

## Become As Little Children

Roy Assanti—May 4, 2019

This is a very important subject and it's a very important character trait that we all need to develop. We are admonished to become as little children. What does this mean?

I remember being with Norbert and His grandchildren, little boys, and I was on the ground with little trucks making all the noises and moving around. Little children are different and there's an innocence about them. They're not armed ready to attack or be cynical. Unspoiled little children are in sort of an unspoiled accepting uncomplicated state.

Matthew 18:2: "And after calling a little child to *Him*, Jesus set him in their midst... [in front of all of them, and a lesson is to come] ...and said, 'Truly I say to you, unless you are **converted and become as little children**, there is no way that you shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, **whoever shall humble himself as this little child**, he is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven" (vs 2-4).

I'm going focus on two words: *converted* and *become*.

**Converted** comes from the Greek 'stropho'—*to turn, to turn around, to turn oneself literally around!* In other words a 180 degree turn! *To turn oneself from one's course of conduct, to have a change of mind.*

**Become** come from the Greek 'ginomai'—*to come into existence, to bring into existence!* To cause something to come to pass, to happen.

The intended meaning is to *go another way from what you naturally go*. To also be in a new disposition, a new vantage point, that you view life another way. Another character, another mode of conduct. The focal point here is to **observe** little children, this trait of simplicity, of teachability that is in little children.

Matthew 19:13: "Then little children were brought to Him [Jesus], so that He might lay *His* hands on them and pray *for them*; but the disciples rebuked *those who brought* them.... [He's busy; go away! The Teacher is teaching!] ...But Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for **of such**... [Those who exhibit the character, the trait of the innocence of little children] ...is the Kingdom of Heaven" (vs 13-14).

It's really very interesting that just about word for word in the same verses; same thing repeated:

Mark 10:13: "Then they brought little

children to Him so that He might touch them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. And after seeing *it*, Jesus was **indignant**..." (vs 13-14)—from the Greek 'aganakieo' meaning *very displeased!* It's a feeling involving anger and there was a firm rebuke here, mingled with contempt or disgusted! This expression is aroused by something that's unjust, that is mean and unworthy.

"...and said to them, 'Allow the little children to come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the Kingdom of God... [This is in reference to this mindset, v 15]: ...Truly I say to you, whoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God **like a little child**... [that character trait we all need to be aware of and keep throughout and cultivate] ...shall in no way enter into it'" (vs 14-15).

If you look away from a child, from the innocence then look at what happened to the disciples, they were rebuked firmly.

- Is there a lesson here for us?
- Is there an emphasis here of an essential character trait that we need to take heed of?

*Repetition makes it sink in! There's a point here!*

- Is God 'aganakieo' with you?
- Is He 'aganakieo' with me?
- If we possess, express or live or walk by this trait?

The end result, v 16: "And He took them up in *His* arms, laid *His* hands on them *and* blessed them."

Do we remain as children? *We have to move onto maturity!* To remain as children in knowledge and understanding is that the idea? The emphasis here? *We need to grow in understanding, knowledge and skill in the way of righteousness!*

Hebrews 5:12: "For truly, by this time... [the Apostle Paul rebukes] ...you ought to be teachers, *but instead* you need to have *someone* teach you again... [you didn't learn the lessons] ...what *are* the beginning principles of the oracles of God, and have become those in need of milk, and not of solid food."

The reference is to *little*; you're still like little children in this way. So, there's something that we are not to emulate.

Verse 13: "For everyone who is partaking of milk is **unskilled in the Word of Righteousness**... [he remains in that child-like attitude, but we have to become *skilled* in the Word of Righteousness] ...because he is an infant." *We are not to be infants!*

*We are to grow!*

Verse 14: “But solid food is for those who are fully grown, who through **repeated practice** have had their senses trained to... [here’s the point]: ...discern between good and evil.”

Let’s look at a principle that most of us, obviously, are aware of. This comes into play. We need to do both things: keep that simplicity and innocence, but we need to grow, and as we grow we need to insure that that foundation is always there. It’s not knowledge; it’s not what you understand; it’s not what you know specifically.

We know that the Pharisees could quote incredible amounts of Scripture verbatim! Yet, in Matt. 23 Christ firmly rebuked them. We need to maintain this uncomplicated, simple child-like state of humility as we grow.

Isaiah 28:9: “Whom shall He teach knowledge? And whom shall He make to understand doctrine? *Those* who are weaned from the milk... [the beginning stages] ...and drawn from the breasts, for precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little” (vs 9-10). *You’ve got to put it all together!*

Here we have two factors that have to come together to make the whole that we need to maintain.

- What is it like?
- What is this kind of character, as we grow, described as?
- What is this character that discerns good and evil?
- Being childlike and growing in knowledge?
- What’s it like?
- What does the end result resemble?

Here’s an example for us very clearly stated in Matt. 11. Let’s look at the character of the One—Christ) we are emulate!

Matthew 11:28: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are *overly* burdened, and I will give you rest”—*contentment*—which such character gives: a feeling, understanding or a state of:

- being balanced
- being okay
- being able to face
- being able to look forward

*and solve and face life!*

Verse 29: “Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart...” *Not cruel, not cynical, but* ‘I absorb, I forgive, I don’t strike back.’ That’s part of the character.

“...and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke *is* easy, and My burden is light” (vs 29-30). *Although, we may not think so at times!*

It’s a combination of childlike simplicity, innocence and acceptance. We add knowledge to it and that’s what we get. We don’t get a snakebite; there’s no peril as if there’s a poisonous spider there. The end result is good, contentment!

Do you, and I ask myself, ‘Do I,’ pushback unnecessarily when being corrected? *or* Do we absorb and reflect and take in this principle:

Proverbs 10:12: “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all **sins**”—Hebrew: ‘phshoim,’ meaning *transgressions and offensives!*

When we are hit, offended, we cover it up. Obviously, there’s got to be balance.

Proverbs 12:15: “The way of a fool *is* right in his own eyes... [your opinion] ...but **he who listens to advice is wise**”—*listens, hears!*

Verse 18: “There are those who speak like the piercings of a sword...” Ever hear a sharp word, whatever the situation is. We can sense when we’re being attacked.

It couldn’t include us, could it? *Because we’re not perfect, yes, it could!* And it certainly does refer to you and me, we’re guilty at times; not all the time, but at times.

“...but the tongue of the wise heals” (v 18). There’s good and there’s evil. That’s what we need to seek to do, absorb, cover over and heal!

Verse 16: “A fool’s wrath is known at once, but a prudent *man* covers shame.”

*We’ve cover shame, disgrace, dishonor, ignominy and offenses!* That is a description of righteous character.

Proverbs 28:13: “He who covers his sins shall not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes *them* shall have mercy.”

Should the focus, when things go uneasy in relationships, should they be on ourselves, would that be the right thing? Should it be self-correction, even though it hurts to look at ourselves. It could apply to a little bit of a tiff that you have with your wife or your husband. Are they wrong? Which way do we look? Or any other family member, or maybe someone outside that you meet? Was it their fault, or my fault? Which way do we look; *it’s that person!* Did I have a part in it? Do you ask yourself that? Specifically of a spiritual brother or sister.

The Father and Christ abides in those who are called and are baptized, given God’s Spirit and

are led. We need to consider that, rather than saying, 'I'm right and they're wrong.'

Matthew 7:1: "Do not condemn *others*, so that you yourself will not be condemned." *If I condemn someone else, I'm condemning myself!* It's like a boomerang that comes back and cops you on the knee.

Verse 2: "For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you mete out, it shall be measured again to you." *Very specific; Christ clarifies, there's no mistaking what's being talked about here!*

Verse 3: "Now, why do you look at the sliver that *is* in your brother's eye, but you do not perceive the beam in your *own* eye? Or how will you say to your brother, 'Allow *me* to remove the sliver from your eye'; and behold, the beam *is* in your *own* eye? *You hypocrite, first cast out the beam from your own eye... [Do we look this way or that way? Look inward first!]* ...and then you shall see clearly to remove the sliver from your brother's eye" (vs 3-5).

For the rest of the message what I'm going to do is focus on the example of the life of the Apostle Peter. What is so obvious is that he has strong points and he has weak points. Guess what? *That you and me, we're the same!* We shouldn't be discouraged when we have a problem or difficulty comes up and we realize that we fall short. We also have strengths and the shortcomings are made clear to us, because that's where we need to be strengthened and grow, and that's very important. Don't forget about your strong points, that's good. Focus in, when correction comes, on where we lack.

It means that you have to turn around; we've got to realize that our natural course of action, thinking state is one way and we have to turn around and do what is not natural. We have to become different, converted and changed.

Matthew 18:3—Jesus said: "...Truly I say to you, unless you are **converted and become** as little children, there is **no way** that you shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

*I'd say that's pretty important!* Look at the emphasis. It really comes out and it is important! With this in mind let's look at the Apostle Peter and let's glean something from his painful lessons. He had *highs* and he had *lows*. There are lessons there for us. The corrections, inspirations and encouragement is there for us. We need to take on board personally what He's saying, the corrections and the encouragements.

Matthew 16:13: "Now, after coming into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus questioned His disciples, saying, 'Whom do men declare Me, the Son of man, to be?'"

In Caesarea Philippi there were shrines honoring different gods, and they said that *everybody* came in and they jumped into the conversation. 'They said...'—plural!

Verse 14: "And they said, 'Some *say* John the Baptist; and others Elijah; and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.' He said to them... [plural] ...'But you, whom do you declare Me to be?' Then Simon Peter..." (vs 14-16).

He's the leader, he's got the traits of leadership and jumps in and drowns out the others. I picture Peter as a big man, a strong man, maybe a hairy-chested fisherman, and a natural leader with a good strong voice that would drown out the others. There is some reason why he jumps in and takes the lead.

Verse 16: "Then Simon Peter answered *and* said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered *and* said to him, '**Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood did not reveal it to you, but My Father, Who is in heaven**'" (vs 16-17).

I have some dear friends that I have been speaking to, and I try to say something about spiritual knowledge, and it just doesn't get through. You say it as nicely as you can and it just *doesn't get through. It doesn't come from flesh and blood. God the Father Himself has to open the mind so that you can receive the knowledge of salvation, of Who Christ really is and taste that Spirit, that peace of mind!* It's got to come from God, there's no other way! You and I can't do it! We're not in the business of opening minds! We're in the business of speaking and making things known, *that's it!*

Verse 18: "And I say also to you that you are Peter... 'petros' a little stone] ...but upon this Rock... [Petra, the massive crag of rock] ...I will build My Church, and *the* gates of the grave shall not prevail against it."

In Matt. 7:24-25 that's describing the same word about the one who builds their house on the Rock, the Petra; there's a big difference. Christ also recognizes Peter's leadership abilities. Notice how He instructed Peter to lead, whom He referred to as the stronger one.

Luke 22:31: "Then the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon, listen *well*. Satan has demanded to have all of you, to sift as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and **when** you are converted, strengthen your brethren'" (vs 31-32).

Peter had strengths and he had weaknesses. Satan would attack us in either way. He attacked Christ and says, 'If you are the Son of God, make bread out of these stones. Through Yourself off the

precipice in a 400-foot drop, and then the twist was, ‘You are Who You are, and You can have it now’ (Matt. 4 & Luke 4).

There’s always going to be that twist without strength, the unexpected. We need to expect the unexpected.

Verse 33: “And he said to Him, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with You both to prison and to death.’” *It would get to that point!* As legend has it, Peter was sacrificed. He was crucified upside down. But he would get to that point, but not yet.

Verse 34: “But He said, ‘I tell you, Peter, *the* cock shall in no wise crow today before you have denied knowing Me three times.’”

In other words ‘You’re going to do your thing much more than this male chicken is going to do his thing. *It was through the pain of correction that Peter was made strong!*

This is what happened; he was questioned and it was said to Peter, ‘You know Him!’ And Peter denied Christ!

Verse 60: “And Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are talking about.’ And immediately, while he was yet speaking, the cock crowed. **Then the Lord turned and looked at Peter...**” (vs 60-61). *The look was all that was needed!* ‘Okay, you did it, I told you...’

“...and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, ‘Before *the* cock crows, you shall deny Me three times.’ And Peter went outside *and* wept bitterly” (vs 61-62).

When we fall, make mistakes, this is true repentance that God’s Spirit brings to us. We think we know it. We are dedicated, absolutely for God and we want to do the right thing; yet, something gets in the way. Peter was probably not aware that he was denying Christ. He wanted to be there. If you’re going to be up front, you’ve got to be ready to ‘cop the hits.’ That’s what happened.

How many times do we do a similar thing. We’re not aware of it, but why? *Jer. 17 tells us why*; because of our very nature and the way we are.

Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart *is* deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” How knows it? *God the Father and Jesus Christ!* What do They do?

Verse 10: “I the LORD search the heart, *I* try the reins, even to give to each man **according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.**”

We can’t know ourselves! *It’s up to God to understand, correct, direct* and we just have to recognize that when we are corrected and redirected,

and turned around, that it’s not easy. We need to be aware and detect it.

Peter had the leadership trait right from the start when God called him. He was a doer; he was fearless! But he had to be honed, shaped and changed. Likewise you and I have our strong points, and we have our weak points. We also have to be honed and shaped.

Luke 5:1: “Now, it came to pass that while the multitude was pressing on Him to hear the Word of God, He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret.”

Think about it! All mankind at one stage, and there’s only a very, very few being called now. The firstfruits are only very, very few. All mankind will be pressing to hear the way of salvation and you and I are called—just like Peter—one of the pioneers.

Verse 2: “And He saw two ships standing by the *shore of the* lake, but the fishermen had left them and were washing *their* nets.” *They were done!*

The point is that you and I when we were called, were in a state when we were done. Until the time came when something happened.

Verse 3: “And after going into one of the ships, which was Simon’s...” *Notice the boat that Jesus chose; He chose the leader. It was intentional, on purpose. Obviously, God does things on purpose.*

“...He asked him to put out from the shore a little; and He sat down *and* taught the multitudes from the ship” (v 3).

There was a time when Christ came into our proverbial ship and we were turned around. We have to keep on being turned around. We need to apply this personally. Our lives were turned around.

Verse 4: “Now, when He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep, and let your nets down for a haul.’”

In our own way we were led to an impactful awakening! Things were going to happen; life was going to change! Something was going to happen, and it’s different for all of us. But we are being led, and the calling comes from the Father.

Verse 5: “Then Simon answered *and* said, ‘Master, we have labored through the entire night, *and* we have taken nothing; but at Your word, I will let the net down.’”

Let’s take note of this state that we’re talking about here.

Matthew 20:1: “The Kingdom of Heaven shall be compared to a man, a master of a house, who went out early in *the* morning to hire workmen for his vineyard. And after agreeing with the

workmen on a silver coin *for the day's wage*, he sent them into his vineyard. And when he went out about the third hour, he saw others **standing idle** in the marketplace" (vs 1-3). *No purpose, no direction, just there.*

Verse 4: "And he said to them, 'Go also into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' And they went. Again, after going out about *the sixth hour and the ninth hour*, he did likewise. And about the eleventh hour, he went out *and* found others standing idle, and said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all the day?'" (vs 4-6).

There was a point in our lives when you and I were idle, without a real direction in life. We had to be changed. We were in a state of inertia that needed to be impacted to move, to have a direction.

When we were called God gave us a direction, a purpose, a destination. So, something happened.

Luke 5:6: "And when they did this, they enclosed a great school of fish; and their net was breaking." *Something happened in your life and my life that created an impact!*

Verse 7: "Then they signaled to their partners, those in the other ship, that they should come *and* help them; and they came and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink."

I imagine Peter really pulling those fish, and he would have been the one to say, 'Come on!' He was the leader and he would have been going crazy. We're going to make a mint here.' His character came out! They filled both boats and they began to sink. They came to a point of no return with our lives.

Verse 8: "And when he saw *this*, Simon Peter fell at Jesus' knees..." *Peter realized that this wasn't normal! To fall at Jesus' knees, what had to happen? He knelt down, and was humbled! We came to a point where our big egos were humbled, and we were led to become more childlike, humbled, simple and teachable.*

Peter was "...saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord.'" A point of conversion and change has come to a head.

Verse 9: "For great astonishment came upon him and all those with him, on account of the *miraculous* haul of fish that they had taken; and in like manner also *upon* James and John, *the* sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, '**Fear not; from this time forth you shall be catching men**'" (vs 9-10).

In a sense, that is our ultimate destiny (Rev. 1:6)! To become kings and priests, to catch men, people, all! Peter need to be molded and changed

from that point. He had to be corrected; he made a lot of blunders like we do.

Look at Peter here, and how many times do we make silly blunders. Peter's strengths and leadership abilities tripped him up.

Mark 8:31: "And He began to teach them that it was necessary for the Son of man to suffer many things, and to be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and to be killed, but after three days to rise *from the dead*. And He spoke these words openly. Then Peter took *Him* aside *and* began to rebuke Him" (vs 31-32).

I imagine that Peter probably put his arm around Jesus and took aside from the rest and started to say, 'Come to Your senses. Wake up!' It's obvious that he walked away from the others, because:

Verse 33: "But He turned and looked at His disciples, *and then* rebuked Peter... [publicly, in front of everybody else] ...saying, 'Get behind Me, Satan, because your thoughts are not of the things of God, but of the things of men.'"

On our walk, you and I will come under strong correction at times, even embarrassment. It can be very difficult, but the purpose for it is to make us stronger! It would have been pretty embarrassing for Peter to be corrected in front of everybody, specifically given that strong correction.

***We have got to take course correction!*** It's difficult and hard, but we have to understand that the course that we're on means that we're going to be embarrassed at times, any pride that is in us has got to be hammered out. We're going to go through difficult times. But it has to happen; otherwise we can't change. This process of turning us around will not be completed.

Hebrews 12:5: "And you have already forgotten the admonition that He addresses to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise *the* chastening of *the* Lord, nor grow weary of being reproved by Him... [that's the course we're on] ...for whom *the* Lord loves He chastens, and He severely disciplines every son whom He receives.' If you endure chastening, God is dealing with you as *a Father* with *His* sons. For who is the son whom *the* Father does not chasten?" (vs 5-7).

Who doesn't correct their children? We have to expect it continually! Peter received even more correction as time went on.

Furthermore, we have had a fleshly fathers who chastened us and we respected them; v 9: "Furthermore, we have had our fleshly fathers who chastened *us*, and we respected *them*; should we not all the more *willingly* be subject to the Father of

spirits, **and live forever?** For in the first case, they chastened *us* for a few days in whatever way seemed good to them; but in the second case, He... [God the Father] ...*chastens us* for *our own* benefit that we may be partakers of His Holiness” (vs 9-10).

That’s why the difficult times. If it doesn’t happen, we don’t get there. We have to accept it. Sometimes it gets really difficult and hard; you just have to keep going.

Verse 11: “Now truly, no chastisement for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it yields *the* peaceable fruits of righteousness to those who have been exercised by it.”

That’s it, ***we’re being exercised in righteousness by the correction, by the strengthening of our weaknesses!***

When we’re corrected, bear in mind that we do have strengths. But that’s not what’s going to be tested. It’s our weaknesses so that we can be whole, complete and made strong.

What’s the admonition? the encouragement? Verse 12: “Therefore, lift up the hands that are hanging down...” *Sometimes we think:* What is going on? What’s happening here? *Bear that in mind!*

Because of our calling, because of the great reward, it says, “...lift up the hands that are hanging down...” *You need to pray!*

In counseling, people just come to a standstill and virtually. That is the instruction that I’ve had to give. Keep going! Keep moving! What does it mean that your hands are hanging down? *You’re not praying!* You’re forgetting the diligence that was given to you at the start.

“...and *revive* the weakened knees” (v 12). *If you keep praying and studying, if you keep seeking God...!*

I got a call from someone who said, ‘What’s happening? I’ve lost momentum! This has happened and that’s happened! I’m afraid!’

Well, you know what you have to do. Circumstances change. Situations change. But this is now your test. ‘Do you love Me?’ Jesus says. ‘Will you still seek Me in a time of trouble?’

As the Proverb goes, ‘He (or she) who faints in the day of adversity, his or her strength is very little.’ That’s why you have to try! You have to move!

Verse 13: “And make straight paths... [that’s how you do it] ...for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned aside...” —*put out of joint!* If you

don’t, you’re going to start to die.’

“...but let it rather be healed” (v 13). Just like the fig tree that Christ cursed. What did He do? *He looked for fruit!* Is it about the tree? What does it matter? *It’s for us! It’s admonition!* He looked at the tree and desired fruit. He desired to eat. God desires fruit from us! If He doesn’t see it, what happens?

**“And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned aside; but let it rather be healed.”**

When times are hard and difficult, we have to maintain that childlike attitude of innocence. God will not abandon us! Can you imagine leaving two young children in a house alone over night while you go on a trip? *It’s foolish!*

So likewise, the principle is there. ***God will not give us a stone if we ask for bread*** (Matt. 6)!

#### Scriptural References:

- 1) Matthew 18:2-4
- 2) Matthew 19:13-14
- 3) Mark 10:13-16
- 4) Hebrews 5:12-14
- 5) Isaiah 28:9-10
- 6) Matthew 11:28-30
- 7) Proverbs 10:12
- 8) Proverbs 12:15, 18, 16
- 9) Proverbs 28:13
- 10) Matthew 7:1-5
- 11) Matthew 18:3
- 12) Matthew 16:13-18
- 13) Luke 22:31-34, 60-62
- 14) Jeremiah 17:9-10
- 15) Luke 5:1-5
- 16) Matthew 20:1-6
- 17) Luke 5:6-10
- 18) Mark 8:31-33
- 19) Hebrews 12:5-7, 9-13

#### Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- Matthew 23; 7:24-25; 4
- Luke 4
- Revelation 1:6
- Matthew 6

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