

# Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

## 19:1-15

by J.C. Ryle

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### Transcript

In these verses we have the mind of Christ declared on two subjects of great moment. One is the relation of husband and wife; the other is the light in which we should regard little children in the matter of their souls. It is difficult to overrate the importance of these two subjects: the well-being of nations and the happiness of society are closely connected with right views upon them. Nations are nothing but a collection of families. The good order of families depends entirely on keeping up the highest standard of respect for the marriage tie, and on the right training of children. We ought to be thankful that, on both these points, the great head of the church pronounced judgment so clearly. With respect to marriage, our Lord teaches that the union of husband and wife ought never to be broken off, except for the greatest of all causes, namely, actual unfaithfulness. In these days when our Lord was upon earth divorces were permitted among the Jews for the most trifling and frivolous causes. The practice, though tolerated by Moses to prevent worse evils—such as cruelty or murder—had gradually become an enormous abuse, and no doubt led to much immorality (i.e. Malachi 2:14–16). The remark made by our Lord's disciples shows the deplorably low state of public feeling on the subject. They said, "If the case of the man be so it is not good to marry." They meant, of course, if a man may not put away his wife for a slight cause at any time, he had better not marry at all. Such language from the mouths of apostles sounds strange indeed! Our Lord brings forward a widely different standard for the guidance of his disciples. He first founds his judgment on the original institution of marriage. He quotes the words used in the beginning of Genesis, where the creation of man and the union of Adam and Eve are described, as a proof that no relationship should be so highly regarded as that of husband and wife. The relation of parent and child may seem very close, but there is one closer still: "A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife." He then backs up the quotation by his own solemn words, "What God has joined together, let not man put asunder." And finally he brings in the grave charge of breaking the seventh commandment, against marriage contracted after a divorce for light and frivolous causes: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another commiteth adultery." It is clear from the whole tenor of the passage that the relation of marriage ought to be highly revered and honoured among Christians. It is a relation which was instituted in paradise, in the time of man's innocency, and is a chosen figure of the mystical union between Christ and his church. It is a relation which nothing but death ought to terminate. It is a relation which is sure to have the greatest influence on those it brings together, for happiness or for misery, for good or for evil. Such a relation should never be entered into unadvisedly, lightly or wantonly, but soberly, discreetly and with due consideration. It is only too true that inconsiderate marriages are one of the most

fertile causes of unhappiness, and too often, it may be feared, of sin. With respect to little children, we find our Lord instructing us in these verses both by word and deed, both by precept and example. «Little children were brought to him that he should put his hands on them and pray. » They were evidently tender infants, too young to receive instruction, but not too young to receive benefit by prayer. The disciples seem to have thought them beneath their Master's notice, and rebuked those that brought them. But this drew forth a solemn declaration from the great head of the church: «Jesus said, «Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me for of such is the kingdom of heaven.» » There is something deeply interesting both in the language and action of our Lord on this occasion. We know the weakness and feebleness, both in mind and body, of a little infant: of all creatures born into the world none is so helpless and dependent. We know who it was who here took such notice of infants, and found time in his busy ministry among grown up men and women to «put his hands on them and pray.» It was the eternal Son of God, the great High Priest, the King of kings, by whom all things exist, «the brightness of the father's glory and the express image of his person.» ( Hebrews 1:3 ). What an instructive picture the whole transaction places before our eyes! No wonder that the great majority of the church of Christ have always seen in this passage a strong, though indirect, argument in favor of infant baptism. Let us learn from these verses that the Lord Jesus cares tenderly for the souls of little children. It is probably that Satan specially hates them: it is certain that Jesus specially loves them. Young as they are, they are not beneath his thoughts and attention. That mighty heart of his has room for the baby in its cradle, as well as for the king on his throne. He regards each infant as possessing within its little body an undying principle that will outlive the pyramids of Egypt, and see sun and moon quenched at the last day. With such a passage as this before us we may surely hope well about the salvation of all who die in infancy. «Of such is the kingdom of heaven.» Finally, let us draw from these verses encouragement to attempt great things in the religious instruction of children. Let us begin from their very earliest years to deal with them as having souls to be lost or saved, and let us strive to bring them to Christ; let us make them acquainted with the Bible as soon as they can understand anything; let us pray with them, and pray for them, and teach them to pray for themselves. We may rest assured that Jesus looks with pleasure on such endeavors, and is ready to bless them. We may rest assured that such endeavors are not in vain. The seed sown in infancy is often found after many days. Happy is that church whose infant members are cared for as much as the oldest communicants! The blessing of him that was crucified will surely be on that church! He put his hands on little children; he prayed for them.

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