

Luke 18:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.

Analysis

Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein—Jesus uses the solemn formula *amēn legō hymin* (ἀμὲν λέγω ὑμῖν), 'truly I tell you,' indicating critical importance. *Hos ean mē dexētai tēn basileian tou theou hōs paidion* (ὅς ἐὰν μὴ δέξηται τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ὡς παιδίον)—'whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a child.'

The key is *dexētai* (δέξηται)—'receive,' not achieve or earn. *Ou mē eiselthē eis autēn* (οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθῃ εἰς αὐτήν)—'shall in no wise enter it'—the strongest Greek negative, making entrance absolutely impossible apart from childlike reception. Children receive gifts because they can't earn them. Similarly, the kingdom cannot be achieved by adult works (Pharisee), but must be received through humble dependence (tax collector, infant).

Historical Context

Jesus's teaching radically challenged first-century assumptions. Judaism emphasized becoming a 'son of the commandments' (*bar mitzvah*) at age 13—achieving adult status through Torah obedience. Greek philosophy valued adult reason over childish naivety. Roman culture emphasized civic duty and achievement. Jesus reverses everything: adults must become like children—dependent, trusting, aware of their inability to contribute—to enter God's kingdom.

This anticipates Paul's teaching that salvation is gift received by faith, not wages earned by works (Romans 6:23).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What specific childlike qualities are required to receive God's kingdom?
2. How does the contrast between 'receiving as a child' and 'earning as an adult' illuminate the gospel?
3. In what ways might your adult self-sufficiency hinder humble reception of God's kingdom?

Interlinear Text

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|-------------|-------|----------|-----------|----------------|-------|---------|---------|---------|
| ἀμὲν | λέγω | ὕμῖν | ὃς | ἐὰν | μὴ | δέξεται | τὴν | |
| Verily | I say | unto you | Whosoever | G1437 | G3361 | receive | G3588 | |
| G281 | G3004 | G5213 | G3739 | | | G1209 | | |
| βασιλείαν | τοῦ | θεοῦ | ὥς | παιδίου | οὐ | μὴ | εἰσέλθῃ | εἰς |
| the kingdom | G3588 | of God | as | a little child | G3756 | G3361 | enter | therein |
| G932 | | G2316 | G5613 | G3813 | | | G1525 | G1519 |
| αὐτήν | | | | | | | | |
| G846 | | | | | | | | |

Additional Cross-References

Mark 10:15 (Kingdom): Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

Matthew 18:3 (Kingdom): 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.

1 Peter 1:14 (Parallel theme): As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

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