

Where Have All The Children Gone?



David Wilkerson January 1, 1977

The apostle Paul wrote, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16).

"Children of God." We often use this phrase to describe ourselves as believers. But I believe we use these words too flippantly, with little understanding of the power and depth of their true meaning.

What does it mean to be a child of God? It means simply to be God's dependent - that is, "one who is unable to exist or function without help; one who is controlled by another." A child of God knows he cannot control his own life. He is incapable of functioning without the Lord's daily help. He lives wholly dependent upon God for everything.

Of course, I am speaking here of spiritual children. There are no such "dependents" existing in the world, because sinners are self-sufficient people. They see themselves as achievers, "can-do" people. They preach that whatever the mind can conceive, it can achieve - that with the right mental attitude, a person can do anything. Frank Sinatra popularized their theme song: "I did it my way!"

Sadly, there are very few children in the house of God these days as well. The church has been flooded with self-help books of all kinds. Many are about taking matters into your own hands: winning your own victory over self, doubt, fear and loneliness. Yet they're all part of the flesh's tendency to avoid total dependence on God Himself!

Many in the church today believe if you have the right formula, you can figure out everything for yourself and solve your own problems. This attitude says, "God, You gave me a good mind. I'll just think this through. I know if I do that properly, I can work everything out."

This self-help message is also being preached from our pulpits. Ministers promise, "If you can think it, you can do it. If you can name your blessing, you can claim it. Just speak the word into existence!" Beloved, this message is nothing more than humanism - a self-centered, self-fulfilling "gospel of self!" Preachers by the thousands are trying to teach people how to cope - but it is impossible to cope in this life, outside of the power of Jesus Christ!

As I was in prayer recently, the Holy Ghost said to me, "David, where have all the children gone?" He was saying, in essence, "I have so few children left, so few dependents. Where are the believers who live today wholly dependent upon Me?"

Jesus set a Child in the Midst of His Disciples - And Gave the Church a Powerful Insight Into His Heart!

At one point, Jesus found His disciples arguing among themselves. They wanted to know: "Which one of us is going to be the greatest in Your kingdom? Which one of us will rule the most cities and be the most productive for You? Which ones will sit on Your right and left?" "And Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:2-3).

What Jesus did was amazing, shocking and profound. He looked into the faces of a congregation that was already

converted - a group who sought the words of eternal life - and He called for a complete turnaround in their relationship to Him. The phrase He used here, "Unless you are converted," means in Greek, "Unless you are revolutionized in your thinking!"

Jesus was saying, "Forget about who will be the greatest! Unless you completely change the way you think about your walk with Me, you won't even make it into the kingdom!"

Multitudes of Christians spend their lifetime thinking about heaven, singing about it and longing to go there.

But many will miss it entirely because they did not learn the very lesson Jesus tried to teach His disciples here. I believe He's saying, "Don't get your eyes on heaven - on ruling, reigning and doing great things in eternity - until you first learn how to walk in this life. Otherwise, you won't even make it there!"

"...And Become as Little Children" (Matthew 18:3)

This scene is one of the most powerful object lessons in God's Word. Yet we have missed its greatest significance!

Christ here is revealing a powerful truth. He is saying, "You've got to rethink your relationship to Me - you have to revert to childlike ways!"

Upon reading this, I certainly do not want to revert to some childish emotions. I see them in my little toddler-grandchildren: selfishness ("Mine, mine!"), stubbornness ("No, no!"), and jealousy. God help us if we revert to the things we see in toddlers! That would be total bedlam.

But when Jesus speaks of being childlike, He does not mean a single childlike characteristic. He is talking about something much broader - and that is a child's human condition.

Some interpret Jesus' message in this passage as being about trust. They say, "Jesus wants us to be trusting, the way a little child is." But trust has little to do with a child's human condition.

For example, my ten-month-old grandson, Elliot, is not capable of trust. He simply doesn't know what it means. When he is hungry, he has only one weapon: a good pair of lungs! He can only cry. Elliot isn't trusting; rather, he is totally dependent. That is his human condition. And he is dependent on his parents, whether he trusts or not.

Jesus was focusing on our condition - our utter helplessness - not on trust, faith or innocence. The child He brought into the midst of His disciples was to be a mirror of their own helplessness - not just spiritual helplessness, but also natural, human helplessness.

Helplessness is an inability to defend or help oneself. Jesus was telling His followers, "Look at this little boy. He is totally defenseless. He cannot cope with life alone - he must be fed and clothed. And he is a picture of you. You must see yourself as defenseless - as helpless as this little boy."

I agree that we must learn to trust God, and that without faith it is impossible to please Him. Indeed, we are to grow up and become men and women of spiritual maturity. We are to put away childish things. We are no longer to be children in our understanding.

But never in our lifetime can we put away our human condition of a child's dependency! God wants us to see ourselves as totally, absolutely incapable of facing this life by trying to figure out or take care of things on our own. We must see our condition as one of utter helplessness!

How would you describe the children of Israel at the Red Sea, if not as helpless? They were hemmed in on every side and could do absolutely nothing about it. Only a loving Father God could make a way of escape for them. They didn't have faith - and they went forward only because Moses had the faith to have the sea opened. They were as children - absolutely helpless!

King Asa and Israel were utterly helpless against the Ethiopians. A million-man army and three hundred chariots marched against them at Mareshah. Scripture says Asa cried to the Lord, "Lord, it is nothing with Thee to help, whether with many or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go against this multitude... Let not man prevail against Thee" (2 Chronicles 14:11).

"So the Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah" (verse 12). Listen to Asa's prayer: "Lord, we are helpless. We can do nothing. The power is all Yours - and we are dead unless you help us!"

Today the Lord is saying to us, "I have so few such children left. They talk about Me and sing about Me every week in church. But when they find themselves in a hard place, they are not dependent upon Me!"

"If Thy Hand of Thy Foot Offend Thee, Cut Them Off... And If Thy Eye Offend Thee, Pluck It Out" (Matthew 18:8-9).

I have sought a revelation on this passage for many years. We know the Bible is against self-mutilation. And the most prevalent interpretation is, "If your hands reach for sinful things, or your feet take you to wicked places, then stop it- cut these practices out of your life. If your eyes look lustfully, then stop it, no matter what the cost!"

Yet I believe what Jesus says here means much more. It has to do with the lesson Jesus is teaching in this same context: It is a rebuke against self-effort. It's all about our helplessness!

He's saying, "If your hand tries to work out your problem - that is, if you're taking matters into your own hands - then stop immediately! If your feet run around desperately trying to solve your trouble, then stop running! If your eye looks to something or someone else for help - a man or woman whom you think may be the answer to your prayer - then by all means, stop looking and pluck out that type of thinking immediately!"

I used to do these very things in Teen Challenge. A man once donated a house to our ministry, and we sold it to help buy a building in Brooklyn. About six months later, I was in deep financial trouble - we needed about \$5,000. I sat in my office, thinking, "Who can I call?" Suddenly, in my mind's eye, the man's name appeared, and I thought: "He gave us a house worth \$55,000!"

I told my associate, "Call him on the phone. We'll get our \$5,000!" Ten minutes later, my co-worker came back with his head down. He said, "I've never been so chewed out in my life." Then, instead of getting on my knees, I said, "Surely there's somebody else who can help." I wasn't praying - I was thinking!

Oh, how it hurts God when we keep looking for a person or something else to solve our problems! We think, "This is my dream. If I can just get past this certain point, it will solve everything!" We go around with our hands, feet and eyes searching for answers - but God is saying, "Cut it out! Stop it! It offends Me!"

Jesus makes it clear that there are serious consequences when we try to make things happen without relying on Him. He says it will cost us eternal life!

"What?" you say. "Do I have to pray about everything? Do I have to depend on God for all?" Yes! That is the humility of a child! It means spending the rest of your life saying, "It's better to live totally dependent on the Lord than to be cast into hell trying to do it on my own!" "It is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire" (Matthew 18:8).

Here is yet another stern warning in the same passage:

"But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

God's Word is clearly set against any mistreatment of children. But Jesus isn't talking about child abuse here. Again, in this context He is saying that it is an offense to God for anyone to teach that we are self-sufficient. He is warning against false teachers who would offend young believers with any gospel that caters to self-love and self-will.

Shepherds today would be producing Christians who do not depend on the arm of the flesh. But instead, they're turning childlike hearts away from total dependency on God - and toward self-motivation and self-esteem! Jesus says it would be better for these men if they had never been born.

The teachers of the modern prosperity message have offended an entire generation. They have put stumbling blocks before thousands of believers, urging them to seek all the goodness and blessings of a caring Father - but saying nothing of the obligations of a disciple, the rod and the chastisements that go with being a beloved child.

If you're a parent, you care for your children by providing them with good things - but you also care for them by chastising and disciplining them. My father used to say, "This hurts me worse than it hurts you." He was speaking of the physical realm. But in the spiritual realm, his discipline was the salvation of his children!

Right now you may be under the rod of the Lord's discipline. But if you are, it's not because you've sinned - it's because God loves you. His love is motivating it all!

Standing Beside the Child In the Midst
Was the God of the Universe!

The disciples loved Jesus. They had confessed to Him, "We believe You are the Son of the living God." Yet we have to wonder if that truth really gripped them before Jesus' resurrection.

The Holy Spirit dealt with me while I was preparing this message. He asked me: "Who is it you pray to so much? Who is it you sing so much about? Whose child are you?"

I said, "It's You, Lord. You're the god of the universe."
He answered, "Don't forget that."

Dear saint, that hit me! And I discovered that this is the key to utter dependency! If you grasp this key, you won't need a checklist to know, "Am I trusting as I should? Am I really following His Word?"

It must register in your mind and soul: "I really am a helpless child. But I am God's child! The everlasting, Creator God is my Father - He rules the universe. I am the child of a Father who knows all and controls all."

This is where the ministry of the Holy Spirit becomes so glorious: He first bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. But then He goes further to reveal that we are also "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17).

As you read this message, you may have no trouble admitting a condition of helplessness. Perhaps you are unemployed. As you look to the future, everything seems hopeless. You may readily identify with a helpless child. You can say, "Yes, that's me - unable to handle my debts, my hands tied, unable to make anything happen!"

But standing by the child amidst the disciples was Another - One with a hand on that child's shoulder. God stood there - God in Christ! And I have no doubt that child crawled into the Master's lap and hugged Him in total rest and peace. You see, children easily recognized Jesus for who He was - they sang hosannas to Him!

We all are helpless children indeed - but we're children of Almighty God, the Creator of the Universe!

Dependency is Not Just Recognizing How Helpless You Are -
It Is also Seeing How Powerful Your Father Is!

Dependency on God means three things:

1. Committing yourself to God's absolute power.
2. Submitting to His will.
3. Waiting for Him to act in His proper time and way.

Do you know a Christian who's in a panic situation? Let's say you ask him, "Do you believe God has the power to deliver you?" His answer probably would be: "Yes - God has all the power needed. Nothing is impossible for Him."

Then you ask: "Do you believe He cares about you, that He loves you?" His answer might be, "I'm not the best Christian. I've made mistakes. But, yes - I do believe God loves me, that He cares about what happens to me."

Finally, you ask: "If you believe He has all power, and that He cares for you - then why are you always so fretful, full of panic and fear?"

Your friend will answer, "Because nothing is happening! Things are getting worse, and I'm on the brink of total disaster! Those who talk about trusting God have jobs. They're not in my position - they don't know what it's like! I

get my hopes up, and then they all get dashed. Everything turns up zero!"

This is why so many have lost hope - because they've moved from helplessness to hopelessness without seeing the other Individual in this story - the One who has His hand on that child's shoulder!

In this life, we will experience hardships. It's not only the wicked who suffer, but "many are the afflictions of the righteous" (Psalm 34:19). And through such trials, you will end up either hating God or casting yourself completely into His care.

Beloved, the Holy Spirit has come for just such times. He has come not only to keep you pure, but to keep you from disaster. He has been sent to lead and guide you through all trials, crises and hopeless situations.

"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 18:10).

We've almost relegated this verse to a little Sunday-school ditty: Every child has a guardian angel. I don't doubt that's true. But Jesus is saying so much more here! He's saying, "Don't despise those who, like children, have given up trying to figure it all out. They have cast themselves completely upon My care. And their Father has a host of angels who'll do anything needed on their behalf!"

The Holy Spirit Will Fan Your Faith in God's Faithfulness!

God does not always take us through the easy way. As was true for the believing Hebrews, the way includes much hardship and suffering: "Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions" (Hebrews 10:32).

Is this true of your life? You went all-out for Jesus, making a full surrender - and His light was turned on in you! Then suddenly you entered a time of great suffering. Your problems and trials mounted up!

"Ye were made a gazingstock " (verse 33). You became a spectacle to the whole world, a picture of suffering, and example of tribulation. The world around you wondered where your God was, and why you were suffering so much.

"[You] took joyfully the spoiling of your goods" (verse 34). Think of it: The Hebrew Christians were cast in jail, and their fellow believers were imprisoned. They lost their nice houses, all their furniture and clothes - all their earthly goods.

We may come to that place soon in America. Will you handle it as the Hebrew Christians did? The Scriptures say they not only endured it - but they endured it joyfully! What did the Hebrews have that helped them to remain joyful in such trials? The answer is in verse 34: "Knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance." They had their eyes on the return of Jesus! They were living for eternity!

They did not throw away their confidence in God when all this was happening. On the contrary, they had the same promises we have - and they trusted.

"But call to remembrance the former days" (verse 32). The author of Hebrews was calling on these believers to look back and remember the Lord's deliverance!

A dear Christian woman told me recently how her husband lost his thriving business ten years ago. The couple was nearing fifty years of age when they lost everything. Late in life they had to start over, with virtually nothing. So they moved into a small apartment - and they prayed together and grew in the Lord.

She testified, "Never in the past ten years has the Lord failed us. And these have been ten of the happiest, most productive years of our lives. God used all the hardships to bring us together, while many of our friends were falling apart and getting divorced.

"We don't spend much, because we don't have much. But it has been better now than when we had it all. There were times when we needed \$10,000 and God met that need. We look back and we can see God's faithfulness. He's brought us through!"

Dear saint, God always brings His children through! I'm not saying you won't go through hard places, and maybe even lose a job or a house. we all need to be prepared for that. but the Bible tells us, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward" (Hebrews 10:35).

"Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith" (verses 36-38).

It doesn't matter how hard it gets, because it won't last very long; Jesus is going to come again! And whether or not He comes during your trial, He promises to deliver you.

Here is the only way you and I are going to make it:

We Must Trust Our God To Take Care of His Dependents

Those who shrink back in fear and unbelief will end up in destruction: "them who draw back unto perdition" (verse 39). God has not pleasure in them. They will fall, and they'll end up in darkness and confusion.

I see such shrinking back among so many today. They have no faith; they do not abandon themselves to God's care. They see themselves as helpless, forsaken, abandoned children. They have not cast themselves upon the Lord, saying, "Yes, I'm helpless - but I'm a child of the Almighty God!"

Beloved, I have a loving Father who will never fail me. And I'll not accuse Him of failing me! He's going to see me through, one way or another. I may not have the lifestyle I'm accustomed to. But if He brings down everything around me, and I maintain my faith - I will have joy, happiness, peace and all that I need!

As you read this, you may be facing an unknown future. You may not know what is just ahead for you, in your career or for your family. You may be in a situation that calls for you to face the impossible.

Right now, the Holy Spirit is calling you to childlike dependence on your Father. He's urging you to cast yourself upon Him in utter helplessness. And He's calling you to remember: You are a child of the Almighty God!

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