



Zionophobia: The Metaphor for Childlike Humility, Matt 18:3; Greatness Is Based on the Humility to Trust the Message of a Teacher in Whom You Have Confidence

Matthew 18:3 - and Jesus kept on saying, "I am telling you the truth, unless you are converted [**regeneration**] and become like little children—maybe you will, maybe you won't—then you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

1. This is a metaphor. The child's soul is used to illustrate the kind of disposition that is required to enter into the kingdom of heaven.
2. The Lord is not addressing the disciples personally since all are saved but he is emphasizing the mental attitude of humility that is required for anyone to even enter into the kingdom of heaven.
3. Childlike faith is illustrated by the presence of Peter's son who is willing to believe what is said to him.
4. The lad is not yet capable of serious rational or empirical thought and learns only by faith in what adults tell him.
5. Thus those who are more advanced mentally must be willing to "become like little children" in order to be saved: faith alone in Christ alone.
6. Without the faith that leads to salvation there is no way for a person to advance in his spiritual life and without spiritual advance greatness in the kingdom is impossible.
7. The word "unless" is the conditional particle **ἐάν, ean** which introduces the protasis of a third class condition: "unless you are regenerated and become like little children." Maybe such a person will but maybe on the other hand he won't become like a little child and respond to the Gospel with faith.
8. If he does not believe he will not enter into the kingdom of heaven. But on the other hand:

Matthew 18:4 - "Whoever humbles [**ταπεινώω, tapeinoō**: the teachability that comes from genuine humility which leads to grace orientation] himself like this little child, such a believer is greater in the kingdom of heaven."

1. A little child has a humility based on his unconditional trust in those around him. A little child looks to his parents for love and protection and the rapport that develops in such a relationship results in the child's unconditional trust in what they say.
2. If you tell a child that there is a God he has no reason not to believe it. If you tell a child that God is in heaven he has no reason to doubt it.
3. The word *tapeinoō* means to "bring low" with reference to one's attitude. It can mean modesty but the best use here is humility such as that found in a little child whose mind is open to instruction without arrogant speculation.
4. Salvation is not based on merit but on the grace of God to those who have the humility to simply believe in Christ. God produces the action through the agency of the Holy Spirit based on the work of Christ.



8. The first four verses are analogies illustrated by the faith of Peter's young son. Verses 5-10 introduce the problem faced by the disciples if they attempt to perform their assigned duties while paralyzed by an extreme over-emphasis on self.
9. Their disposition must be one of humility. Their position of apostle will create a sense of trust in those to whom they minister.
10. Trust imputes great responsibility upon the object to which it is directed. A definition helps. The biblical word for "trust" is:

πίθω, *peithō* - "trust"

Zodhiates, Spiros (gen. ed.) *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament.* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1992), 1133-34:

- (I) Active voice: to persuade. Generally, to persuade another to receive a belief, meaning to convince. Acts 28:23, "Paul was explaining to the Jews by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them [present active participle of *peithō*] concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening."
 - (II) Middle and passive voice: generally of any truth. Used in an absolute sense to be convinced, to believe. Acts 28:24, "And some were being persuaded [imperfect passive indicative of *peithō*] by the things spoken but others would not believe."
 - (III) To be persuaded, to trust; to be confident, assured. To confide in, rely upon. To trust or have confidence in.
11. When a disciple or an apostle communicates it is his intent to persuade an individual into believing his message. When the message is believed by the individual he is persuaded.
 12. The reason that the person believes is because he places his trust and a confidence in the validity of the message.
 13. Therefore, the awesome responsibility of the communicator is to make sure that the message he communicates is true so that the persuaded person's trust is not directed toward a message founded on duplicity and deceit, a lie, a prevarication, or a piece of verbal prestidigitation.
 14. The messenger must be convinced that what he believes is the truth so that when he persuades another to believe it he has not led that person astray.
 15. The English definitions of "trust" amplify these ideas:

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. 11th ed., s.v. "trust":

1a: assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone **b;** one in which confidence is placed.

2a: to rely on the truthfulness or accuracy of: to believe **b:** to place confidence in.

16. The accountability imposed upon those who teach others is amplified in verse 5 through 10 as the Lord continues to use as an illustration the most vulnerable student a teacher could ever have—a small child.

Matthew 18:5 - "And whoever [ὅς, *hos* plus the conditional particle ἐάν, *ean* followed by the subjunctive of the verb] receives kindly [aorist middle subjunctive of δέχομαι, *dechomai*: indicating a 3rd class condition]— some will while some won't—a child like this because of My person, receives Me."



1. The Lord is trying to persuade the disciples to examine their disposition. Their self-absorption is preventing them from having the humility necessary to communicate truth.