

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expositional Study of **The Gospel According to Luke**

Chapter 18- Luke 18:15-17

290- Permit the Children to Come to Me

September 20, 2015

Luke 18:15-17

15 And they were bringing even their babies to Him so that He would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they *began* rebuking them.

16 But Jesus called for them, saying, "**Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.**

17 **"Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*."**

To the Glory of God

God loves children. And God has *always* loved children and so should we. There is something seriously wrong with somebody who does not love children. And truly there is something evil in us when children are not safe. And the best and the safest place in all the Universe for children to be- is in the Presence of God. And so the main point that I desire to bring to you this morning is this:

We should remove all hindrances that keep children from coming to Jesus.

The disciples of Jesus hindered the children and Jesus rebuked them, and He invited the children. And so the Lesson here is crystal clear:

We should remove all hindrances that keep children from coming to Jesus.

And to apply this Teaching to our own situation- some 20 Centuries after Dr. Luke recorded this moment- I would like to spell out five hindrances that we should try to remove from our children at The Covenant of Peace Church and the children in our neighborhoods. The first one comes directly from the Passage that Brother Andy just read to you, and the other four are based on our experience together in the ministry to children at home and in church.

1. Pride

Now the correct context of these three verses is that they form the ending of what Jesus began back in verse 1. All that Jesus is teaching in this entire Chapter is about the great danger of pride. Pride is what consumed the unrighteous judge in verses 1-8. Pride is what hindered the Pharisee in verses 9-14. Pride is what will keep the rich young ruler out of Heaven in verses 18-27, and Pride is what bothered Peter and the rest in verses 28-34. And now we see that pride is the first hindrance to children coming to Jesus.

In the Parable that we just finished last week- Jesus ended it with these words in verse 14:

Luke 18:14b

... for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

... where the word "humbled" has to do with condemned. So it is especially fitting that Luke should follow up that Parable with a story about children that ends with the words,

Luke 18:17b

... whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*."

Now these two sentences mean virtually the same thing. "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled," is the same as saying, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all."

And that means that "**Everyone who humbles himself will be exalted,**" is the same as saying, "**Everyone who receives the kingdom of God like a child will enter it.**" So the humility in view here is the Biblical "childlikeness" that is *required* of all who will enter into God's Kingdom.

And so it is very important to understand that this childlikeness- this humility- is not *optional*. It isn't that *some* of those who enter into God's Kingdom will be childlike, while *others*- who will enter in- are not. No, Jesus said if you are *not* childlike- you don't enter the Kingdom *at all*!

And if you don't enter into God's Kingdom at all- then that means that you are not saved at all. And so part of what it means to be saved is that we have this humble childlikeness in our lives. And those who are lost- do *not* have this. They manifest ongoing pride and arrogance and self-righteousness that keeps them from repenting and that keeps them from God's Kingdom.

And so Salvation brings to the believer- not merely the forgiveness of their sins and not merely the imputed Righteousness of Jesus Christ- but Salvation also brings to the believer a humble and broken childlikeness. So I would suggest to you that this humble childlikeness is part of the divine nature that is given to the believer by him being sovereignly born again. And it is proof that the believer has been granted new spiritual life and has been *re-created* after the similitude of Jesus Christ.

Now I want you to notice that what is being discussed here is Child*li*keness- not Child*ish*ness. In other words- what Jesus is saying here is that we must be "like" a child in the sense of trust and dependence- but not childish. Child*li*keness is associated with things like:

- ✓ Devotion to Jesus Christ
- ✓ Humble dependence on Jesus Christ
- ✓ An innate desire to please Jesus Christ
- ✓ Finding safety in Jesus Christ
- ✓ A deep and abiding love of Jesus Christ
- ✓ An enjoyment of Jesus Christ

.. while Child*ish*ness is associated with things like:

- ✓ Self-centeredness
- ✓ Self-confidence
- ✓ Pouting
- ✓ Throwing temper tantrums
- ✓ Unable to take responsibility

Child*li*keness proves that God is at work in the individual, while Child*ish*ness proves that the individual's relationship to Jesus Christ is distant at best and non-existent at worst.

But this story here in **Luke 18:15–17** has to do with more than adults who should be childlike in the way they receive the Kingdom. This Story also has to do with children who were being brought to Jesus for His Touch. So to see all that Jesus wants to teach us here, we need to find out how the children relate to the childlike- or not so childlike- adults.

Luke 18:15

And they were bringing even their babies to Him so that He would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they *began* rebuking them.

Now here in verse 15- there were parents bringing their babies to Jesus. And the disciples rebuked them. And Jesus rejects their rebuke and He goes *against* what His Own disciples were doing, and Jesus encourages the parents to bring their children to Him. So this is a public rebuke of His Own disciples.

Then in verses 16&17, as if to warn the disciples, Jesus says,

16 ... Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

17 Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*.

In other words, when Jesus sees a disciple hindering a child from coming to Him, He sees someone who is in danger of missing the Kingdom *themselves* because of pride.

So if you are receiving the Kingdom yourself like a little child, then you will not do *anything* to hinder little children from coming to Jesus. But if you are trying to enter the Kingdom by some *other* way

than by receiving it like a child- then you will be a hindrance to children. So if you are not childlike toward God *yourself*- then children will be beneath you and not worth your time.

So Jesus is saying here that there is a very close connection between our *own* humility and our ability to lead children to Jesus. So the great hindrance to effective ministry to children is pride. And the great gift for ministry to children is humility.

But there are many other hindrances that we put in the way of the children as they come to Jesus. Most of these are in some way or other the result of pride, even though they don't look like it on the surface. Let's mention some of them, and how we might work to remove them.

2. Parental Unbelief

After pride I would mention, secondly, the hindrance of *parental unbelief*. When a child's parents are not believers, the child is at an extraordinary disadvantage. There is no one at home to bring him to Jesus. We all know children who live in these tragic circumstances.

And there are two ways to remove this kind of hindrance. One is to try to reach the child and lead him to Jesus, even if the parents don't want to come along. What is so sad is that many parents are perfectly willing to let someone else take their children into the Presence of Jesus. And so if they will let us- we should do it.

But it would be far more effective for the child, and far more beneficial for the parents, if we could lead the *parents* into the Presence of Jesus at the same time. If it is true that the unbelief of the parents is the chief hindrance to the children- then the *best* way to remove the hindrance is to seek the conversion of the parents. So I hope you can see how closely related the ministry to children and the larger ministry of evangelism really is.

3. The Lack of Deep and Accurate Theology

A third hindrance that keeps children out of the Kingdom or weakens their usefulness in it- is *the lack of deep and accurate theology among the parents and teachers*.

It takes as much or more understanding of a Biblical Doctrine to teach it to children than it does to teach it to adults. If you understand a thing well, you can usually make it plain for ordinary people and children. But if you are fuzzy in your *own* understanding, you will generally be overly complex in your explanation. And all that does is confuse children.

A great hindrance to the Salvation and the growth of our children is the weakness of our *own* grasp of the full range of Biblical Truth and the amazing unity and cohesiveness of the Whole Counsel of God. I am overwhelmed at what children can absorb and retain when they are repeatedly and systematically and progressively instructed in the great Doctrines of the Bible.

And so I am convinced that children should be taught deep and profound Truths of God's Word. And that is why I have resisted so steadfastly any attempt at removing children from the Sanctuary during the Church Service. I am convinced that children learn more than most adults give them credit for. And so to simply allow children to come to Church to play is counterproductive to giving them what they need most of all and is hindering the children from coming to Jesus.

My wife and I raised our four living children in the Church. They sat with us. They sang the same songs and heard the same message that we did. When we laughed- they laughed. When we cried- they cried. When we prayed- they prayed. When we fasted- they fasted. We shared our troubles and our victories with our children. My children saw that I was wrong about some things. But they also heard me repent and saw me pray and ask forgiveness. My children walked with my wife and me through the death of our two children, and they suffered with us through hardship and persecutions. We didn't teach our children that Salvation gives you a better life down here- we taught them that Salvation gives you the best life over there. We didn't teach them that Jesus was a genie in a bottle that you could use to fulfill all your dreams, but that He was a Lilly in their valley and the Bright and Moring Star and the beautiful Rose of Sharon and the Fairest of ten thousands to my soul. So we did not hinder our children from coming to Jesus by shielding them from suffering.

I am also convinced that fathers should lead their families in Family Devotions during the week. The Christian Catechism that we go over every Sunday Morning is a great tool for Family Devotions that

will give your children a basic fundamental understanding of the ways of God.

Parents today are bombarded with information about saving up for college as education is stressed today more than ever before. And I am a great fan of education. There is no premium for ignorance and so I support being educated. I myself participate in ongoing education classes nearly every week.

But I do not believe that you have to sacrifice your children's souls on the altar of education. For parents to teach their children math and science and geography and not teach them Eternal Divine Truth borders on child abuse to me. God gave us our children and the development of their minds through good quality education is essential to their future- and I agree with that. But the parental responsibility does not end with readin', writin', and 'rithmetic. Parents are also tasked with the responsibility of teaching their children the Truth of God's Word. So do not hinder your children from coming to Jesus by being so caught up in providing their natural support and education that you forget their souls.

And the best way to remove this hindrance is to help all the adults of our Church get excited about the joy of knowing God and growing in their understanding of His Character and Ways. So we need to develop our own School of the Holy Bible to teach and train as many parents as are willing in the great Truths of Scripture and how to share them with their children.

4. The Lack of Disciplined Planning

A fourth hindrance to our children is *the lack of disciplined planning- especially in us parents.*

And what I have in mind is the fact that we often fail to teach our children- not just because we lack understanding of what needs to be taught- but because we do not take the time to plan to teach. You're not going to have Family Devotions if you don't plan on it. Just as it is true that nobody trips and falls into Holiness- so it is also true that nobody trips and falls into teaching children. It doesn't happen by itself. So if you don't plan to set aside time to engage your children with Divine Truth- it won't happen.

Fathers, it is your solemn duty to teach your children about the glorious Truths of Justification, Sanctification, Redemption, Regeneration, Adoption, Salvation, Reconciliation, Original Sin, the Deity of Jesus Christ, the Substitutionary Atonement, the Resurrection, the Second Coming, the Work of the Holy Spirit, the Nature and Importance of the Church, the joy of Sacrificial Giving, and the Inspiration and Authority of the Bible.

It is a great hindrance to our children that we do not sit down and plan a systematic presentation of these things to them during family devotions for a few minutes each day.

And the way to remove this hindrance is to cultivate a Church in which parents do not neglect their duty thinking that it is the responsibility of the Church to teach those things. Again, I urge you to get a copy of the Christian Catechism that has questions and answers and texts on all these important issues. And I beg you to push the other unimportant items out of the way so you can go over the Catechism with your children systematically at home.

5. Lack of Space

The importance of the fifth hindrance to our children will depend on your estimate of the value of Bible Study in the overall life of our Church. And the hindrance here is a *lack of space*.

If the ministry of Bible Study is crucial in the lives of our children (as well as our adults), we are reaching a point where the lack of space will be a significant hindrance to our children and the children who are yet to come.

The Building Committee- is gathering data now about a new Sanctuary to present to the whole Church. And it is also time that we entertain some very serious discussions regarding the probability of re-arranging our Sunday Services to accommodate those of you traveling from out of town and of building more space. I hope you are praying already that there will be a wonderful spirit of excitement and unity in whatever way the Lord leads us to handle the growth that He is giving us at the Covenant of Peace Church.

One possibility that we discussed last week in our Elder Meeting was to have an early morning Bible Study at 8:30 am, followed by a breakfast, and then have morning worship at 10:30 or 11:00, and then

have dinner on the grounds. That way we could all engage God's Word, have Morning Worship, and have a time of fellowship, and be done by 2:00 pm. And when we get the new Sanctuary- we could actually have two *different* Bible Studies on Sunday Morning- one in the new Sanctuary and another one in here- which we could convert into being a Fellowship Hall. Please be praying about this.

So the teaching of the Passage here is plain:

We should remove all hindrances that keep children from coming to Jesus.

So we should pray hard and strive to remove the hindrance of pride, and the hindrance of parental unbelief, and the hindrance of the lack of deep and accurate theology among parents and teachers, and the hindrance of the lack of disciplined planning among parents, and the hindrance of the lack of space here at the Church. And by God's Grace- we will.

Now, there is an area of this godly childlikeness that I have been concerned about for several years now. And I have mentioned it several times in my sermons over the years- but today's Passage is a perfect place for me to get into this a little deeper with you.

I have taught you many times that *why* you do what you do is just as important as *what* you do. So it is true that we are to do the right thing. But it is also true that we are to do the right thing for the right reasons. Because bad motives ruin good acts. The Apostle Paul said in **1 Corinthians 13:3:**

... if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

And at the Last Judgment- the Lord

1 Corinthians 4:5b

... will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men's* hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

Therefore, we must never be content that we are merely "doing good things". We must labor to see that we are "doing good things from

God- exalting *motives*"- lest we find in the end that our sacrifices were for nothing.

Now there is something hideous out there called "The Debtor's Ethic" among many in the modern Church. And the "debtor's ethic" says that we "do" for God because we "owe" God. So our service *to* and *for* the Lord is based on the fact that we owe God for all that He has done for us. And this has the net effect of allowing us to think that our service to and for the Lord is us "paying God back" for all that He has done for us. And this has a very deadly appeal to immature Christians.

Now this Debtor's Ethic comes packaged as a "Gratitude Ethic", and says things like: "*God has done so much for you, now what will you do for Him?*", or "*He gave you His life, now how much will you give to Him?*" So, far too often- the Christian life is pictured as an effort to pay back the debt we owe to God. Now the admission is made that we will never fully pay it off- but the Debtor's Ethic *demands* that we work at it anyway. And what happens is that our good deeds and religious acts become nothing more than "installment payments" that we make on the debt that we owe to God.

But have you ever tried to find a Biblical Text where gratitude or thankfulness is the explicit motive for obedience to God? Stories like the sinful woman in **Luke 7:36–50** and the unforgiving servant in **Matthew 18:23–35** come to mind,¹ but neither speaks *explicitly* of gratitude as a *primary* motive.

So why do people teach this? Why is the single most explicit motive for our obedience used in the modern Church- *not* found in the Bible? Could it be that because God knew that a "gratitude ethic" could very easily slip over into a "debtor's ethic"? And so He chose to protect His people from this deadly motivation by *not* including gratitude as an explicit motive for obedience in His Word?

Instead God encourages our obedience with irresistibly desirable Promises of "Divine *Enablement*". Listen to these words:

¹Another possible exception is Hebrews 12:28–29, "Since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire." But the phrase "show gratitude" is a questionable translation. The KJV has, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God." Even if the KJV is wrong, I take the function of gratitude to be that it empowers service by feeding faith in future grace. I say this because Hebrews, more than any other book in the New Testament, is explicitly insistent that obedience comes "by faith" (Hebrews 11).

Jeremiah 31:33

But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the Lord, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Ezekiel 36:27

I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

Matthew 19:26

With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

John 15:16

You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.

Romans 6:14

For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

1 Corinthians 1:7-9

⁷ so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

⁸ who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁹ God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Galatians 5:22&23

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Philippians 2:13

for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

1 Thessalonians 3:12

and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also *do* for you;

Hebrews 13:20&21

20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, *even* Jesus our Lord,
21 equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.

All these verses tell of what God does *for* us and *to* us and *in* us- *sovereignly*- *not* for what we do for God. Or how about these verses:

Luke 9:24

For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.

Luke 10:28

And He said to him, **"You have answered correctly; *DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE.*"**

Luke 12:33&34

33 **"Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys.**

34 **"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

Luke 16:9

And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings.

Hebrews 11:24-26

24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,

25 choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,

26 considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.

Hebrews 12:1&2

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 13:5&6

5 *Make sure that* your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "***I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,***"

6 so that we confidently say, "***THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?***"

All these verses tell us to do good things with the motivation being Divine *Rewards*- *not* gratitude or debt.

God goes to great lengths throughout Scripture to motivate us to do good works by reminding us that He is *now* and *always will be* working for those who follow Him in the obedience of Faith. God *never* stops and waits for us to work for Him "out of gratitude." He guards us from the mind-set of a debtor by reminding us that all our Christian labor *for* Him is a gift *from* Him.

Romans 11:34-36

34 For ***WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR?***

35 Or ***WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN?***

36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.

Romans 15:18

For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed,

This was the basis of the great battle fought over 1,700 years ago between Augustine and the heretic Pelagius. Augustine said that not only does God tell us *what* to do- but He has to give us both the desire and the ability to obey what He has commanded.

It was the heretic who taught that all we need from God is the instructions. And then Pelagius taught that we set out- in our *own* strength and abilities- to obey God- *as a debtor* and out of deep gratitude for what God has already done in us.

I would remind you that what Pelagius taught was the foundation of what we call today "Secular Humanism", and is not Christian at all. It isn't Biblical at all.

Let me come at you from another direction. The Apostle John taught that our love *for* God is a gift *from* God. So we love God with the love that God gives to us- which is the love that He has for Himself. Likewise, our service *of* and our obedience *to* God is a gift *from* God as well. Therefore- it is wrong to consider our service of God as some sort of payment of a debt.

In fact- what is astonishing- is that every single good deed that we do in dependence on Him to "pay Him back" actually does just the opposite. It only puts us ever *deeper* in debt to His Grace.

1 Corinthians 15:10

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

We must understand, dear friends, that this is exactly where God wants us to be through all eternity- us going ever deeper in debt to Him and His Grace every day of our lives. So if we insist that we should obey "out of gratitude," we should at least understand the lurking danger of this thinking and be careful to understand how gratitude can motivate obedience *without* succumbing to a debtor's mentality.

Ponder with me the meaning of gratitude and how it might work to motivate in a *good* way- *not* like a debtor's ethic. First we need a

definition. Suppose I wake up to the sound of a robber trying to break into my house. When I turn on the light, he flees. But as I got up to confront the intruder- I smelled smoke. A fire had started in the basement where my sons sleep. So I quickly go there and put it out. So the thief had awakened me and, unbeknownst to him, saved my sons. But I don't feel grateful to the robber, do I? No, I feel grateful to God. Why? Because the thief had no good intentions toward me at all- but God did. So we never respond with gratitude to a person who does us a favor *unintentionally*.

Or suppose I am visiting some Christian friends in a remote jungle village and fall deathly sick. And one of the villagers perceives a need for penicillin and sets out on foot to get it from a doctor ten miles away. But on his way back, he is bitten by a deadly snake, but manages to make it to the village just before he dies. And in his pocket is found the bottle of penicillin. But it was broken by his last fall and is now useless. That man gave his life for me- yet I did not get the benefit he died to bring. So do I feel thankful? Yes! Because gratitude is not merely a response to a benefit received. It is a response to someone's goodwill toward us. And this is confirmed by another experience.

Suppose you give someone a gift at a party and he opens it and loves it. He shows it off and speaks of it the whole evening, but he never once even looks at you or speaks to you- even though you're the one who gave him the gift. He is totally enthralled with the gift- but not you- the giver.

So what do we call a person like that? We say he is an "ingrate". Why? Because his emotion of joy over the gift has no reference to the goodwill of the giver. So based on all that- I arrive at this definition of gratitude.

Gratitude: A kind of joy which arises in our hearts in response to the goodwill of someone who does or who tries to do us a favor.

Now the reason this spontaneous response of a heart has a good potential to produce other acts of obedience is that it is a *kind* of joy. And whenever we experience joy- it is because our hearts have esteemed something we regard as being valuable. And the *cause* of joy is always a "perceived value". And so the greater the value to us- the greater our joy in receiving it.

Okay- but not only that. All joy is *gregarious*. It has in it a demonstrative impulse. It likes to gather others around and savor the value *together*. And that is why it is *impossible* to feel intense delight in something good yet feel no impulse to demonstrate to others the value which *caused* that delight.

In his Reflections on the **Psalms**, C. S. Lewis put it like this:

“Just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it. We say, ‘Isn’t she lovely? Wasn’t that glorious? or Don’t you think that is magnificent?’ It isn’t out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete until it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people you are with care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch.”²

So the secret of how gratitude motivates obedience is in the nature of joy. All joy has in it an impulse to demonstrate the beauty and value of its object. So the question becomes:

How should (how must) our joy in the value of
God’s Gift of Jesus Christ demonstrate itself?

And the answer is:

In a way that honors the Nature and Aim of God’s Goodwill
and does not contradict it.

In other words- you would never try to show your gratitude to someone who just paid your way through an alcohol treatment center by throwing him a beer party. That would contradict the entire aim of his goodwill.

And the Nature of God’s Goodwill in giving His Son was that it was *unconditional* and *undeserved*- a gift of “Free Grace”. And the Aim of that Act was to unleash a Power of Forgiveness and Regeneration that would transform people into reflectors of God’s Glory.

²C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958), 93–95.

So the way our gratitude to God for His Goodwill must express itself is by saying and doing what honors its nature as free and its aim as God's Glory. And this absolutely *excludes* the "debtor's ethic".

Any attempt to express a gratitude by "paying God back" would contradict the very Nature of His Gift as being both free and gracious. Any attempt to turn from being a "beneficiary" of God in order to become God's "benefactors" would remove the stumbling block of the Cross where my debt was so fully paid that I am forever humbled to the status of a "receiver"- but *never* as a "giver".

1 Peter 4:11

Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Instead, the way our joy expresses the value of Free Grace is by admitting that we don't deserve it, and by banking our hope on it and doing everything we do as a recipient of even more and more Grace.

2 Corinthians 9:8

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

Our good deeds do *not* pay back Grace; they borrow even *more* Grace. But gratitude will *always* degenerate into the "debtor's ethic" if it only looks back on past Grace and not forward as well to the Grace that God will give in the future. We honor the Nature and Aim of God's Goodwill by trusting Him to work for us- **from now on!**

And that means that gratitude functions well as a motive for obedience- but *only* as it gives rise to Faith. Gratitude says to Faith, "*Keep trusting your Father for more Grace; I know He will supply. I have experienced it, and it was sweet.*" So while Gratitude *does* help motivate the radical obedience of love- it only does so *indirectly*- through the service of Faith in the Grace that will come in the future.

Perhaps this is why the central ethical affirmation of the New Testament is that...

... faith working through love (Galatians 5:6b),

and not

... gratitude working through love.

Not that this would be untrue, but that it is fraught with legalistic dangers. So Paul would have us beware of the "debtor's ethic" and to give ourselves over to the life-changing power of ever dependent Joy.

Now I said all that to say this. The goal of a parent in the natural is to raise his children to eventually become *independent* of him. Parents are supposed to raise children in such a way that they will mature to the point where they no longer *need* their parents. So while they will continue to love and respect their parents- they will not *need* them. In fact, it is a perversion to see grown children still dependent on their parents. That shows a terrible dysfunction.

But that is *never* true about God. God *never* does or says *anything* that would cause those who have this godly childlikeness to ever get to the place where we no longer need Him. That would be the essence of *childishness*- a silly immature child playing a game where he thinks he is operating independently of God.

So getting to a place where we no longer are *totally* dependent on God and His Grace isn't being mature in Christ at all- it is being deceived.

The goal of Biblical Christianity is *not* to produce people who act *independently* of God- but to produce people who are *totally* dependent on God and His Grace- not only for the major items of impossibility- but also for the common, simple, and mundane items of everyday life. In fact, the strong believer is *not* the person who has built up his own faith where he no longer looks to God for everything. A person like that is a Pelagian and is being *childish* in the Spirit.

Total dependence on God and His Grace is the definition of spiritual maturity. And that is being childlike. And Jesus said those are the people who will inherit the Kingdom of God. So the very characteristic of rugged individualism-that the world applauds- is the very characteristic that dishonors God the most.

So being childlike is pleasing to God- where we realize our great need for God more and more every day. And yet we do not obey out of

debt or even gratitude- as though we are paying God back. We obey out of Faith- that works through love.

Amen. Let's pray

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.