

Child / Children

(παιδιά = 'pehthia')

A young child, a little boy or little girl, infants, children, little ones.

Matthew 18:3, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." What did Jesus mean when He told us to become "just like little children"? The word *παιδιά* ('little children') is used, which does not mean "a babe in arms" or "a teenager." It is usually a small child - an infant maybe aged 4 to 6. Therefore, *παιδιά* ('little children') refers to kids who have not started any serious schooling, so they spend much of the day playing and enjoying themselves. Bear in mind that becoming like a "little child" does not mean you revert to childhood or become childish. So what characteristics of a little child give the clearest picture of a "believer in the Kingdom of heaven?" I have found seven:

(1) Innocence - The apostle Paul says in Romans 1 that most people keep on inventing new ways of sinning. Children are not like that because they are not sin conscious. (2) Simplicity - A child's world is simple, straightforward and unsophisticated. (3) Frankness - Children are frank but not rude! (4) The power to ponder - Children find the time to ponder the beauties of the world; new animals, sunsets and night skies. Most adults don't take the time to discover new things. (5) The power to forgive and forget - Grown-ups keep grudges but children don't. They can be fighting one minute and be best friends the next. (6) Enthusiasm - Whatever they do, children do it with all their heart! Adults lose their enthusiasm too easily! (7) Trust - Children trust their parents to meet all their needs. Children cannot provide their own food, clothing and shelter so they rely entirely on their parents for those things. Children haven't lost their ability to trust. Do we trust our Heavenly Father as much as children trust their earthly fathers, or for that matter, as much as children trust our Heavenly Father.

Confess / Declare

(ὁμολογέω = 'homoloyeho')

To confess, to declare openly, admit, to say the same thing as another, to agree with, to profess, to admit or declare one's guilt, to speak out freely, to assent.

Matthew 10:32, "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven." A literal translation of this verse is, "Therefore, whoever declares Me openly (unashamedly) before men, I will also declare openly (unashamedly) before My Father who is in heaven." This is a proud declaration of friendship. It is like a son bringing a friend home to meet his father after having told the friend how wonderful his father is. There is no guilt of embarrassment in this action. The boy is so proud of his dad that he can't wait to introduce him to his friend! This is exactly how we are expected to act before men concerning Jesus. And when we do it, Jesus promises that He will act exactly the same way before His Father in heaven. Quite simply, when we acknowledge Christ before men, He acknowledges us before His Father in heaven. That is a good trade off – isn't it?

This verse is encouraging us to speak out freely, and declare openly, the deep conviction we have concerning Jesus Christ – in spite of any opposition! We must remember that Matthew's original audience was Jewish converts to the Christian faith, and these converts were having a rough time. They had been rejected, cut off, and disinherited by their families. They were no longer allowed to worship in the inner part of the Temple. They were being persecuted for their faith. They were dragged in front of the Sanhedrin and forced to answer ridiculous charges. Their possessions and wealth were often confiscated or destroyed. If they were in business, the business was suffering because Jews refused to have any dealings with them. If they worked for a Jewish employer they probably lost their job. Therefore, it is only natural that these converts began to waver in their faith. Many were wondering whether it was worth it. They wondered if the price they were paying was too high.

Matthew 10:32 is part of the instructions that Jesus had given to His twelve disciples. Matthew wanted to encourage and build up these dispirited and wavering converts to the Christian faith. He wanted to assure them that they had made the right decision in following after Christ. This verse tells them to do something quite specific. Notice, Jesus didn't just say, "confess Me," He says, "**confess Me before men!**" It is a public declaration and affirmation of our faith. Even more, when we do this we are publicly endorsing and authenticating our faith - by our own words! And this is pleasing to both Jesus and His Father in heaven. I can imagine Jesus standing in the throne room of grace saying, "I died for that person. With my blood I've ransomed him and have redeemed him. That person cannot be judged or condemned because I was judged and condemned in his place. I am proud to be associated with that person. He is a close friend of mine."

Confidence / Boldness

(παρρησίαν = 'parrisian')

Confidence, boldness, cheerful courage, unreserved utterance, assertiveness, self-assurance, fearlessness, audacity, daring.

Hebrews 10:35, "Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward." Another translation reads, "**So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.**" The word "παρρησίαν" is literally "all speech" and it denotes 'unreserved utterance' or 'speaking boldly without fear' (Acts 4:13; 4:29). It is a difficult word to accurately translate into the English language, and especially in the context of this verse. Nevertheless, one thing that is evident is its relationship with speech. In Hebrews 10:23 it says, "Let us hold fast the confession (declaration) of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." Hence, an expounded translation of verse 35 could read, "Do not throw away your unreserved boldness and fearless declaration of your faith, which has great reward." This provides us with a clear picture of what our confidence should be. Our confidence must be rooted and grounded in faith, and as a result if that, we are able to fearlessly and boldly declare (confess) God's word. This lines up with Acts 4:29, "**Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness (παρρησίας) they may speak Your word.**"

According to this scripture, our "confidence" (*fearless and unreserved utterance*) seriously affects our reward. It implies that the measure of our confidence determines the measure of our reward. Therefore, we are told, "do not throw away your confidence!" During testing and difficult times it is very easy for us to lose our confidence and change our confession. The mere fact that it is much harder to achieve our goals often impacts on our confidence, and consequently, our speech. Yet, we are encouraged to hang on to the "confidence" we already have! The reason? If we do not hang on to our confidence, the rich rewards that are due will be hindered from getting to us. Can you see something in this process? Holding on to the confidence we have is a **faith** exercise. We must always have "rich rewards" in mind when holding on to our confidence. Confidence is the 'attribute' that produces rich (great) reward. Now, these rewards can be anything from financial to relational. But whatever the reward, it will be very significant!

If confidence is a faith exercise, then we should have complete trust in the faithfulness of God - all the time! But we should also have a complete trust in the unique abilities that God has given us. We should have a general sense of control in our lives, and genuinely believe that God is working all things together for our good. Having this attitude does not mean that we will be able to do anything and everything. However, it ensures that what we do do is 'faith-filled'. Even when our expectations are low, we can continue being positive. Confidence is extremely important in almost every aspect of life, yet so many people struggle with it. Sadly, this can be a vicious circle. Those of you who lack self-confidence will find it difficult to become high achievers and your rewards in life will be poor - mainly because you won't get a positive response from others. But let's be real, would anyone instinctively want to back a person who doesn't believe in himself?

Therefore, let us do exactly what Hebrews 10:35 says! Let us make up our minds never to discard our bold and fearless confession. Let us purpose to be confident and courageous in everything we say and do! And let us also be encouraged by the fact that we will all be richly rewarded for our efforts.

Content

(*αὐτάρκης* = 'avtarkis')

To be content, self-sufficient, sufficient in oneself, adequate, needing no assistance, having sufficient strength.

Philippians 4:11, "Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content." The unique word there is "content" (*αὐτάρκης*). It's quite an unusual Greek word because it comes from stoic philosophy. Paul has chosen to use one of the great words of Pagan ethics, 'avtarkis', which means to be entirely "self-sufficient." But why has he gone down this route? Let's first look at what the stoics meant by it and then we will compare it to what Paul meant. Self-sufficiency was the highest aim of the stoics. In stoic thinking it meant a state of mind in which a person was absolutely independent of all things and all people, and they proposed to reach this state by applying certain reasoning. They chose to do this by first eliminating all desire and then eliminating all emotion - to get people to a point where they didn't care what happened to themselves or to other people. Paul uses that word, but he uses it differently because Paul cannot (and does not) mean the elimination of all emotion and desire. After all, Paul really cared for other people.

In Philippians 1:7 we read, *"Its right for me to feel this way about all of you since I have you in my hearts."* According to this statement, Paul really does care! Paul genuinely loves people. Paul is deeply interested in the lives of these people and prays for them continually. Therefore, Paul is not talking about not caring when he uses this word for "contentment." However, there is a point where his meaning mingles with that of the stoics; since Paul is suggesting that there is a place in life where we can live independently of our circumstances. He is convinced that there can be a peace, a stability in us, a sense of contentment and joy, that's not connected to storms of life. In fact, the reason why Paul can be **content** is because he is certain (fully persuaded) that everything is subject to change for the better! And this is how he puts it; *"I learned how to be content in good times and in bad, rich times and in poor, when I am hungry and when I am feasting. In all of these kinds of times, I have learned how to have a sense of wholeness that's independent of all of that. I have learned the secret of having all of these kinds of things happening, and despite all of that, being free inside, being whole, being safe."*

Notice, Paul is happy to share his secret with us, and it's quite simple. It's not complicated, but it's not easy either. His secret still means that we are going to have to live through the ups and downs of life. However, it does work! It worked for him again and again - in beatings, in shipwrecks, in hunger, and in sorrows that he faced. And it will work for us today! We can also learn to be "content" in every circumstance in life. So what exactly is the key? Paul learnt to be self-sufficient with regards people and things, while being totally reliant of God. He had taught himself to be completely dependent on God, while staying independent of his circumstances. Paul's sufficiency was first in God and then in himself (because of God). As a result, he knew that whatever he was going through was subject to change for the better. This is true contentment.