about the place of the children of believing parents within the covenant. Notice the rest of verse 14: *“But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.’”* This is the principle of inclusion of children in the covenant, sustained by Jesus. The actions of the parents are covenantally sustained in the new covenant. This speaks volumes about Christ’s convictions about how He views children of the new covenant, and by application, it speaks volumes about what our convictions should be. After all, Jesus is the head of the church. We are His body. We are one with Him. We should share His convictions. How did He view the children of believing parents? Well, what does He say? He says, *“For to such belongs the kingdom of God.”* The disciples misrepresented Jesus. What the disciples were saying to these parents is “Jesus doesn’t want your children.” What the disciples were saying to these parents by shooing them away was “God has no heart for your children,” and Jesus was absolutely indignant about that. In fact, He rebukes them, and He does so by making three blunt and forceful statements with the voice of a lion aroused with anger, staccato-like statements, machinegun, rapid fire: *“Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.”*

He is outraged. They had misrepresented Him, so Jesus sets the record straight regarding children within the covenant, and He says to them this welcoming command, the first statement, *“Let the children come to me.”* He’s affirming the parents’ actions. He is affirming the parents’ actions. Why would He welcome them? Well, if He embraces His sheep, won’t He also embrace the little lambs of the flock who become naturally the rising generation of disciples? This is God’s design. That’s why He said, *“Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”* That’s why Proverbs 22 says, *“Train them up in the way they shall go.”* This is a promise, and when they are old, they won’t part from it. Of course, He receives the little lambs. Of course, He receives them. And it’s interesting to me that in the Greek there is a Greek verb that is used here that is used to describe what a husband does when he divorces his wife. He sends her away. Jesus is telling them *“Let the children come to me; do not hinder them.”* “Do not send them away. Do not divorce them from the covenant. They are part of it.” Then He adds this welcoming command: *“Let the children come to me.”* That’s the welcoming command, and now there’s the rebuking command: *“Do not hinder them.”* Very forceful, direct, corrective. *“Do not hinder them.”* Why? Because it’s natural

for parents of the covenant to send their little lambs to the Shepherd. Moreover, it therefore becomes—here’s the other side of the coin—a grave error to try and prevent them from coming. Indeed, to try to stop them is to work against a cardinal kingdom principal. To try to stop them is to follow the example of the disciples, which was rebuked and not follow the example of the parents, which was embraced.

So, Jesus makes this third statement, the most important of all, after *“Let the children come to me,”* after *“do not hinder them,”* statement number three: *“For to such belongs the kingdom of God. For to such belongs the kingdom of God.”* How would these original parents understand this? Well, by His coming, through His preaching, Jesus was doing what? He was simply inaugurating the kingdom of the new covenant. I hope you didn’t forget this back in chapter 1 and verse 15. This is after John was arrested. Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God, and what did He say when He proclaimed the gospel? Verse 15: *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”* What had these parents just done in their adult lives? They’re first-generation believers. They had repented and believed the gospel. The kingdom of God had been inaugurated, and Jesus says to them, to these first-generation believers, what He says: *“For to such belongs the kingdom of God.”* *“Your children belong to the kingdom of God.”* Now, what in the world does Jesus mean by this? Does this mean all children without qualification are automatically saved? Does this mean that all children have the same spiritual capacity to receive the salvation of God? Does this mean that all children are without original sin? I hope you say no to all of those statements. Not all children without qualification are automatically saved. Not all children have the same spiritual capacity to understand the truths of God. Not all children, in fact, no child, is without original sin. So, what does Jesus mean by this? Again, the context. The children Jesus identifies are the literal children of believing parents that are physically brought to Jesus so that they might receive a spiritual blessing of the kingdom of God by Jesus touching them, praying for their children. They were already disciples of Jesus. They are trusting that this message of salvation, this message of the kingdom, rightfully, covenantally, by God’s design belongs to them, and they’re asking Jesus to give them salvation, salvation to their children.

We can learn from this. These parents understood their duty to disciple their children. These parents understood their duty to nurture their children, to embrace the privilege and promises of the covenant. These parents also understood that these privileges and promises could not be embraced apart from faith. That is, after all, how they came to salvation. It doesn’t change with their children. Their children must come to salvation by faith, and if they don’t, they forfeit their membership in the covenant. They forfeit the blessings of God. Faith is not automatic, but it is a gift of God, Ephesians 2:8. And the promise of salvation is being held out for all of these little lambs of the sheep, and that promise of salvation is realized by and by only for the ones that are truly elect and only for the ones who someday give testimony to true faith and repentance. But these parents, first and foremost, are trusting in the power of Jesus to save them, their children just like they were saved. By the way, these children are bought irrespective of their level of faith, right? What infant have you ever seen who had faith? None.

The Jewish parents were demonstrating faith. They were demonstrating faith in the promise of God that by natural design their children belonged, but they understood that if their children later proved to reject their covenantal status, they would be deemed apostate. That’s the whole point of Hebrews, all the warning passages. That’s the point of Romans 11. There are branches that are

connected to the covenant that are broken off because they proved to be apostates. How do you prevent apostasy? Well, you entrust your children to Jesus at the earliest age possible, and that applies to the new covenant kingdom of God. That was the kingdom of God that Jesus established, that Jesus inaugurated, that Jesus preached. One Reformed commentator says this:

The biblical idea of the household as a covenantal unit is a dominant feature of God’s redemptive plan and remains intact in the New Testament. The head of the believing household has a duty to obligate his entire household to the service of God. We do not have the prerogative to exclude persons, including our children, from covenant privileges that God has always allowed.

He goes on to say:

Nor may we withhold the sign and seal of the covenant membership, which is baptism, which sets covenantal members apart from the common pagan. We must say today, as did Joshua, “*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*”

Now, this particular covenantal writer concludes from this that today children in the new covenant should be baptized because, by example, these parents are bringing their children to Jesus. At a minimum, what can be said is that these children were naturally brought by these parents; and on top of that, that Jesus covenantally sustains their actions; that they are the type of actions that fit with the Old Testament and how parents viewed their children in the Old Testament in the nation of Israel, the status of covenant kids. Jesus is essentially saying, “Disciples, you are wrong. Parents, you are right. Bring the children to me. Let them come.” The great sin of the disciples was not taking into account the future generations of the kingdom of the new covenant. I mean, what did Jesus teach about back in chapter 4 about the kingdom? Verse 26:

The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.

At once, finally, at last, after a process, the harvest comes. Jesus is saying, “And so is the kingdom of God. There is a growth to it. There is a process to it.” And He even says in verse 30, the parable of the mustard seed:

With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.

The kingdom of God is like a tree, Romans 11. Branches go out; it blossoms; there is fruit. The kingdom of God grows very small. You see, the disciples are thinking, “The kingdom has been established. Jesus is going to suffer and die. He better authoritatively, and even violently perhaps, establish this kingdom now because there is no future.” Jesus is saying, “That’s not how the kingdom works. Where is your foresight and understanding? There is going to be one generation after another of disciples until this tree fills the world.” The disciples’ theology was way, way off. Jesus’ attitude towards these children is in clear harmony, complete continuity with Genesis 17;

that God’s promise of salvation is for Abraham and his descendants, and of course, Abraham applied circumcision to his children. Jesus identified with the human race in the incarnation. He identified as the God-man with us. He was sent to save the world, John 3:16—that is all types of humans—and providentially, mysteriously, sometimes He saves infants and young children. The new birth is a mystery, and apparently these children were saved on this day, miraculously, supernaturally, sovereignly. And the second-century church father, Irenaeus, said this, and I quote:

Jesus came to save all by means of himself, who through him are born again unto God, infants and children, boys and girls. He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, a child for children, a youth for youths.

Jesus, our substitute, saves these infants and young children. Now, let me say this; that is the exception, not the norm that infants and young children are regenerated before their capacity to demonstrate faith. That’s not the norm, but it happened here. Jesus says, “These children belong to the kingdom of God.” But there is another principle here, and lest we misunderstand Jesus’ point, He provides a clarifying qualification in verse 15. He says, “*Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.*” Now, Jesus is not extolling a popular view of children in our own day that all children are innocent; that is, without sin; they’re all pure, and nor is He highlighting the gullibility of children, the spontaneity of children, the immaturity of children. Paul is clear in 1 Corinthians 14:20 that we are not to have a *childish* faith but to have a *childlike* faith that is in simple trust and dependence upon God, a helpless status. That’s the way we enter the kingdom of God.

So, Jesus takes advantage of these children present to use them as an illustration to demonstrate that salvation only comes to us by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. All true Christians, verse 15, “*receive the kingdom of God*” the same way; namely, “*like a child*” or we shall not enter it. But the reality is there are some young children who are saved. There are some infants that are regenerated, like Jeremiah in the womb. It might not be the standard. It might not be the pattern. It might not be the norm, but here is what is the norm: if God saves adults who have to have childlike faith, then don’t you think He can save young children that also have childlike faith? Obviously, He can because the kingdom of God is a gift. And if we have a problem with God saving young children, then what are we saying about man-made requirements to enter the kingdom of God? There are none. This is a rebuke to the Pharisees’ works-based salvation, verse 15 is—a complete rebuke. We must be careful not to allow Jesus’ point in verse in 15, which is a rebuke to the Pharisees, a rebuke to the disciples who have been influenced by the Pharisees—we need to be careful not to allow Jesus’ point in verse 15 to override His point in verse 15.

So, that takes us now to verse 16. There are three characteristics of Jesus blessing these children, three theological characteristics. Jesus’ blessing of these children was, number one, naturally pursued, verse 13; number two, covenantally sustained by Jesus, verses 14 and 15; and now, number three, it was officially administered, this blessing. Notice your Bibles: “*And he [Jesus] took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.*” This is beautiful. Jesus lays His hands upon the children, an intimate personal scene. But as I said at the beginning, your focus should not be sentimental. It needs to be theological, ceremonial, but it is nevertheless heartwarming, isn’t it? Notice, it says, “*He took them in his arms,*” one by one. He gives each one of these children the same attention, the same compassion. He picks one infant up. He draws them close to His chest. These parents got what they sought because after picking them up, drawing

them close to His chest, it says, “[He] *blessed them, laying his hands on them,*” a scene of affection, but this is not sentimentalism.

What are we to make of Jesus’ actions? Well, He already viewed these children as part of the kingdom of the new covenant. That much was made clear in verses 14 and 15. He took them in His arms. The verb means to “enfold in one’s arms.” So, He’s holding them, hugging them, and then He blesses them, probably laying His hand on their forehead. Matthew helps us understand exactly what is happening. Matthew 19:13: *“Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray.”* This is not playtime; it’s pray-time. This is not sentimental. This is ceremonial. This is desperation. This is not works-salvation. This is not these parents thinking that their children are automatically saved, but this is these parents committing their children to Jesus to bless them and to pray for them, and what prayers Jesus prays are always answered by the Father. He lays His hands on them. They are different than the little heathen of pagans. Jesus embraces them. And by the way, there could have been gentiles present, and if there were, they were believers. And I picture the Jewish parents leading the way, these gentile believing parents following, “Oh, this is what you’re supposed to do? We’re supposed to expect that our children are also part of these salvation blessings?” And the Jewish parents say, “Yes, this is the way that it’s been since father Abraham.” Jesus is the root, and He is holy. So also the branches, right? First Corinthians 7:14 is clear about that. First Corinthians 7:14, turn over there, a passage of the new covenant. Verse 14: *“For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife [whose is a believer], and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband [who is a believer]. Otherwise,”* Paul says, *“your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.”*

Now, what makes them holy? What makes them clean? The fact that only one of their parents isn’t a pagan because if both were pagans, they’d be unclean. If both parents were pagan, they would not be holy. They would not be blessed, sanctified, set apart, illustrated by what Jesus does with these children in Mark chapter 10. Now, turn over with me to Genesis chapter 17. We looked at Genesis chapter 17 many weeks ago. Hopefully, you didn’t forget what was there. Verse 7: *“And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your”* what? *“offspring after you throughout their generations for”* a what? *“an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.”* Let me ask you a question. If you are a believer, do you have everlasting life? Are you part of the everlasting covenant? Well, what Genesis 17:7 is saying is that generations after you also belong to the that covenant. And verse 12:

He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised.

You say, “Well that was the days of Abraham, but surely those covenantal promises, God didn’t really mean everything He said, did He?” Well, when Israel used to sing in their worship, they sang about this all the time. Psalm 103:17: *“But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children’s children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.”* This is not automatic salvation. These children received the blessings and the privileges of being part of the covenant, sanctified, set apart, and holy; but they also have to keep the covenant, and they only way they’re going to keep

the covenant is if the Spirit of God indwells them. If they’re truly saved, they will obey God. But the blessings “*from everlasting to everlasting*,” the blessings of the covenant are “*on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children’s children*,” Psalm 103:17. And just two chapters later, Psalm 105:6:

O offspring of Abraham, his servant, children of Jacob, his chosen ones! He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant.

There is no way that the promises and the covenant God made with Abraham can be overturned just because we live in the days of the new covenant. A teaching opportunity for these covenant parents, isn’t it, that brought their children to Jesus to be blessed by Him and prayed over because some day they would say, “Son, daughter, when you were a baby, we brought you to Jesus. He embraced you in His arms. We pointed your face toward His face, and now we’re urging you to continue to keep your face toward Jesus. Do not spurn the covenant privileges given to you but look to Christ as Lord and Savior.” This whole scene is so theologically important that it was predicted. Isaiah the prophet predicted this very scene. Isaiah 40:11: “*He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.*” The people of God make up the sheep of God, and sheep have little lambs. When we commit our children to God, He picks up these little lambs in His arms and by His power and according to His providence and His pity, He has grace on them so that we can expect them to come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a measure of God’s Spirit being poured out on these children. That’s what’s happening.

Ancient blessings, as you well know, came through the laying on of hands by the heads of households to their sons, and usually what they were blessing them with involved hereditary blessings, sometimes in the form of property but always in the form of an inheritance. Jesus blesses these children with the promise of receiving the faith passed on to them by their parents to receive a spiritual inheritance. You say, “Wait a second. That inheritance could be forfeited.” Sure, it could be forfeited, just like the prodigal son forfeited his inheritance, who later came to a saving knowledge of Christ as illustrated in the parable. The point is not bringing your children to Jesus automatically saves them. The point is that within the covenantal framework, we are to lift our children up to Jesus in prayer. We are to commit them to God. We are to raise them “*in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*” We are to expect that through the regenerating work of the poured-out Spirit of God, they will receive the spiritual inheritance that we have received. We are the sheep; they’re the little lambs. Jesus is not going to put a stiff arm to the little lambs. He’s going to embrace them.

Generally, going back to that statement—skip back up to it in Mark chapter 10—that statement in verse 14: “*For to such belongs the kingdom of God,*” let me just say this. Generally speaking, this means all children that die in infancy or early childhood enter heaven. These children “*for to such belongs the kingdom of God.*” There is a general tenderness and love that God has for young children and infants. In fact, Job said, “I would rather be stillborn or had been a miscarriage of my mother than to be born in this world and suffer everything I’ve suffered.” Why would he say that? Well, because Job understood that a child that’s been miscarried, a stillborn baby, automatically

enters heaven, automatically enters glory and doesn't have to suffer on this earth. I think you can take from this passage that all parents can have the biblical comfort that if they've had a miscarriage or the death of a young child, they are in the kingdom of God. Calvin taught that; and in fact, B. B. Warfield uses this as an argument to show the consistency of Calvinism. He says this and I quote:

Salvation is wrought by an unconditional application of the grace of Christ [to dying infants] to their souls, through the immediate and irresistible operation of the Holy Spirit prior to and apart from any action of their own proper wills...And if death in infancy does depend on God's providence, it is assuredly God in His providence who selects this vast multitude to be made participants of His unconditional salvation...This is but to say that they are unconditionally predestinated to salvation from the foundation of the world. If only a single infant dying in irresponsible infancy be saved, the whole Arminian principle is traversed. If all infants dying such are saved, not only the majority of the saved, but doubtless the majority of the human race hitherto, have entered into life by a non-Arminian pathway.

Jesus says, “*For to such belongs the kingdom of God.*” By application, I think this passage would teach that infants and young children that die enter heaven, but specifically—and this is the point—this passage is teaching that children of the covenant, children of believing parents are members of the visible church. They are members of the covenant. How else do you understand Jesus' words that “*for to such belongs the kingdom of God*”? How could He say that if they are not members? He said it because they are. He said it because they are. He viewed children of believers to be unlike children of pagans. They received the overflow of the privileges, the benefits of hearing the gospel preached, the example of faithful parents, being raised “*in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*” That is something that pagan children don't have the example of. They are outside of the orbit of the covenantal blessings of God. And so, as we read this passage and understand this passage, we can go in one of two directions. We can say that children of believing parents are not part of the covenant. Where does that leave them? That leaves them outside of God's blessings. It leaves them outside of God's promises. It leaves them outside of the gospel you say you believe. If you believe the gospel, then you need to believe the promises that are attached to the gospel that God generationally and successively blesses the children of believing parents most of the time with salvation—all the time with privileges and blessings—most of the time with salvation.

Now, just for fun, let me point this out. Skip back to verse 14, and then I'll wrap this up. “*Let the children come to me,*” Jesus says, “*do not hinder them.*” That phrase, “*do not hinder,*” the Greek that is used there is used three times in the book of Acts and one time in Matthew's Gospel—listen to this—to refer to this: “*What prevents me from being baptized?*” Ethiopian eunuch. That was Acts 8:36. Acts 10:47, Acts 11:17 also, and then Matthew 3:14, John's baptism of Jesus—same word. “*What hinders me from being baptized?*” That has led the early church, and I'm talking about first and second century, to argue for infant baptism based on this passage and that Greek word usage. It is true that literal children are brought to Jesus, and Jesus said, “*Do not hinder*” literal children from coming to me, but the passage does not explicitly command infant baptism. What I do however think the passage teaches is this. This is another line of evidence to support the practice of infant baptism because the seeds of the theology of covenantal infant baptism are contained right here. What is the argument? The sign of the old covenant is circumcision. The sign of the new covenant is baptism. The children of believing Israelites were included in the covenant. The sign was applied to them before they professed faith. In the new covenant, baptism has

replaced circumcision, but you have all of the promises to believing parents that their children are members of that covenant. So, the question becomes, “Why is the sign not applied to them?” It’s a logical argument. It’s what Calvin argues. He says this, and I quote:

It is unreasonable that children should be deprived of the outward sign of baptism. It is presumption to drive far away from the fold of Christ those whom he cherishes in his bosom and to shut the door and exclude as strangers those whom he does not wish to be forbidden to come to him.

There are two types of presumption. One is presuming our children are automatically saved. You know what that is? Baptismal regeneration. It is a heresy, and if you believe that you don’t believe the Bible. To presume that your children are automatically saved is actually a sin because it’s not believing what the Bible teaches. But there is another presumption, and that is to deduce, “My children aren’t saved and won’t be saved.” If you’re a believer, you should expect your children to be saved, and maybe you’ll even decide to baptize them as a ceremony of sorts to commit them to Jesus. Was that what Peter was saying when he said in Acts, “*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children*”? The promise that if you repent and be baptized, the promise that the sign of baptism points to the salvation of God. The argument that says, and I’ve heard this, that if ever infant baptism could be argued for, it would be argued for from this passage if Jesus would’ve only had water present in the house.

Let’s think about this for a minute. He inaugurated the new covenant, right? What was the sign of the new covenant? The pouring forth of the Spirit of God. And what is the sign of that Spirit? It is water. We are not to Acts 2 yet. Jesus has not even been crucified. Jesus has not resurrected. Jesus hasn’t ascended. Jesus hasn’t poured forth the Spirit. The sign has not changed yet. There is a progression. He has inaugurated the new covenant. He has included the children, and eventually and gradually, baptism would replace circumcision. By AD 70, Christian parents, Christian Jewish parents, would stop circumcising their children and baptizing them, and would only baptize them. Very early in church history, baptizing their infants. So, it’s a strawman argument to say that if infant baptism were taught in Scripture, it would be taught here if Jesus had water. He doesn’t have to have water. He does everything but apply water that you would do in a covenantal infant baptism ceremony, and the parents understood this as a natural thing. Jesus sustains their actions. He officially administers this ceremony and this rite so that, I believe, the seeds of the theology of covenantal infant baptism are all present in this passage. And yet, I would also say this. The most important application of this passage, whether you baptize your infant or not or young child, is at a minimum to recognize that your children are members of the covenant, and they are members of the covenant in this way.

On the one hand, do not presume your children are automatically saved but on the other hand, do not presume your children aren’t members of the covenant—listen to this—until they prove otherwise. And how do they prove otherwise? No faith, no obedience, no life yielded up to God. Those are two different ways to view your children, and our goal is to have the most biblical way. We don’t presume salvation, but we do presume they are members of the covenant, and we presume they’re members of the covenant until they prove otherwise; and whether or not you baptize your infant or young child is up to you. What are your convictions telling you as you study Scripture, as you study the lines of evidence of the inclusion of children as members of the

covenant? For many of us, that will mean bringing the babies, bringing the infants, and doing in principle exactly what Jesus did on this very day in Mark chapter 10. Let us pray.

Father, we thank You for, again, Your Scriptures. They’re pure, they’re holy, they’re clear, they’re helpful even in a brief passage, a brief episode in the life of our Lord. Lord, there are seeds of theology that help us understand so much about Your covenant, so much about the place of our children within the covenant. So, we thank You for that. Lord, we pray that You would give us wisdom to apply it the way it needs to be applied in a most excellent way according to Your Scriptures. Our time has been long, and yet now we still have the blessed privilege of partaking of the Lord’s Supper, the other sacrament of the church other than baptism, and so we pray You would bless our time as we have sat under the preaching of Your Word, that our hearts might be prepared to receive this sacrament. We pray and ask all of these things in the blessed name of Christ, our Savior, we pray. Amen.