

FORBID THEM NOT

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Independence, Missouri

Sunday, June 12, 1955
8:30 a.m. KMBC & KFRM
Kansas City, Missouri
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SCRIPTURE: Mark 10:13-16

And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. 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. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.

Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 19:14)

Everybody loves a baby. From time immemorial the infant has been a symbol of helpless innocence and purity. In all civilized societies, and in many uncivilized as well the child is deemed more important than the adult, and every effort is made to save the life of a child, even at the expense of an adult life. Every good man instinctively loves and protects a small child. If God is the pinnacle of all that we consider good in man, does it not then stand to reason that God loves little children infinitely more than we ever can?

Yet a very large segment of Christianity believes that unbaptized infants can never enter heaven, or behold the face of God, because they die with the stain of original sin, or the sin of Adam, still upon them. The theology of those who thus believe teaches that guilt for Adam's sin is shared by the entire human race -- that "In Adam's fall we sinn-ed all." Guilt demands punishment; and therefore, according to this school of theology, even an infant who was utterly irresponsible and incapable of any personal sin when he died must still suffer the penalty for Adam's sin.

What did Jesus have to say about little children? He made a little child the model or type or example to which all men must conform if they would enter the kingdom of God. He said that if any man offended one of these little ones, it would be better for him to have a millstone tied about his neck, and for him to be cast into the sea.

He said, "Forbid them not to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." He said, "Their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." There is no hint in any of Jesus' teachings that little children who die in innocent infancy will be denied the full privileges of their Father's heavenly kingdom. So far as the scriptural record shows, Jesus never baptized an infant, never said that they needed baptism, and never instructed his disciples to baptize them. Baptism is for remission of sins, and little children are without sin.

We look for and expect to find in God all the best qualities that we find in men, raised to the Nth degree. If God is less merciful, less kind, less just, less righteous than the best man who ever lived, he is not God; he is not worthy of our worship or our respect. Can you imagine any man who called himself just, finding a baby guilty of a crime his father or some remote ancestor did, and punishing him for it? How could God be just, and dispense that kind of justice? God's law makes every man accountable for his own sins, and not for the sins of any other. This principle is plainly stated in many scriptures, but an excellent summation of it is to be found in Ezekiel 18:20: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."

Here perhaps we need to define our terms. There is a difference between deserved punishment for the guilt of sin, and undeserved consequences that come as the result of another's sin. If a man holds up a bank, he is guilty, and his punishment is a term in the penitentiary. The son of the criminal is not guilty; he is not punished for guilt; he does not serve time in the penitentiary, but he does suffer from the inevitable consequences of his father's sin. He is denied his father's companionship, love and protection, as well as his financial support. He bears the social stigma of being the child of a criminal. He will be closely and suspiciously watched by those members of society who believe in the saying, "Like father, like son." All these things are consequences of his father's sin, but they are not punishment for guilt. No one would say that they are just or equitable or deserved. They constitute one of the most damnable aspects of sin, namely, that sin always brings the suffering of undeserved consequences upon the innocent, even as it brings the suffering of just punishment upon the guilty.

Men are not born into the world under a weight of guilt for Adam's sin. No one is guilty of Adam's sin save Adam. But we have inherited from our ancestors an evil nature and a tendency to sin. We are born into a world which is cursed by the presence of sinful men, into an environment which makes sin natural, desirable, and appealing. Because of these inescapable consequences of Adam's fall, we sin; and having sinned, we too must suffer punishment, not for Adam's sin, but for our personal guilt.

It was precisely because a God of justice could not stand idly by and see all the descendants of Adam suffer unjustly from the consequences of Adam's fall, that he sent his Son into the world. Jesus came to cancel and lift the consequences of Adam's sin for the whole human race. If he had not come, our separation of spirit and body would have been permanent; our separation from God would have been eternal as well. Jesus was both human and divine. Because he was human, he partook of the inherited human consequences, but not the guilt, of sin. Because he was without sin -- because he had no guilt -- death had no

claim on him; but he suffered death voluntarily on the cross in order that by the power of his resurrection he might take away the curse of Adam's sin. This means that every man born of Adam's line shall some day have body and spirit brought together again in the resurrection of the body, by the power of Christ's atonement and resurrection. Then that resurrected body shall be restored to God's presence for judgment. Thus Jesus overcomes death, and cancels the consequences of Adam's transgression. And, we should hasten to add, whether any man remains in God's presences after his resurrection depends on his acceptance of Christ and his atonement, on his repentance from sin, and on the deeds done in the body during the time of his earthly probation, and on the degree of his understanding of God's will. Many rebellious souls who are restored to God's presence by the resurrection will flee from that presence because of their guilty fears, to spend eternity amidst the fires of remorse and bitter regret.

By Christ's atonement, the curse of Adam is lifted from the entire human race. The body of the redeemed must still die, in order that a new body might live -- in order that spirit and body, inseparably united, might receive a fullness of joy in God's presence. But little children, who die before they know good from evil, or have power to choose, are alive in Christ, who cancels for them the consequences of Adam's sin, and restores them in their innocence to the presence of God. Where there is no knowledge of sin, or no intent of sinning, there is no guilt; and God does not punish innocence. Surely the Christ who prayed for his executioners, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," would not condemn or banish a helpless and innocent infant because he had been born to spiritually ignorant parents, or because they neglected to have him baptized for the remission of sins he never could have committed, and for which he is not responsible.

There is no scriptural record that Jesus ever baptized infants. We are told that he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. Let none forbid the little children to come into the presence of God in their innocence. "Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Little children are redeemed from the fall, from the sin of Adam. They are alive in Christ. They are innocent of any sin, or of any guilt for sin, and "their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."