

What Jesus Really Meant by 'Become Like a Child'

Martin Luther had six children, and one day, exasperated by their noise, Luther muttered about Jesus' comment in Matthew 18:3 that unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven:

"Dear God, do we have to become such idiots?"

While the rumination is humorous, it caused me to wonder, ***What did Jesus really mean that we must become as a child?***

That's when it hit me. Dr. Alexander Vazakas was my 83-year-old philosophy professor in college who had received his Ph.D. under John Dewey. A remarkable Pentecostal scholar originally from Thessalonica, Greece, Dr. Vazakas could communicate fluently in 18 languages. One day he was talking in class about two kinds of knowledge: **cognitive and affective**.

- **Cognitive is knowledge of facts:** things like what, where, when, who, and why.
- **Affective is relational knowledge**, as in, "Adam knew his wife Eve."

When my daughter Evangeline was 3, she didn't have much cognitive knowledge about me. She didn't know what it meant to be six feet tall or to be married (she thought she'd always been around), and she didn't know much about doctoral degrees. Shortly after she saw me walk across stage to pick up my doctoral diploma, though, she walked across a platform at the end of daily Vacation Bible School and proudly announced that she, too, had gotten her doctorate!

But while she didn't know much about me, she knew me better than a lot of people who knew more facts. Why? Because of affective knowledge. **She knew me through relationship.**

So, *that's it*, I said to myself as I drove. Jesus was talking about affective knowledge. Children don't know a lot of facts. **The doorway to the Kingdom is through relationship**—"You must be born again" (John 3:7)

Cognitive knowledge is worthless in the Christian realm without affective knowledge. There are many brilliant theologians who can dazzle you with their knowledge of the Bible, archeology, hermeneutics, exegesis, higher and lower criticism—but who have no personal relationship with God. They know about God, but do not know God.

I realized that when my daughter grew to adulthood, she would understand the information about me, but it would take time. That insight freed me to accept people into our church who had a relationship with Jesus Christ but areas of belief and behavior that needed maturation.

The call to ministry means we do our best to **create an environment conducive to God's working** in the lives of His people. People change from within when they have a relationship with Jesus Christ, not from the imposition of doctrines or standards of behavior from outside.

God looks on the heart, which means He knows what each and every heart devoted to Him needs, and **He knows how that heart must change** to be right with Him.

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