

Children Brought To Christ, Not To The Font

A Sermon by Charles Spurgeon

"And they brought young children unto 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." Mark 10:13-16

My attention has been specially directed to this passage by the fact that it has been quoted against me by most of the authors of those sermons and letters which are, by a stretch of imagination, called "replies" to my sermon upon "Baptismal Regeneration." Replies they certainly are not, except to one another. I marvel that a Church so learned as the Anglican cannot produce something a little more worthy of the point in hand. The various authors may possibly have read my discourse, but by reason of mental absorption in other meditations, or perhaps through the natural disturbance of mind caused by guilty consciences, they have talked with confusion of words, and have only been successful in refuting themselves and answering one another. They must have been aiming at something far removed from my sermon, or else I must give them credit for being the worst shots that ever practised with polemical artillery. They do not so much as touch the target in its extreme corners, much less in its centre. The whole question is, Do you believe that baptism regenerates? If so, prove that your belief is scriptural! Do you believe that baptism does not regenerate? Then justify your swearing that it does not. Who will reply to this? He shall merit and bear the palm.

The scripture before us is by several of the champions on the other side exhibited to the people as a rebuke to me. Their reasoning is rather ingenious than forcible: forsooth, because the disciples incurred the displeasure of Jesus Christ by keeping back the little children from coming to *him*, therefore Jesus Christ is greatly displeased with me, and with all others like me, for keeping children from *the font* and the performance there enacted; and specially displeased with me for exposing the Anglican doctrine of baptismal regeneration! Observe the reasoning,-- because Jesus was much displeased with the disciples for hindering parents from seeking a blessing upon their children, therefore he is much displeased with us who do not believe in godfathers and godmothers, or the signing of the cross on the infant brow. I must say at the outset that this is rather a leap of argument and would not ordinarily be thought conclusive; but this we may readily overlook, since we have long ceased to hope for reasonable arguments from those who support a cause based upon absurdity.

My brethren, I concluded that there must be something forcible in such a text as this, or my opponents would not be so eager to secure it. I have therefore carefully looked at it, and, as I have viewed it, it has opened up to me with a sacred splendor of grace. In this incident the very heart of Christ is published to poor sinners, and we may clearly perceive the freeness and the fulness of the mighty grace of the Redeemer of men, who is willing to receive the youngest child

as well as the oldest man, and is greatly displeased with any who would keep back seeking souls from coming to him or loving hearts from bringing others to receive his blessing.

- I. In handling this text, in what I believe to be its true light, I shall commence, first of all, by observing that THIS TEXT HAS NOT THE SHADOW OF THE SHADE OF THE GHOST OF A CONNECTION WITH BAPTISM. There is no line of connection so substantial as a spider's web between this incident and baptism, or at least my imagination is not vivid enough to conceive one. This I will prove to you, if you will follow me for a moment.

It is very clear, dear friends, that *these young children were not brought to Jesus Christ by their friends to be baptized*. "They brought young children to him, that he should touch them," says Mark. Matthew describes the children as being brought, "that he would put his hands on them and pray;" but there is not a hint about their being baptized: no godfathers or godmothers had been provided, and no sign of the cross was requested. Surely the parents themselves knew tolerably well what it was they desired, and they would not have expressed themselves so dubiously as to ask him to touch them, when they meant that he should baptize them. The parents evidently had no thought of regeneration by baptism and brought the children for quite another end.

In the next place, *if they brought the children to Jesus Christ to be baptized, they brought them to the wrong person*; for the Evangelist John, in the fourth chapter and the second verse, expressly assures us that Jesus Christ baptized not, but his disciples. This settles the question, once for all, and proves beyond all dispute that there is no connection between this incident and baptism.

But you will say, "*Perhaps they brought the children to be baptized by the disciples?*" Brethren, the disciples were not in the habit of baptizing infants, and this is clear from the case in hand. If they had been in the habit of baptizing infants, would they have rebuked the parents for bringing them? If it had been a customary thing for parents to bring children with such an object, would the disciples, who had been in the constant habit of performing the ceremony, have rebuked them for attending to it? Would any Church clergyman rebuke parents for bringing their children to be baptized? If he did so, he would act absurdly contrary to his own views and practice; and we cannot therefore imagine that if infant baptism had been the accepted practice, the disciples could have acted so absurdly as to rebuke the parents for bringing their little ones. It is obvious that such could not have been the practice of the disciples who were rebuked.

Moreover, and here is an argument which seems to me to have great force in it, *when Jesus Christ rebuked his disciples, then was the time, if ever in his life, to have openly spoken concerning infant baptism, godfathers and godmothers, and the whole affair*. If he wished to rebuke his disciples most effectually, how could he have done it better than by saying, "Wherefore keep ye these children back? I have ordained that they shall be baptized; I have expressly commanded that they shall be regenerated and made members of my body in baptism. How dare you, then, in opposition to my will, keep them back?" But no, dear friends, our Saviour never said a word about "the laver of regeneration" or "the quickening dew" when he rebuked them--not a single sentence. Had he done so, the season would have been most appropriate if it had been his intention to teach the practice. In the whole of his life, there is no

period in which a discourse upon infant regeneration in baptism could have been more appropriate than on this occasion; and yet not a single sentence about it comes from the Saviour's lips.

To close all, *Jesus Christ did not baptize the children*. Our evangelist does not inform us that he exclaimed, "Where are the godfathers and godmothers?" It is not recorded that he called for a font or a Prayer-Book. No, but "He took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them," and dismissed them without a drop of the purifying element. Now, if this event had any connection with baptism whatever, it was the most appropriate occasion for infant baptism to have been practised. Why, it would have ended forever the controversy. There may be some men in the world who would have raised the question of engrafting infants into the body of Christ's church by baptism after all this, but I am certain no honest man would have done so who reverently accepted Christ as his spiritual leader. I, my brethren, would sooner be dumb than speak a single word against an ordinance which Christ himself instituted and practised; and if on this occasion he had but sprinkled one of these infants, given him a Christian name, signed him with a cross, accepted the vows of his godparents, and thanked God for his regeneration, then the question would have been settled forever, and some of us would have been saved a world of abuse, besides escaping no end of mistakes, for which we are condemned in the judgment of many good people for whom we have some affection, though for their judgment we have no respect.

So you see the parents did not ask baptismal regeneration; Christ did not personally baptize; the disciples were not in the habit of baptizing infants, or else they would not have rebuked the parents; Christ did not speak about baptism on the occasion, and he did not baptize the little ones.

I will put a case to you which may exhibit the weakness of my opponents' position. Suppose a denomination should rise up which should teach that babes should be allowed to partake at the Lord's Table. Such teaching could plead precedents of great antiquity, for you are aware that at one period infant communion was allowed, and logically too; for if an infant has a right to baptism, it has a right to come to the Lord's Table. For years children were brought to the Lord's Table, but rather inconvenient accidents occurred, and therefore the thing was dropped as being unseemly. But if some one should revive the error and try to prove that infants are to come to the Lord's Supper, he might prove it from this passage quite as clearly as our friends can prove infant baptism from it. Moreover, do not forget that even if infant baptism could be proved from this text, the ceremony prescribed in the Prayer-Book is quite as far from being established. Whether the baptism of infants may or may not be proved from other Scriptures, I cannot now stay to inquire; but even if it can be, what are we to say for godfathers or godmothers, or the assertion that in baptism children are made "members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven?" Truly I might as well prove vaccination from the text before me, as the performance which the Prayer-Book calls "infant baptism." I do not hesitate to say that I could prove any earthly thing, if I might but have such reasoning granted to me as that which proves infant baptism from this passage. There is no possible connection between the two. The teaching of the passage is very plain and very clear, and baptism has been imported into it and not found in it. As a quaint writer has well said, "These doctrines are raised from the text as our collectors raise a tax upon indigent, nonsolvent people, by coming armed

with the law and a constable to distraint for that which is not to be had. Certainly never was text so strained and distrainted to pay what it never owed; never man so racked to confess what he never thought; never was a pumice-stone so squeezed for water which it never held." Still hundreds will catch at this straw, and cry, "Did not Jesus say, 'Suffer the little children to come unto me?'" To these we give this one word, See that ye read the word as it is written, and you will find no water in it, but Jesus only. Are the water and Christ the same thing? Is bringing a child to a font bringing the child to Christ? Nay, here is a wide difference, as wide as between Rome and Jerusalem, as wide as between antichrist and Christ, between false doctrine and the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

II. Now for our second, and much more pleasing task, WHY, THEN, WAS JESUS CHRIST DISPLEASED?

Read the passage, and at once the answer comes to you. He was displeased with his disciples for two reasons: first, *because they discouraged those who would bring others to him*; and secondly, *because they discouraged those who themselves were anxious to come to him*. They did not discourage those who were coming to a font, they discouraged those who were coming to Jesus. There is a mighty distinction ever to be held between the font and Christ, between the sprinkling of the priest and living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, *his disciples discouraged those who would bring others to him*. This is a great sin, and wherever it is committed Jesus Christ is greatly displeased; for a true desire to see others saved is wrought in the believer by God the Holy Spirit, who thus renders one of the chosen the means of bringing wandering sheep into the fold. In this case they discouraged those who would bring *children* to him to be blessed.

How can we bring children to Jesus Christ to be blessed? We cannot do it in a corporeal sense, for Jesus is not here, "he is risen;" but we can bring our children in a true, real, and spiritual sense. We take them up in the arms of our *prayer*. I hope many of us, so soon as our children saw the light, if not before, presented them to God with this anxious prayer, that they might sooner die than live to disgrace their father's God. We only desired children that we might in them live over again another life of service to God; and when we looked into their young faces, we never asked wealth for them, nor fame, nor anything else, but that they might be dear unto God, and that their names might be written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

We did then bring our children to Christ, as far as we could do it, by presenting them before God, by earnest prayer on their behalf. And have we ceased to bring them to Christ? Nay, I hope we seldom bow the knee without praying for our children. Our daily cry is, "Oh that they might live before thee!" God knows that nothing would give us more joy than to see evidence of their conversion. Our souls would almost leap out of our bodies with joy if we should but know that they were the children of the living God. Nor has this privilege been denied to us, for there are some here who can rejoice in a converted household. Truly we can say with the Apostle Paul, "I have no greater joy than this, that my children walk in the truth." We continue, therefore, to bring them to Christ by daily, constant, earnest prayer on their behalf. So soon as they become of years capable of understanding the things of God, we endeavor to bring them to Christ by *teaching them the truth*. Hence our Sabbath-schools, hence the use of the

Bible, and family prayer, and catechising at home. Any person who shall forbid us to pray for our children, will incur Christ's high displeasure; and any who shall say, "Do not teach your children; they will be converted in God's own time, if it be his purpose; therefore leave them to run wild in the streets," will certainly both "sin against the child" and the Lord Jesus. We might as well say, "If that piece of ground is to grow a harvest, it will do so if it be God's good pleasure; therefore leave it, and let the weeds spring up and cover it. Do not endeavor for a moment to kill the weeds, or sow the good seed." Why, such reasoning as this would be not only cruel to our children, but grievously displeasing to Christ.

Parents, I do hope you are all endeavoring to bring your children to Christ by teaching them the things of God. Let them not be strangers to the plan of salvation. Never let it be said that a child of yours reached years in which his conscience could act and he could judge between good and evil, without knowing the doctrine of the atonement, without understanding the great substitutionary work of Christ. Set before your child life and death, hell and heaven, judgment and mercy, his own sin, and Christ's most precious blood. As you set these before him, labor with him, persuade him, as the apostle did his congregation, with tears and weeping, to turn unto the Lord; and your prayers and supplications shall be heard, so that the Spirit of God shall bring them to Jesus. How much more like the Scripture will such labors be than if you were to sing the following very pretty verse which disfigures Roundell Palmer's "Book of Praise!"--

"Though thy conception was in sin,
A sacred bathing thou has had;
And though thy birth unclean has been,
A blameless babe thou now art made.
Sweet baby, then forbear to weep;
Be still my dear, sweet baby, sleep."

I cannot tell you how much I owe to the solemn words of my good mother. It was the custom on Sunday evenings, while we were yet little children, for her to stay at home with us and then we sat round the table and read verse by verse, and she explained the Scripture to us. After that was done, then came the time of pleading. There was a little piece of "Alleyn's Alarm," or of "Baxter's Call to the Unconverted," and this was read with pointed observations made to each of us as we sat round the table. The question was asked how long it would be before we would think about our state, how long before we would seek the Lord. Then came a mother's prayer, and some of the words of a mother's prayer we shall never forget, even when our hair is gray. I remember on one occasion her praying thus: "Now, Lord, if my children go on in their sins, it will not be from ignorance that they perish, and my soul must bear a swift witness against them at the day of Judgment, if they lay not hold of Christ." That thought of a mother's bearing swift witness against me, pierced my conscience and stirred by heart. This pleading with them for God and with God for them is the true way to bring children to Christ.

A second ground of displeasure must be noticed. These children, it strikes me, and I think there is good reason for the belief, themselves desired to come to Christ to obtain a blessing. They are called "little children," which term does not necessarily involve their being infants of six months or a year. Indeed, it is clear, as I will show in a moment, that they were not such little children as to be unconscious babes. They were "infants," according to our version of

Luke; but then you know the English word "infant" includes a considerable range of age, for every person in his minority is legally considered to be an infant, though he may be able to talk to any amount. We do not, however, desire to translate the text with so great a license. There is no necessity in the language used that these should have been anything but what they are said to be--"little children." It is evident they could walk, because in Luke it is said, "Jesus called *them*;" the gender of the Greek pronoun used there refers it to the children, not to the persons, not to the disciples. Jesus called them, he called the children, which he would hardly have done if they could not comprehend his call, and he said, "Suffer the little children to come," which implies that they could come, and doubtless they did come with cheerful faces expecting to get the blessing. These perhaps may have been some of those very children who, a short time after, pulled down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way, and cried, "Hosanna," when the Saviour said, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength."

Now Christ was greatly displeased with his disciples for pushing back these boys and girls. They did as some old folks do now-a-days, who cry out--"Stand back, you boys and girls! We do not want you here. We do not want children to fill up the place. We only want grown-up people." They pushed them back. They thought that Christ would have too much to do if he attended to the juveniles. Here comes out this principle, that we must expect Christ's displeasure if we attempt to keep anybody back from coming to Christ, even though it be the youngest child.

You ask how persons can come to Christ now? They cannot come corporeally, but they can come by simple prayer and humble faith. Faith is the way to Jesus; baptism is not. When Jesus says, "Come *unto me* all ye that labor and are heavy laden," he did not mean "be baptized", did he? No; and so when he said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me," he did not mean, "Baptize them," did he? Coming to Jesus Christ is quite a different thing from coming to a font. Coming to Christ means laying hold upon Christ with the hand of faith; looking to him for my life, my pardon, my salvation, my everything.

The font is a mockery and an imposition if it be put before Christ. If you have baptism after you have come to Christ, well and good; but to point you to it either as being Christ, or as being inevitably connected with Christ, or as being the place to find Christ, is nothing better than to go back to the beggarly elements of the old Romish harlot instead of standing in the "liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free," and bidding the sinner to come as a sinner to Christ Jesus, and to Christ Jesus alone.

III. In the third and last place, let us also gather from our text that **WHEN WE DISCOURAGE ANY, WE ALWAYS GO UPON WRONG GROUNDS**. Here was the case of children. I suppose that the grounds upon which the apostles kept back the children would be one of these--either that the children could not receive a blessing, or else that they could not receive it worthily.

Did they imagine that these little children could not receive the blessing? Perhaps so, for they thought them too young. Now, brethren, that was a wrong ground to go upon, for these children could receive the blessing, and they did receive it, for Jesus took them in his arms and blessed them. If I keep back a child from coming to Christ on the ground that he is too young, I do it in the face of facts, because there have been children brought to Christ at an extremely early

period. You who are acquainted with Janeway's "*Tokens for Children*" have noticed very many beautiful instances of early conversion. Our dear friend Mrs. Rogers, in that book of hers, "*The Folded Lamb*," gave a sweet picture of a little son of hers, soon folded in the Saviour's bosom above, who, as early as two or three years of age, rejoiced and knew the Saviour.

The fact is that we do not all at the same age arrive at that degree of mental stature which is necessary for understanding the things of God. Children have been reported as reading Latin, Greek, and other languages at five or six years of age. I do not know that such early scholarship is any great blessing; it is better not to reach that point so soon. But some children are all that their minds ever will be at three or four, and then they go home to heaven. And so long as the mind has been brought up to such a condition that it is capable of understanding, it is also capable of faith, if the Holy Spirit shall implant it. To suppose that he ever did give faith to an unconscious babe is ridiculous. That there can be any faith in a child that knows nothing whatever I must always take ground to doubt, for "How shall they believe without a preacher?"

Children are capable, then, of receiving the grace of God. Do mark, by the way, that all those champions who have come out against me so valiantly, have made a mistake. They have said that we deny that little infants may be regenerated. We do not deny that God can regenerate them if he pleases. We do not know anything about what may or may not happen to unconscious babes; but we did say that little children were not regenerated by their godparents telling lies at a font. We did say, as we say it again, that little children are not regenerated, nor made members of Christ, nor children of God, nor inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, by a solemn mockery in which godfathers and godmothers promise to do for them what they cannot do for themselves, much less for their children.

The other ground upon which the apostles put back the children would be, that although the children might receive the blessing, *they might not be able to receive it worthily*. The Lord Jesus, in effect, assures them that so far from the way in which a little child enters into the kingdom of heaven being exceptional, it is the rule. The very way in which a child enters the kingdom is the way in which everybody must enter it.

How does a child enter the kingdom of heaven? Why, its faith is very simple. It does not understand mysteries and controversies, but it believes what it is told upon the authority of God's Word, and it comes to God's Word without previous prejudice. It has its natural sinfulness, but grace overcomes it, and the child receives the Word as it finds it.

You will notice in boyish and girlish conversions a peculiar simplicity of belief. They believe just what Christ says, exactly what he says. If they pray, they believe Christ will hear them. If they talk about Jesus, it is as of a person near at hand. They do not, as we do, get into the making of these things into mysteries and shadows; but little children have a realizing power. Why, see the joy of a child that finds a Saviour! I have noticed about them that they have greater joy and rejoicing than any others, and I take it that it is because they do not ask so many questions as others do, but take Jesus Christ's word as they find it and believe in it.

Well, now, just the very way in which a child receives Christ is the way in which you must receive Christ if you would be saved. You who know so much that you know *too* much--

you who have big brains--you who are always thinking and have a tendency to criticism and perhaps to scepticism--you must come and receive the gospel as a little child. You will never get a hold of my Lord and Master while you are wearing that quizzing-cap. No, you must take it off and by the power of the Holy Spirit you must come trusting Jesus, simply trusting him; for this is the right way to receive the kingdom.

Is there in your soul any desire toward him? Come and welcome, sinner, come. Do you feel now that you must have Christ or die? Come and have him; he is to be had for the asking. Has the Lord taught you your need of Jesus? You thirsty ones, come and drink. You hungry ones, come and eat. "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." If you come to him, he will by no means cast you out.