

Forum:

Controversial Discussion between Mr. Mark Punford and the Editor concerning the BRF position on:

The Lord blessing the Infants

This Discussion continued from page 48 of Issue No. 20 of Sept.-Dec. 1997

Mr. Punford:

Again, what of the situation in which Our Lord and Saviour did take up little children in his arms and bless the same saying "Suffer the little children to come unto me for of such is the kingdom of heaven"? For if those children were mostly or even partly reprobate, and without believing parents according to the BRF God "had nothing but hatred for them" — — — — Wherefore then such a display of tenderness, love, and protection from our Saviour? Or will the BRF have us believe that our Saviour was acting only in his humanity on this occasion — — and that without His Father's sanction?

Editor's Response:

The full textual reference Mr. Punford cites is as follows:

1. Matt. 19 vv. 13 - 15.

13 ¶ Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put [his] hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.

14 But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

15 And he laid [his] hands on them, and departed thence.

2. Luke. 18 vv. 15 - 17.

15 ¶ And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when [his] disciples saw [it], they rebuked them.

16 But Jesus called them [unto him], and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

17 Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.

Mr. Punford pertinaciously posits the position that in the above texts we have an example of the Lord Christ receiving and blessing some who might have been reprobates, i.e., non-elect, it being, he implies, a fair assumption that either :

1. some of the parents who brought their children were non-elect, and hence had no claims on the covenant promises of God, **or** :

2. In that even some of the children of the elect prove ultimately to be reprobates, (there are certain Biblical examples of this, as also in Church history) then it is at least possible, if not likely, that some of the children so brought to the Lord here in the Gospel narrative were non-elect. The Incarnate Christ would have known immediately which of the children brought thus to Him were elect or non-elect, because:

Joh 2:25 And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.

Yet, the Lord blessed all the children indiscriminately. On the basis of this Mr. Punford implies that since God in Christ and God in Heaven cannot be divided, God must hold an attitude of “tenderness, love and protection” towards the non-elect as assuredly as towards the elect. Otherwise, given the BRF position that God “had nothing but hatred for them” it looks unavoidable that Christ was here blessing the non-elect infants “with his tongue in his cheek”, so to speak.

Firstly, with respect to 1) above, the *supposed* presence of non-elect parents:

(i) In bringing their infants to Christ, all the parents in the above narratives were manifesting a deeply convicted outward committment to believing in Christ as the Messiah. This act would have had to be done against the background of official hostility by the Pharisees, etc. to Christ and those who followed Him, Now St. John in his gospel can tell us:

Joh 7:13 Howbeit no man spake openly of him **for fear of the Jews**.

Joh 19:38 And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly **for fear of the Jews**, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave [him] leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus.

Joh 20:19 Then the same day at evening, being the first [day] of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled **for fear of the Jews**, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace [be] unto you.

Note the highlighted phrases: “**for fear of the Jews**”. Such concern was manifestly widespread even amongst the most ardent followers of the Lord. Thus those parents who brought their infants to Him did so out of a conviction that evidently over-ruled their fears. Such deep convictions, whereby the “fear of man” loses its “clout” when comprehended in the light of the “fear of God”, is a powerful, if not

absolute testimony to the true faith of the parents. Today, many godless parents bring their infants to the Parish Church, to “have them done”, as they say in England. Were such action to bring in its train social and political ill consequences, few, if any such, would turn up at the font with their children. Only those whose faith is such that they believe with deep Christian conviction would be bringing their children then. For stripped of any social or political considerations, the act of bringing one’s children to the Lord for His blessing implies a faith that He indeed, is the Lord, the Great God, and that in His hands lies the power to bless, whatever awful vicissitudes life may nevertheless throw at those children on their subsequent passage through it.

From the above, therefore, **firstly** it is at the *very least* reasonable to conclude that the people who brought their children to the Lord did so out of a deep and true conviction, which action indicates most strongly that they possessed genuine faith, i.e., they were elect.

Again, **secondly**, the Lord instructs us quite plainly that with respect to those persons who come to Him;

Joh 6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

Joh 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

Notice then, that the above texts, coupled with the texts concerning the Lord blessing the infants, will inform us that those parents “came to the Lord” as, and only as, a result of the “drawing of the Father”. They came believing, they had to be believing, otherwise there was no real reason for them to come and present their children to Him in this manner. And their coming, against the background of persecution and fear is another strong indicator that it was for the strongest of reasons that they came....which reason can only be that which was generated in their hearts by the drawing power of God Himself.

And St. John says explicitly, that all such who come to the Lord, He will in no wise cast out.

This is important. The Lord Jesus had within Him that Divine power which enabled Him thus:

Joh 2:25 And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.

He knew, therefore, what was in the hearts of those parents when they came to Him with their infants. And if any of them had come to Him out of a spurious, or fleshly motive, not really believing on Him as the Messiah, then He would have

known, and would have told them straight, just as He was straight in telling other people concerning hypocrisy. This must have been the case, for can one imagine the Lord receiving parents and a child, and discerning that the parents were not really coming in faith, yet treated them as if they were true believers, and went through the motions of blessing their child, and never once pointing out their sinful unbelief? If He had done *that*, well *then* He would have been "speaking with His tongue in His cheek"! And the Scripture is adamant that the Lord was without any such guile:

1Pe. 2:22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

The Gospels abound with examples of the Lord's dealings with people of all sorts. Far too much to go into here, suffice it to say that on all occasions He was straight and honest, and appropriate. He rebuked the Pharisees to their faces, and to one who said he would follow the Lord, but wished to attend to other matters first He was pretty blunt in His response, as St. Luke tells us:

Luke 9 :61 And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.

62 And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

On the basis of this evidence, I see no way to escape the view that all those parents who came to the Lord with their infants were true believers, and that therefore their children were in the line of the Covenant.

Significantly, in the passage immediately following the blessing of the infants, we encounter the rich young man who asked what he should do to inherit eternal life. The parallel passage in Mark 10: 17 - 23 tells us that though this young man "went away agrieved" (v. 22) at the Lord's answer, it nevertheless tells us a little earlier (v. 21) that "Jesus beholding him, loved him". Great play is made by the Arminians on this one.....here they say you have a text that tells you directly that Jesus loved a so-called non-elect! But the very fact that the Lord loved him is evidence that he was elect! And the text notes for us the effect of the Lord's words disillusioning him of his self-righteous self-justification, his delusion that he had kept all God's commandments.....he went away *agrieved*. The Greek words used here indicate sadness, and sorrowing. Such reactions are indicative of one who is under a genuine conviction of sin, and already under the process of the drawing power of God's Spirit. One not under such Divine influence would have reacted with all the vituperative responses endemic to the "fruits of the flesh" as per Galatians 5, his natural flesh "lusting against the Spirit" (Gal. 5 : 17). Now this is a salient example of the Lord's straight dealings with people, where he delivers to the person before Him whatsoever is appropriate for that person's condition. (Compare what He says about the Pharisees, in Matt. 23, "vipers" etc...). And supernaturally, the Lord must have discerned the inner thought processes and dispositions of all those who

came to Him. In St. John ch.1 : 47 we see Him discern accurately the spirit of Nathanael.....being able to look, so to speak, with X-ray eyes straight through into the person behind the face..... "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile" ! In other words, the Lord could see within, and could tell who was really manifesting the evidence of election.

Thus we must conclude that all the parents who brought their children to the Lord for blessing must all have been discerned by Him as true believers, for He certainly treated them all as such.

2) regarding the question as to whether all the infants were elect or not.

The Word of God at these Gospel references gives us one significant intimation that all the infants so brought and blessed by the Lord, were elect. And that is, that He received them all, and blessed them all, and made no warning prophetic utterance of reprobation to any parent concerning any child, as God did to Rebecca concerning Esau, and as, inspired by the prophetic spirit, Noah cursed Canaan but blessed Shem and Japheth.

In all this we see the dreadful matter of being in close proximity to the manifestation of God, whether that be via the incarnate Son, or the prophetic anointing of the Spirit. Such direct contact means absolutely direct consequences. And the Lord's responses to those who came to Him are such direct consequences. Also the Apostle, empowered by the Holy Ghost, pronounced the direct judgment on Ananias and Sapphira, and a thousand years before, Uzzah dies when he touches the Ark of the Covenant.

It is necessary to recognize this factor in the interpretation of the whole Bible. The Apostolic and Prophetic anointing of the Spirit is not given to us, there are no Apostles today, their work having been done. The Christian ministry today is carried on by its Ordinary officers, i.e., elders and deacons, whose task it is, with fellow believers, to build on and only on the Apostolic foundations of Scripture.

Now when we understand that when an Apostle speaks, or when the Incarnate Son speaks, they speak from a platform of Primary Spiritual inspiration, gifted with the discernment intrinsic to the Spirit of God. We speak today by secondary inspiration, in that we repeat their words, we do not generate new scriptures. Thus the Incarnate Son could know whether or not any infant He was asked to bless was elect or not. By comparison, today at the font, we don't.

What I am saying is that if Christ blessed all those infants, they must have all been elect. He would have known. And He would have "spoken with His tongue in His cheek" if He had blessed any of them knowing otherwise.

Today, lacking such supernatural gifts, we are unable to know whether all infants brought to the font are elect or not. We bless with the covenant sign all of them, in obedience to God's command, and we do so without any guile, because we do not know who is elect and who is reprobate. The danger now is, that we read our own inability to make prophetic discernment back into the Gospels, with the result that

we then erroneously portray the Son of God as blessing *possible* reprobates!
But holding in one's mind the fact that, as St. John says of the Lord:

Joh 3:34 For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God:

for God giveth not the Spirit by measure [unto him].

then it follows that the Lord was able to discern everyone's true state, and that to be "without guile" His disposition and response to them must be appropriate to His knowledge about them.

But Scripture has much, much, more to say about infants in the line of the covenant than we find just at this one Gospel situation. It is far too much to fully expound here in this limited space, but we would recommend the following literature on the same:

1) *Believers and Their Seed* by Herman Hoeksema

2) *We and Our Children* by Prof. Herman Hanko

3) *God's Everlasting Covenant* by Prof. Herman Hanko

Suffice it to say here that Scripture encourages every believing married couple to have children....nay more....to multiply their children! So the Psalmist extols the virtue of having many children, thus:

Psalms 127 : 3 Lo, children [are] an heritage of the LORD: [and] the fruit of the womb [is his] reward.

4 As arrows [are] in the hand of a mighty man; so [are] children of the youth.

5 Happy [is] the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed.....

Now note that "children are an *heritage* of the LORD". Note how "the fruit of the womb" is a **reward** from the Lord. Note how the man blessed with many children is said to be "**happy**".

If all this means anything it can only mean that, as a general rule, at the very least, believers have every ground for solid hopes that their children are elect, that the promises of God made to the believing parents, also apply to their children, as **St. Peter** says in **Acts 2 : 39**.

If this were not so, how could parents rejoice over their children as per Psalm 127? How could their children be an "heritage" of the LORD if they are not elect? Election must thus follow in the covenant line of families, or the Lord's promises would be voided. (God forbid!). It makes no difference that some, a few, turn out to be reprobate, as did Esau. But the Scripture is adamant, and we may say that as a general, indeed, a most extensive rule, the children of true believers will be elect.

Hence we conclude also, from the doctrine of the Covenant promises, that all the infants brought to the Lord Jesus for Him to bless, all of them, were assuredly elect.

To be continued (DV).....