

# A BIBLICAL DEFENSE OF CHILD EVANGELISM

Student's Name

CM 205 PROGRESSIVE METHODS OF CHILD EVANGELISM

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## Introduction

In the foreword to *Children – A Biblical Perspective*, Dr. Wright shares this anonymous quote: “Children do not make up 100% of our population, but they do make up 100% of our future” (Wright 2011, i). In ten to twenty years from now, the children of today will be the adults of tomorrow who are running the country, entering the work force, and teaching the next generation. Therefore, it is important for the course of the future that the correct foundation be laid in the current generation. If one is a Christian, hopefully one will want the society to be following God’s perspective. But unregenerate sinners are bent on doing evil and cannot live God’s way and understand His Word. As Romans 3:23 (English Standard Version) says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” all people, even children, are born with a sin nature and are in need of a Savior. Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” Therefore, child evangelism and conversion are essential to saving the soul of a child, not only so that he or she can escape the clutches of Hell, but so that that child can have a relationship with God, live God’s way, and understand His truth.

Statistics show that childhood tends to be the ripest time for salvation. Dr. Sam Doherty mentions that “one survey conducted mainly by Child Evangelism Fellowship workers in USA found that 85% of the Christians contacted were saved between the ages of 4 and 14” (Doherty 2011, 168-169). Not only do children tend to be saved in childhood but those who are actively involved in Christian practices during childhood will tend to continue this practice over those who are not involved. The Barna Group, a group that monitors and reports America’s recent trends and statistics, wrote,

When it comes to church engagement, those who attended Sunday school or other religious programs as children or as teens were much more likely than those without such experiences to attend church and to have an active faith as adults. For instance, among those who frequently attended such programs as a child, 50% said they attended a worship service in the last week, which is slightly higher than the national average and well ahead of those who rarely or never attended children’s programs. (Barna Group 2009)

Although studies do show that those that are saved tend to do so at a young age, some still have doubts about child evangelism. Some say that all children born into Christian families are automatically protected. Others say that a child should always be brought up in the faith and then when a child is older, such as in the preteen years, and has a greater ability to reason then they can receive Christ. But when discussing child conversion one should always go back to God's Word. Passages in the Old Testament from places like Deuteronomy and also passages from the New Testament such as Matthew, Mark, and the Epistles are filled with intriguing comments about God's view of children and how to teach them. After investigating Scripture it is also important to draw conclusions about the thoughts of the Christian's responsibility to this next generation in light of what God's Word has said.

## Four Philosophies

### Traditional Philosophy

There are four main philosophies of childhood conversion. They can be referred to as the traditional philosophy, educational philosophy, psychological philosophy, and the child evangelism philosophy. According to the "Theology of Child Conversion" notes in the module *Progressive Methods of Child Evangelism*, the traditional philosophy is defined as follows:

The Christian life of the child is formed by his environment. Conversion is a phenomenon of adolescence and until he has the use of reason (around twelve years of age), the child is not lost, since he is **safe under the covenant** by belonging to a Christian family. (CEF 2013, 22)

Those that believe this view believe that a child is safe from Hell, until the age of twelve, because the child's parents are Christians and/or because the child has been baptized. I do not believe this belief is accurate because every direct reference, taken in context, to salvation in the Bible pertains to one's own salvation only. For example, Romans 10:9 says, "[B]ecause, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved". This verse does not mention anything about anyone else being saved, just the person confessing and believing. The same is with John 1:12, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." This verse says that all can

receive Christ, which includes children, and it also says that one must receive and believe in Him personally to be saved.

Those that believe the traditional view often use passages like Exodus 12:12-13, Acts 2:38-39, Acts 16:31, and 1 Corinthians 7:14-16 to support their view. But the blanket salvation conclusions of these passages are taken out of context. For instance, the 1 Corinthians passage is not talking about the salvation of children or even the salvation of the other spouse in the instance that one spouse becomes a Christian. Rather Paul shares that if one spouse becomes a Christian, that one need not divorce the other one. Rather the unbelieving spouse and children are sanctified or receive a blessing from the believing spouse. This passage has nothing to do with automatic salvation nor do any of the other passages.

Furthermore, I do not believe this view because God's Word not only clearly states that one must personally decide to choose Christ but Scripture does not mention anything about an infant's salvation through baptism. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." No one is saved through a good work, including the "good work" of baptism. It is completely through faith in Christ. Those in favor of the traditional view may use Acts 2:38-39 to support infant baptism but actually Acts 2:38-39 is not talking about infant baptism. One will easily see this when reading the passage in context. Acts 2:38-39 is a response to the people asking what they must do in response to Peter's message and it is clear by verse 21 and even verse 38 that salvation is a personal conviction. Children should be invited to make this decision but they are not covered by the parent's choice.

### **Educational Philosophy**

The educational philosophy says that:

The child should receive biblical knowledge from a very young age and develop Christian habits and attitudes. One day he will make a personal decision for Christ, and be saved. (CEF 2013, 23)

While this belief sounds noble at first, the underlying belief here is that there is no intentional teaching of the Gospel and no given opportunity to receive Christ at a young age. This idea originated from Horace Bushnell's book *Christian Nurture* (CEF 2013,

23). It is mainly based on the passages in Deuteronomy which commands parents to continually teach their children God's commands. While I do agree that one should continually teach God's Word, even at a young age, I do not believe that one should withhold the opportunity from a child to respond to the Gospel. When the people in the Old Testament times were teaching their children about God's law, they did not hold back any of God's teaching nor the opportunity to believe in God. Today, Christians have both the Old and New Testament, and should not hold back from teaching any part of God's Word including God's offer of salvation. In Matthew 18:14 Jesus says, "So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." The word perish is speaking of being separated from God. If God does not want little children to perish, and the only way to be saved is to believe in God's only Son, then He must want children to be shown how to receive Him as their Savior and not just be taught facts about Him.

In addition, 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." So I believe, from this verse, that while it is good that a person is taught about God from childhood, spiritual concepts are not correctly understood until salvation. Nor can Christian growth principles be applied until salvation, for it is at that time that the Holy Spirit indwells the believer. The educational philosophy tries to develop Godly attitudes and habits before salvation and one sees from this verse that this action is foolishness. It can be dangerous to withhold the concept of receiving Christ until children are older because they are less likely to receive Christ but rather become proud of their head knowledge of Christ (1 Cor. 8:1) and fail to have that personal relationship with Christ through salvation. Since God does want children to be saved, as seen in Matthew 18:14, it is important that one is intentional with the teaching of the Bible to lead to salvation. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

### **Psychological Philosophy**

The definition of the psychological philosophy is:

The child is incapable of understanding symbolism and abstract concepts and is unable to reason; therefore, he cannot make a decision for Christ. (CEF 2013, 24)

The heart behind this concept came from Jean Piaget who developed a theory regarding the intellectual development of a person. There are essentially four stages of growth: sensorimotor period (birth to two years), preoperational period (two to seven years), concrete operations period (seven to eleven years), and formal operations period (twelve and older) (24). While it is true that children do go through these basic stages at these approximate ages, I do not agree that this keeps a child from understanding the concept of salvation. Rather, it is the teacher's responsibility to teach the concepts on the child's level. "All abstract concepts can be understood through concrete examples" (Herlein 2014). Although the author of this quote is unknown the truth still stands. Abstract ideas like sin can be explained in concrete ways by showing pictures and giving examples of sin. In the same way, teaching about salvation and forgiveness of sin can be shown through concrete examples such as object lessons, pictures, and other illustrations.

Furthermore, there is no verse in the Bible which states that man must have "understanding" to come to salvation. Rather, "he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (Tit. 3:5). Salvation is a work of the Holy Spirit which is something that this philosophy completely ignores. Edward Hayes says in the book *Childhood Education in the Church*, "Words alone will not win. Words—meaningful terms—combined with love, rich and deep feeling, make the gospel come alive in a child's experience. God stands ready to save the child on the exercise of the child's faith" (Hayes [1975] 1986, 410).

### **Child Evangelism Philosophy**

The last philosophy is that of child evangelism. It states that:

The Gospel should be presented to the child at an early age so that as the Holy Spirit works, he will come to know Jesus as his personal Savior. As a result that child can begin to develop Christian character, which is the outward expression of a new inward life. (CEF 2013, 25)

I believe that this philosophy best aligns with what the Bible teaches about child conversion. In its complexities, this view holds that although children are born with a sin

nature they are not held accountable for their sin, before God, until they reach the age of comprehension, or also called, the age of accountability. This is an age known only to God. If a child dies before this age is reached they are guaranteed access into Heaven. One Scripture commonly used for evidence that these children go to Heaven is 2 Samuel 12:23 where David says, "But now he [the baby] is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me." David knew that he was going to Heaven when he died, and he also had assurance that he would see his child there.

Although it is believed that children who have not reached the age of comprehension go to Heaven, that does not mean that children should not be evangelized or that they cannot be saved. Rather those who believe in child evangelism believe that because one does not know when each child reaches that point of comprehension it is important to teach the Scriptures while the child is young and to continually give that child an opportunity to receive Christ. I believe this is true as the Bible confirms this in 2 Timothy where it is expressed that Timothy was taught about the Scriptures since the time he was a baby and then Matthew 18 expresses Christ's desire for children to be saved. In addition, Christian history is filled with children who trusted Christ at a young age. Their conversion was genuine as they bore great fruit for Him later on in life. A small list includes Corrie Ten Boom (saved at age 5), Amy Carmichael (saved at age 9), James Dobson (saved at age 3), Jonathan Edwards (saved at age 7), Matthew Henry (saved at age 11), Ruth Graham (saved at age 5), Mary Slessor (saved at age 7), Jim Elliot (saved at age 6), and Dr. Isaac Watts (saved at age 9) (Doherty 2011, 168). It is evident through the lives of Christians that one can be saved at a young age and then develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Man has theorized many ideas about a child and his or her salvation. While it may be okay to look at man's belief on a child's salvation, as a Christian, it is most important to discuss God's view. In the following sections, a deeper examination of God's Word will be conducted to see what God says about child evangelism.



## Old Testament Passages

### Deuteronomy 4:1-10

Children are the future of society and God's Word has a lot to say about how to teach them. For example, the book of Deuteronomy is filled with passages to remind parents to teach their children God's commands. The first passage to focus on is Deuteronomy 4:1-10. Here Moses is beginning to give instructions to those entering Canaan. Those entering are the next generation and did not necessarily remember or experience God's provision in Egypt and the giving of the law at Mt. Horeb. Therefore Moses is reminding them of God's commandments before they enter the land. First off in verse 1, Moses starts by instructing the people to listen to the statutes and rules and then to obey them. This is in order that they might live, go in, and possess the land that the Lord is giving them (Deut. 4:1). The Hebrew word for "listen" is *shama* and it means "to hear, listen to, obey" (Blue Letter Bible 2014, s.v. "Strong's H8085—*shama*"). Therefore Moses is not just telling the people to listen to what he has to say but to obey it. The idea of listening to the law and then obeying it is also found in verses 4 through 6 and verse 9. This idea is also carried in the New Testament as James 1:22 says, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves".

"Taught" (*lamad*) in the Hebrew means "to learn" and is often translated that way (Blue Letter Bible 2014, s.v. "Strong's 3925—*lamad*"). Therefore God did not just want His commandments to be taught to the people but He also wanted them to be learned. Verse 3 records an incident when the Israelites did not learn God's commands and went after other gods. God punished them for whoring after Baal of Peor but spared those who did not and gave this verse as a reminder to the current generation (Deut. 4:3-5). One of the reasons that God wanted the people to follow His commands is because "that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples" (verse 6). The Israelites' example of keeping God's law showed that His law is righteous and that God is near to His people (verse 7 and 8). God wanted them to keep His commands so that they would not forget what they had seen and so they would not depart from God (verse 9). He also instructed them in this verse to make God's commandments known to their children and the children after them. The Hebrew word to "know" is *yada* and it means "to make known, declare" (s.v. "Strong's H3045—*yada*"). This first commandment

was given at Mt. Horeb and God wanted His words to continue to be declared throughout the generations (verse 10).

### **Deuteronomy 6:1-9**

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is often called the Shema and is central to this passage (Got Questions, “What is a Shema,” 2014). Moses says in verse 1 that God commanded him to teach this to the Israelites. The word here for teach (*lamad*) is the same word used in Deuteronomy 4. Besides its literal meaning it also carries the idea of doing something repeatedly (Bachelder 2014). Therefore, God wants His commandments to be taught repeatedly in order that “you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long” (Deut. 6:2). Verse 3 has the word *shama* (listen) in it just like Deut. 4. God’s instructions here is that the people listen and obey God’s Word in order to receive His blessing to multiply them, just as He had promised. God has great rewards for those who keep His Word.

Verse 4 starts the Shema, which is derived from the word for listen. The command is to “love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut. 6:5) and to continually keep these words upon one’s heart (verse 6). Then the command is to teach them diligently to the children and to talk about them at all times (Deut. 6:7). This includes when sitting at home, walking along the way, lying down, and rising up (Deut 6:7). They are also be written as signs on the hands, as frontlets between the eyes, and written on the doorposts of the houses and on the gates (Deut 6:8-9). In short, God’s commands are to always be taught and to be visualized and communicated in every way.

### **Deuteronomy 11:18-21**

This passage is a close reiteration of the Shema in Deut. 6:4-9. The fact that God repeated these principles so close together should be a sign to all people that this is a very serious command of God. This passage also mentions laying up God’s Word in one’s heart and soul, binding them on the hands and frontlets between the eyes, teaching God’s Word at all times, and writing God’s Word in visible places such as the doorposts and gates. The word *lamad* is used again when talking about teaching the

children. He desires that each generation know about Him. Children must be continually taught God's law through the different methods listed in the passage. Obviously, God's commands are to be repeated continually and in every situation. In fact, the *ESV Student Study Bible* comments on the two pairs of opposites (sitting/walking and lying down/rising up) in verse 18 by saying that "[this suggests] that the teaching is to take place at any and all opportunities" (*ESV Student Study Bible* 2011, 246). In verse 21 it is promised that if they fulfill the command in verses 18-20 that their days and the days of their children would be multiplied in the land, just as God had said. In summary, parents have a grave responsibility to hide God's Word in their children's hearts, teach them His Word, and keep it written and visible in the homes (CEF 2013, 30).

### **Deuteronomy 31:9-13**

Near the end of Moses' talk he tells the people about the instructions for the Feasts of Booths. Moses said at the appointed time that all of Israel was to come together for the reading of the law (Deut. 31:10-11). This included men, women, the little ones, and the sojourners in the towns (Deut. 31:12). This was in order that the children who had not heard and known God's Word and how had He worked in the past would hear God's Word, know Him, and fear Him (Deut. 31:13). The three key Hebrew words first mentioned in Deuteronomy 6 all appear in this passage as well. Those words are *yada* (to know), *shama* (to listen), and *lamad* (to teach). God wanted those who had not known (*yada*) Him, to know His words. God wanted those who had not heard (*shama*) His commandments, to hear His voice. God wanted those children who had not learned (*lamad*) to fear Him, to learn of His great glory. Dr. Doherty summarizes the passages by saying that God wanted children to COME together with others to be taught the Word of God, to LISTEN to the Word of God when they come, to UNDERSTAND the Word of God when they listen, to FEAR, RESPECT, or TRUST the Lord as a result of hearing, and OBEY the Lord to demonstrate trust (Doherty 2011, 40-42).

### **Psalm 78:1-8**

George Santayana writes in his book *The Life of Reason*, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (Santayana [1905] 1980, vol. 1, chap. 12). The purpose of Psalm 78 is to remind the Israelites of their history so that they can teach it to their children and hopefully avoid making the same mistakes. Verse 1 starts

out by exhorting the people to incline their ears to the words of the psalmist. The Hebrew for “ear” is *azan* which denotes stretching out one’s ear like an animal does when at full attention. Verse 2 and 3 says that the things which will be uttered are things which have been heard, known, and have been told by their fathers. Specifically these things are “the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His strength (power)—creation, power in battle, [and] the wonders He has done” (as stated in verse 4) (CEF 2013, 32). These things, including God’s laws (see verse 5) are not to be hid from the generations to come but to be told to the children at all times, just like God commanded in Deuteronomy. The purpose of telling these things to the future generations is so that they will set their hope in God, not forget God’s works, and keep His commandments (see verse 7). The psalmist is hoping that the future generation will not be like their fathers who were a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not steadfast and their spirit was not faithful to God (verse 8). As Matthew Henry’s writes in his commentary, “[Psalm 78:8 was written so they] that have descended from wicked and ungodly ancestors, if they will but consider the word and works of God, will see reason enough not to tread in their steps” (Henry 1996). The hope is that the next generation will keep God’s commands and pass it on to the future generations to continue the Godly heritage (verse 6).

Although these passages are found in the Old Testament, they still apply to child conversion. Today, children are to be taught God’s commandments and laws at all times. This teaching should also include the message of salvation. This is because “the law of the LORD is perfect, reviving [converting] the soul...” (Psalm 19:7). Today, since Christians not only have the condemnation of the law but also the opportunity and gift of salvation they can use both to teach children. They can use the law to bring conviction and God’s mercy to show the way of salvation. Then they can use God’s law again to teach the saved child how God wants them to live as a new creation. These principles are to be passed on to the generations to come, like Psalm 78 teaches. God’s faithfulness and His instructions are important to pass on lest the next generation forget it and repeat mankind’s follies.

## Gospel Passages

### Matthew 18:1-14

This passage in Matthew is probably the strongest argument for child evangelism and conversion. Matthew 18:1 starts out with the disciples asking Jesus, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?” In response, verse 2 says that Jesus calls a child to Him and places him in the midst of them. Mark 9:36, which records the same account, says that Jesus took the child into His arms. Jesus then answers their question by saying “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (verse 3). This answer most likely surprised the disciples because “children in that society had a very low position” (CEF 2013, 9). In fact the *Bible Knowledge Commentary* says, “[A] child...had no rights according to the law” (CEF 2013, 9). The Greek word used here for “child” is *paidion*. This word “implies a younger child (perhaps seven years old or younger)” (Bible Hub 2014, s.v. “3813: *paidion*”). Jesus was using this child as an illustration of who could enter Heaven. He says in verse 3 that one must be converted with faith like a child in order to enter Heaven.

The Greek word for “converted” is *strepheo* and according to *Strong’s Concordance* means to literally “turn around” or metaphorically to “to turn one's self from one's course of conduct, i.e. to change one's mind” (Blue Letter Bible 2014, s.v. “Strong’s G4762–*strepheo*”). When one is converted to Christianity, one literally changes his or her mind from loving sin to turning away from sin. This is an action that only God can do, men cannot do it on their own (CEF 2013, 9). In addition, a person must express this conversion as a child would—that is, in humble faith (verse 4). Doherty puts it this way, “...conversion necessitates, the Lord Jesus says, likeness to a child—to become teachable, open, simple, trustful, humble, dependent, sensitive, and submissive, These are all childlike characteristics or qualities and the Lord Jesus tells His disciples and people today that to be converted (to turn), to enter the kingdom of Heaven one must become like children and have these qualities” (Doherty 2011, 56). In verses 6, Jesus shows how much He values children by saying that anyone who receives a child in His name receives Him as well.

Starting in verse 6 a different word for child is used and that is the word *mikros*. Most of the time the word *mikros* is translated “little one” in the Matthew 18 passage. This word means “small [or] little” (Blue Letter Bible 2014, s.v. “Strong’s G3398–*mikros*”). Jesus says in this verse that whoever causes these little children, who believe in me, to sin is in great trouble; it would have been better for that person to have a millstone hung around the neck and to be drown in the depth of the sea. This was a very serious form of punishment for the Jewish people as they saw this as the worst possible way to die (CEF 2013, 11). But Jesus wanted to illustrate the seriousness of causing a little child to sin. This can be done by wrong attitudes, actions, or words. Also important in this passage is the word for “believe”. The Greek word is *pisteuo*. This is the same word for believe that is used in Acts 16:31 and John 3:16. These verses are commonly used to invite people to believe in the Lord Jesus. Since Jesus uses this same word to describe the belief of little children it is quite evident that little children (*mikros*) can put their trust in Jesus as well. Verses 7 through 9 give a short reminder about the gravity of sin. Even going to the extreme of removing a member of one’s body to keep from sinning or to keep from causing others to sin.

The last section is a parable about the lost sheep. Jesus uses this story to illustrate how important children are to Him. Verse 10 starts by saying that there are special angels in Heaven which always see the face of the Father, therefore one should not despise the little ones. To despise means to view “...with a negative (hostile) outlook; to despise, thinking down on (thinking little of); esteem lightly, seeing as insignificant or detestable; to treat with contempt or disregard; devalue; to depreciate (scorn); pay no regard to (because something seems of no account); 'despise, scorn,' and show it by active insult” (Bible Hub 2014, s.v. “2706: *kataphroneo*”). Jesus does not want adults to despise children because the angels in Heaven are ministering to these children, Jesus came to save these children, and it is God’s will that they be saved (CEF 2013, 13).

This is further emphasized in verses 12 and 13 which is also part of Jesus’ parable about the shepherd who loses one of his sheep. But instead of staying with the other ninety-nine sheep he goes and looks for the lone lost sheep. When he finds this sheep, he rejoice more over it than the others who did not wander away. This passage

shows that Jesus loves and looks for lost children and greatly delights when one is found (CEF 2013, 12). The passage concludes with this verse, “So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.” Little ones, again, in this verse is *mikros* and God does not want any of these little ones to perish.

Actually, when dealing with child evangelism and conversion the strongest verses in this passage are verses 6 and 14. Just like one sees in verse 6 which has the word “believe” in it from John 3:16, the word “perish” in Matthew 18:14 is the same word used in John 3:16. Jesus came to save adults so that they would not perish; and in the same way, Jesus also came to save children from their sins so that they would not perish but believe in Him and have eternal life. Salvation is no respecter of age. This is evident by the fact that Jesus welcomes little children to believe in Him so that they do not perish (verse 14) and punishes those who would lead these believing children astray (verse 6). Jesus loves the little children.

### **Mark 10:13-16**

This passage differs from the Matthew 18 passage in that it is not a passage that necessarily promotes child evangelism. Rather the purpose of this passage is to communicate Jesus’ care for children. The three main groups of people involved here are the people, the disciples, and Jesus. In verse 13 the people are bringing the children to Jesus so that He could bless them. The Greek word used for “children” is the word *paidion* just like in Matthew 18. In Luke’s account of this story he uses the Greek word *brephos* which, according to *Strong’s Concordance*, denotes an “unborn...or newborn child, an infant, [or] a babe” (Blue Letter Bible 2014, s.v. “Strong’s G1025–*brephos*”). But instead of the disciples learning their lesson from Jesus’ dissertation in Matthew 18, they rebuke the children and keep them from coming to Jesus.

In verse 14, it records Jesus’ response which says that He was indignant! This is the only reference that this word is used for Jesus. The Greek word is *aganakteo* and it means “‘much displeased’; carries with it a sense of grief” (CEF 2013, 18). One reason that Jesus was so upset was because instead of learning from what He had “taught about the value of the child...the disciples had failed the test!” (18). Jesus said in response to their actions, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such

belongs the kingdom of God.” This passage is not implying that all children are saved but He is implying that “all, including children, who come to Jesus in childlike trust and dependence are given free access to Jesus” (19). Just like in Matthew 18, the requirement for entering the kingdom of God mentioned in verse 15 is receiving Christ in childlike faith, complete trust in God, and dependence on God and His mercy (19). Lastly, one sees in verse 16 that Jesus takes the little children into His arms and blesses them. This phrase denotes that “He blessed them fervently again and again” (20). What a wonderful picture this paints of Jesus and His love for children; certainly they are among those He desires not to be lost, but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Both Matthew 18 and Mark 10 show that Jesus deeply loves the little children and that in order to enter into Heaven one must have the faith of a child. What a great message to have from Jesus Christ Himself concerning the children.

### **Epistle Passages**

#### **Ephesians 1:1-3; 6:1-4**

The Greek word for the word “saint” is *hagios* which means “most holy thing” (Blue Letter Bible 2014, s.v. “Strong’s G40–*hagios*”). The definition of a saint is explained by Gotquestions.org as, “The idea of the word ‘saint’ is a group of people set apart for the Lord and His kingdom [see 1 Corinthians 1:2]...All Christian[s] are saints...The words ‘sanctified’ and ‘holy’ come from the same Greek root as the word that is commonly translated ‘saints.’ Christians are saints by virtue of their connection with Jesus Christ...This is the biblical description and calling of the saints” (Got Questions, “What are Christian Saints,” 2014). The definition of a saint is not determined by age but by one’s relationship with Christ. Therefore, it is logical to assume that children can be considered saints and according to chapter 6 of Ephesians Paul does consider them saved saints.

Ephesians 6:1 starts by exhorting children to obey their parents in the Lord. Paul’s direction to children comes after his general comments to all Christians and then more specifically to husbands and wives and is followed by admonitions to fathers, bondservants, and masters. Since Paul is addressing saved people in each of these categories it would be natural to conclude that the children he is addressing are also



saved. The word children used in this passage is *teknon*, which generally denotes children of any sex (Bible Hub 2014, s.v. “Strong’s NT 5043: Teknon”). The notes from the CMI student manual also state that this Greek word reveals that this is a small child (CEF 2013, 28). Since the Greek word for child alludes to a small child and Paul is talking to saved saints it would be safe to assume that a young child could be a faithful Christian. Paul also comments that it is right for these children to obey their parents in the Lord. How can an unsaved person obey in the Lord? This verse clearly shows that Paul is speaking to saved children. In addition, it is the father’s job to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Sam Doherty comments about this verse in his book by saying, “...it is obvious that both of these commands can be most effective if the children have, first of all, been evangelized and have trusted Christ as their Savior” (Doherty 2011, 150).

### **Colossians 1:1-2; 3:20-21**

Paul’s instructions to the Christians at Colossae were very similar to those who lived in Ephesus. First off, he starts the letter in the same way by giving greetings to the faithful saints there. As mentioned in the comments on the book of Ephesians, the words saints has no age qualifier. Also, as in the book of Ephesians, Paul sandwiches his instructions to children between comments to the different believers. A similar point is to be made that if Paul is addressing saved adults in the other parts of his letter, then it is natural to assume that the children he is addressing are also saved. The same Greek word, *teknon*, is also used for the word “child” and assumes the equivalent meaning.

One significant difference between Ephesians and Colossians is that in Colossians, Paul tells the children to obey their parents because it pleases the Lord (see Col. 3:20). The Greek word for “Lord” is *kyrios* and in this setting refers to the Lord Jesus Christ (Blue Letter Bible 2014, s.v. “Strong’s G2962–*kyrios*”). Paul probably would not have instructed the children to please the Lord unless He was their Lord. In verse 18 of chapter 3, Paul tells wives that they are to submit to their husbands because it is fit in the Lord. One naturally understands that Paul is talking to saved women, so it follows that Paul is also talking to saved children in verse 20 as he uses like

expressions. From this and the other examples from the text it is logical to concur that children can be saved as Paul is addressing saved children.

### **Titus 1:6**

Titus 1:5-9 lists many characteristics that an elder is not supposed to be including arrogant, quick-tempered, a drunkard, violent, and greedy for gain. But this passage also lists good qualifications for an elder including being above reproach, having only one wife, being hospitable, being a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, disciplined, and holding firmly to God's Word. Among the list is also that "his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination" (Titus 1:6). The word for children in this passage differs slightly from the one listed in Ephesians and Colossians as it has the Greek word *pistos* connected with it. In the Greek text it reads *teknon pistos* which, according to the commentary by A. R. Fausset, means "believing children... [or as] ALFORD explains, 'established in the faith'" (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown 1871). This verse is very important because it indicates that children can have a real and personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is also said that the elder's children are not to be open to the charge of debauchery or rebellion. While this is good advice for all children, it should especially exemplify the life of a saved child. Salvation and sanctification of a child must have been attainable or else Paul would not have put it as a qualification to be an elder.

In relations to child evangelism, the Bible is filled with instructions about how to care for the spiritual needs of a child. In the Old Testament passages it is clear that God's commands concerning the law are to be taught to the next generation. The Gospels demonstrate that children are to be given the opportunity to receive Christ and are to be shown Christ's love. Finally, the Epistles instruct how the saved child is to act as a member of God's family and how the adults in that child's life can encourage them to obey the Lord. How wonderful it is that God clearly states how the current generation is to pass on His instructions to the next generation.

### **The Christian's Responsibility Today**

No child should be denied the opportunity to receive Christ. Jesus' last commandments to His disciples was to go out into all the world and preach the good

news to all creation (Mark 16:15). Children are not excluded from this command. Men like Jean Piaget would argue that children cannot receive Christ because they do not have the mental capacity to understand Biblical principles. Fortunately, man is not saved by his or her ability to reason but by the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Salvation is a work of the Holy Spirit. This is true for children as well. The only thing that Jesus requires is that children come to Him in childlike faith (Matthew 18:3-4). Therefore salvation has nothing to do with reason but has everything to do with God and His grace. Even a child can be blessed with God's grace and exercise this faith and receive Him as Savior.

I am glad that someone took the responsibility to tell me about the Savior. I was saved at the age of six. A lady in my church was led to present the *Wordless Book* to me and through her clear explanation of the Gospel I prayed to receive Christ. At times, I told myself that I did not feel saved but I always went back to God's Word and knew that God kept His promises. When God said in John 1:12 that if one received and believe in Jesus for salvation, I believed that He was true to His Word. When I was fifteen, I received complete confirmation of my salvation through the Holy Spirit by studying God's Word. I cannot say how it happened, I just know that one day I realized that I did not have any more doubts about my salvation; God's Holy Spirit confirmed my salvation. I believe that 2 Timothy 3:14-15 applies to me. These verses share how Timothy was taught the Word from infancy and that it was able to make him wise through faith unto salvation. My salvation came from God's teaching of the Word and it made me wise in His knowledge through faith unto salvation. People may doubt that children can come to know Jesus but the important thing to remember is that salvation is not an ability of the mind, but an act of the Holy Spirit. Never doubt God's ability to work in a child.

Because this is true, the Christian has a responsibility to allow all children this opportunity to receive Christ as their Savior. Christ's desire is that the next generation is taught to see their sin and fear His holiness through His commandments, be presented with the opportunity to receive His grace, and then be disciplined as a new creation. Furthermore, a Christian should never allow his or her behavior to cause a child to stumble or sin. Jesus says this is a grave offense and death would be more suitable for

this person than leading a child astray (Matthew 18:6). Therefore, part of the Christian's responsibility is not just to present God's truth but to obey God's truth also. The Christian's responsibility is to share the message of salvation with the unsaved and provide teachings of growth to the saved, wherever children are to be found.

### **Conclusion**

One can see that man has many opinions about the issue of child conversion but in the end Christians should always go back to God's Word and His authority on the matter. It is clearly shown from God's Word that He desires for children to be taught from His Word. The Old Testament shows God's fervent command to continually impress His commands on the next generation. Jesus welcomes the children to come to Him and be saved; for it is only through child-like faith that one can be saved. Lastly, Paul address saved children and tells them how to live according to God's laws.

"Children do not make up 100% of our population but they do make up 100% of our future", as Dr. Wright noted (Wright 2011, i). Since these children will be running our society in the future, ought Christians to equip them to handle life's trials? Is there a better helper than God? Is there a better guide book than the Bible? Yet, they will not be able to have access to the power of God without first having the forgiveness of God. During childhood, they have the child-like faith needed for salvation if someone will just show them show them how to receive it. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). Childhood is the perfect time to lay the foundation of God's Word in a child's life; for the Almighty God has clearly stated from His Word that He desires them to know Him. Christians ought to take the time to share this with His beloved children and then pray that these children pass it on to the next generation. "...Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14).

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