



BIBLICAL BASIS OF CHILD EVANGELISM

Defense Paper



Submitted by Student Name

CM205 Progressive Methods of Child Evangelism

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Introduction

Charles Spurgeon has instructed, “Believe in the conversion of children, as children; believe that the Lord can call them by His grace, can renew their hearts, can give them a part and a lot among His people long before they can reach the prime of life” (Spurgeon 1975, 81). Spurgeon clearly believed that the Lord can and does sovereignly call children to Himself at a young age. Child Evangelism Fellowship was founded upon this proposition and has committed itself to reaching children while they are young, so that they may give their whole lives to Jesus and be spared the pain and suffering of wasted years outside of God’s will. The Barna Research Group conducted a study in 1990 which came to the conclusion that “the vast majority of all Christians make that critical decision [to accept Christ] before they even reach their teens” (Barna Research Group 1991, 38-39). Moreover, their research shows these are not merely passing professions of faith, but have lasting impact on those who put their faith in Jesus Christ while very young. “People who become Christian before their teen years are more likely than those who are converted when older to remain ‘absolutely committed’ to Christianity” (Barna Group 2004).

Despite the above testimonies, there are still some who doubt children of tender years can come to saving faith in Christ. The Lord Jesus talked in no uncertain terms about “little ones who believe in me” showing He was convinced their faith in Him was genuine (Matt. 18:6 English Standard Version). This paper examines what The Holy Bible has to say on this important subject before, during and after the time the Lord Jesus walked the earth—including an in-depth look at Matthew 18. It will be demonstrated that God makes no distinction as to age on the commission to evangelize the world, and that children were counted among the believers in the early church. Philosophies extant in the Church today will be explored and examined in

light of these Scriptures and the need for Christians today to evangelize children will be made clear.

God's View of Children in the Old Testament

In Deuteronomy 4:1-10 Moses is giving instructions to the nation of Israel, the people of God, prior to his death and their possession of the Promised Land. In verse 1 he writes, “listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them,” giving emphasis not just on hearing the message but also putting it to use in their lives. The word translated “listen” here is the Hebrew *shema*, which is also translated at times as “obey,” and means “to hear with attention or interest, listen to” (Strong 2001, s.v. “shema”). Moses clearly wanted them to get this message he was conveying to them with the intention to obey it so they would dwell peaceably in the land, but it was not just for that generation. They were to “Make them known to your children and your children’s children—” (verse 9). The Hebrew *yada* means, “to make known, declare” and carries the clear implication that the adults are to share all of Moses’ teaching with their children and grandchildren (Strong 2001, s.v. “yada”). Nothing was to be withheld from the young. Verse 10 stresses the importance of them walking with God all their days and also “to teach” (Hebrew *lamad*) their children to do so as well. Moses seemed convinced that children would be able to understand and practice these instructions with good reason. The very nature of our loving Father is that He never gives a command that cannot be obeyed.

In Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Moses actually models what he means by *lamad* as he explains that the Lord God has commanded him to *lamad*, that is teach, these instructions to them to the end “that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it” (verse 1). This involves careful explanation and repetition to plant the guidance deeply in their hearts and

minds. So just as Moses was communicating God's order that parents and grandparents are to teach their descendants to observe all the instructions, he was also modeling for them how to do it. What Moses demonstrates throughout Deuteronomy is patient instruction, giving God's commands and giving the reasons for obedience, including the blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience in Chapter 28.

The Great Commandment is given in verse 5: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." They are commanded to keep them in their hearts, but there is more they are to do. Verses 7-9 instruct that these words be taught diligently (Hebrew: *shanan*) to their children. This includes when they arise and when they go to bed, while sitting at home and walking along the way. *Shanan* means "to sharpen, teach (incisively)" with the clear implication that through repetition in all circumstances verbally accompanied by visual reminders on their foreheads, doorposts and gates, the children would know that God is serious about them learning His ways and loving Him with their whole lives and being (Strong 2001, s.v. "shanan"). This love for God and knowledge of His ways was to be diligently taught to the children perpetually, showing God's desire for the little ones to participate fully in His love for them as part of His people.

Deuteronomy 11:18-21 is largely a restatement of what has been written earlier, again demonstrating the power of repetition as Moses 'practices what he preaches.' Again he tells the parents to *lamad*, or teach, their children all these commands. This is not merely the emphasis that parents follow Moses example of repetition, but here he builds upon what he has said earlier by giving a promise for their obedience. Their days would "be multiplied in the land" (verse 21). This is not just their days, but also the days of their children (Hebrew *ben*) their descendants.

This law Moses was recording would not be generally available in written form, so it had to be passed down orally. Every seven years was a year of release when debts would be forgiven, slaves would be set free and the land was to be given its rest. This would be an especially memorable time for all and particularly the children, because little ones would be experiencing this year of release for the first time. At these times, Deuteronomy 31:9-13 records that everyone was to gather at the fall festival and to hear the words of the law read. The purpose for this assembly is that everyone in the nation, including children and sojourners who may have immigrated since the previous year of release would “learn to fear” and to do all the Lord commanded. The Hebrew word translated fear is “*yare*,” which means “to fear, reverence, honour, respect” (Strong 2001, s.v. “*yare*”). Sojourners and children would have an opportunity to hear directly from God through this reading and be strengthened in their resolve to follow the Lord God of Israel.

This occasion also served as an important check on the ongoing teaching because everyone would hear the words Moses had received from God. This included the “little ones” (verse 12), showing it was not just the descendants but even the smallest of children. The Hebrew word *taph* is used here indicating those with small steps and barely able to walk. This would undoubtedly make a huge impression on children who would be in awe of the assembly and hearing the words of God directly for themselves. This would serve to reinforce the teaching they were receiving from their parents and grandparents and also hold those teachers accountable to be true and faithful to the commands of God, neither adding to them nor taking from them. Children seem to have a knack for finding discrepancies and pointing them out with direct questions. If this command to read the law before the entire nation, young and old, were kept dutifully Israel would have been able to keep true to God by effectively having a nationwide

evaluation every seven years. That children were part of it shows that they were included in God's plans every step of the way, even in this seven-year checkup.

Psalm 78:1-8 begins with the command to "give ear," which is from the Hebrew word *'azan*, meaning "to hear, listen, give ear" (Strong 2001, s.v. "azan"). Verse 1 also reinforces the importance by telling readers to "incline your ears," meaning "to turn, incline, influence, bend down, hold out, extend, thrust aside, thrust away" which, from the Hebrew *natah*, presents a colorful and emphatic way of saying be alert and very attentive to what is being said (Strong 2001, s.v. "natah"). The Psalm gives an account of the importance of heeding the words of Moses discussed above and transmitting the commands of God to the children in each generation, which is reiterated in verses 5b-6. The purpose and blessings of this teaching to children and grandchildren is given in verse 7: "so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments." In other words, they would be mindful of what God has done for their ancestors in delivering them from bondage and bringing them to the Promised Land and that they truly would put their hope in God, fix their hearts on Him and revere and obey Him. Verse 8 warns against the apostasy of their fathers who fell in the desert and those who wandered from the Lord their God during the times of the judges and were punished by invaders.

Synopsis and Implications of Old Testament Passages

To summarize these passages from the Old Testament:

- Parents and grandparents were to tell their children and grandchildren all of the wonders and the commands of God, holding nothing back.

- The children were full participants in the grace of God and were to obey and revere God with their whole heart.
- This teaching was to be done as a way of life, from the time they arose in the morning at start of day to the time they laid back down to sleep whether they were on the road or sitting at home, and was reinforced not just with words but with visual aids.
- Children were included in the reading of the Law every seven years so they could receive the Word of God directly and not just through the parents and grandparents who taught them day after day.
- They were also to revere God, not just obey Him, and thus to have a worshipful relationship with Him.

Therefore, it seems clear that God placed great emphasis on children being fully included in the life of His people Israel and thus they should be fully included in the life and teaching of the church today. Just as nothing was withheld and everything was to be shared with them, including awe, reverence and love for God, neither should Christians today withhold any part of life in Christ, especially including the Gospel and the way to enter into the Christian life. Spurgeon has written, “When fathers are tongue-tied religiously with their offspring, need they wonder if their children’s hearts remain sin-tied?” (Spurgeon.us 2005).

Analysis of Matthew 18:1-14

In response to the disciples’ question as to who would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven:

Jesus uses the little child as an object lesson on humility that comes from their vulnerability... In the ancient world, children were valued primarily for the benefit that they brought to the family by enhancing the workforce, adding to the defensive power, and guaranteeing the future glory of the house. But they had no

rights or significance apart from their future value to the family and were powerless in society. The humility of a child consists of the inability to advance his or her own cause apart from the help and resources of a parent. (Wilkins 2004, 612-613)

“Child” here is the Greek *paidion*, which “means ‘small child’ with reference to age or descent... Figuratively it carries the sense of undeveloped understanding” so this is clearly a younger child (Kittel and Friedrich 1985, s.v. “paidion”). Others have defined it as “a little child up to seven years of age,” so the object lesson is based on a child only partially developed (Brown 1986, 283). What does Jesus say about this child?

Jesus tells the disciples they will not even be in His kingdom if they do not demonstrate this humility and utter dependence upon the heavenly Father that children had upon their earthly fathers. “[Unless] you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (verse 3). The Greek here is *strephō*, which is “to turn, i.e. to change” or be converted (Thomas 1998, s.v. “strepho”). “Jesus is not saying that children must become like adults to enter Heaven but adults must become like children” (CEF 2014, 3). What a shock this must have been to the disciples jockeying for position in Jesus’ Kingdom! Children from birth are in a position of dependence, so trusting others and especially their parents is a way of life or second nature to them. It should be noted that the Lord Jesus repeatedly in the Gospels shows respect and high value for children in stark contrast to the value placed upon them in society. But there is much more to this lesson.

In verse 4 Jesus answers their question by saying they must be as humble as a child to be great in the Kingdom. The Lord so identifies with children that to receive a child in His name is to receive Jesus (verse 5). Matthew 10:42 discusses Jesus’ favor toward children and His desire to reward those who look after the needs of the little ones who are His disciples. Jesus sternly rebuked those who would hinder children in their walk with Him in verse 6. Matthew 18:6a,

“but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,” contains three key Greek terms:

- “Little ones” is from the Greek word *mikrós*. “In the Greek world *mikrós* means a. “small in size,” b. “small in compass,” c. “small in significance,” and d. “short in time” (or “young” in age)” (Kittel and Friedrich 1985, s.v. “mikros”). The emphasis is on the smallness of the child, reinforcing that fact that Jesus is talking of children no older than seven years at this point.
- “Believe” here is a translation of the Greek *pisteúō* which means “to believe to the extent of complete trust and reliance—‘to believe in, to have confidence in, to have faith in, to trust’” (Louw and Nida 1996, s.v. “pisteuo”). This is the very same belief required for salvation in John 3:16, John 3:36 and Acts 16:31 among other verses. Jesus is saying that young children are capable of and often possess this saving faith, “complete trust” in Him.
- “Causes... to sin” comes from the Greek word *skandalizo*, which means “to put a stumbling block or impediment in the way, upon which another may trip and fall, ... to entice to sin, to cause a person to begin to distrust and desert one whom he ought to trust and obey, to cause to fall away” (Strong 2001, s.v. “skandalizo”). This includes anything which actively or passively diminishes the faith of the little ones who are trusting in Jesus.

Not only does Jesus say that young children can have saving faith, but He includes a strong warning to those who would cause these little ones to stumble and turn from their faith. Jesus says one would be better off with “a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6b), which was considered to be a horrible fate similar to

the curse of being hanged on a tree—to die in utter disgrace. Jesus then expands upon the absolute importance of avoiding all offense at whatever cost in verses 7-9.

Verses 10-14 shows the importance of these little ones, these *mikrós*, to Jesus. Once again in stark contrast to the prevailing attitude of children being considered lesser people and in many regards nothing more than property, Jesus says “do not despise” (verse 10) them. This is from the Greek *kataphroneo*, which means “to [condemn], despise, disdain, think little or nothing of” (Strong 2001, s.v. “kataphroneo”). In contrast God thinks very highly of these little ones. They have angels watching over them and reporting on their welfare to the Father in Heaven (verse 10b). And Jesus tells how an extensive search is made when one of these little ones is missing. Verse 14 states the Father does not want to lose even one of these little ones. The Greek for “perish” here is *apollumi*, which means “to perish, to be lost, ruined, destroyed” and is the same word used by the Lord in John 3:16 to describe ultimate separation from God (Strong 2001, s.v. “apollumi”). “The will of the Father is that **they should know Christ and be saved**” (CEF 2014, 12).

Jesus’ Love for Children in Mark 10:13-16

In Mark 10 we see parents bringing their children to be touched, that is blessed by Jesus. The disciples act like petulant bodyguards in keeping them away by rebuking them. The word translated “rebuked” comes from the Greek *ēpitimaō*, which means “to tax upon, i.e. censure or admonish; by implication forbid:—(straitly) charge, rebuke” (Strong 2009, s.v. “ēpitimaō”). This is a strong negative reaction from the disciples, which is met with an even stronger rebuke from the Lord. The words “he was indignant” (verse 14) come from *aganakteō*, which means “be indignant, incensed, offended, irate” and is the only time this strong word is used of Jesus

(Swanson 1997, s.v. “aganakteo”). Jesus was so vexed by the disciples’ behavior that He rebukes them with a double command: (1) let them come and (2) do not hinder them—deny, prevent or forbid them from coming (Strong 2001).

He then instructed the disciples that “to such belongs the kingdom of God” (verse 14). “Jesus welcomed the children because the kingdom of God, God’s present spiritual rule in people’s lives, belongs as a possession to such as these. All, including children, who come to Jesus in childlike trust and dependence, are given free access to Jesus” (Grassmick 2000, 150). Unlike the society which devalued children, the Lord saw and treated them with all the dignity and respect accorded to free adults. “When one is appropriately little, like a child, or poor in spirit (Matt 5:3), one is more open to receiving the reign of God” (Garland 1996, 382). As in Matthew 18, Jesus then tells the disciples that if they do not receive the Kingdom as a child they will not be part of it at all. “Not only are children recipients, they are also models of entering the Kingdom of God!” (CEF 2014, 18). Jesus then took the children in His arms and blessed them, which from the Greek *kateulogeō* means to “bless ardently” (Swanson 1997, s.v. “kateulogeo”). What an expression of love these children received from the Lord!

Paul’s Instruction to Children in Ephesians

The Apostle Paul addresses his letter to the church at Ephesus to the “saints,” which is the Greek *hagios*, meaning “persons who belong to God, and as such constitute a religious entity—‘God’s people’” (Louw and Nida 1996, s.v. “hagios”). To be a saint does not mean one has achieved a state of perfection or of being sinless, but that one was set apart by and for God.

Paul’s first intent was not that these people lived especially holy lives—he described the Corinthian Christians the same way (1 Cor. 1:2), and yet he had no illusions about the sanctity of their lives. Rather, his primary concern was to emphasize that just as he had been appointed by God to be an apostle, they too

had been separated to God (separation is the key idea in the word 'holy').
(Snodgrass 1996, 38)

In Ephesians 6:1 we see children addressed, which is from the Greek word *teknon*, meaning “one’s immediate offspring, but without specific reference to sex or age—‘child, offspring’” (Louw and Nida 1996, s.v. “teknon”). Though *teknon* itself does not necessarily indicate youth, the command to *obey* does. It is translated from *hupakouō*, meaning “to hear under (as a subordinate), i.e. to listen attentively; by implication to heed or conform to a command or authority:—hearken, be obedient to, obey” (Strong 2009, s.v. “hupakouo”). Paul is apparently addressing young children still in the home. “[The] concern of the text seems to be on young children, for they are still in the process of learning and being shaped (cf. v. 4)” (Snodgrass 1996, 321). “‘Obey your parents in the Lord’ does not mean ‘obey your Christian parents.’ Rather, it means to obey as part of one’s relation to the Lord” (Snodgrass 1996, 321). What is not to be missed here is that children are included in Paul’s address to the “saints” showing that the apostle believed that these children were saved and thus also “in the Lord.”

Paul Instructs the Children at Colossae

Paul’s address to the Christians in Colossae is very similar to that of Ephesians. “Paul customarily identifies the recipients of his letters as ‘saints,’ but he does not usually address them as ‘faithful’ (the exception is Eph. 1:1)” (Garland 1998, 41). This reference to the faithful in these letters comes from the Greek word *pistos*, which “in the [New Testament] [is] one who trusts in God’s promises, one who is convinced that Jesus has been raised from the dead, one who has become convinced that Jesus is the Messiah and author of salvation” (Strong 2001, s.v. “pistos”). Paul gives no indication other than that he believes children to be in this group of

those who are faithful, meaning possess saving faith in Jesus Christ. It is even interesting that he addresses children personally instead of telling parents to pass on his instructions to them.

It was unusual, however, to address children directly, as if they were independent, responsible subjects.... But the children's duty to obey their parents is transformed into obedience 'in the Lord.' Paul emphasizes a child's pleasing the Lord, not just the parents. He or she owes obedience above all to the Lord. The child's independent relationship with the Lord surpasses the relationship with parents, and Christ's obedience to his Father in all things serves as the model. (Garland 1998, 246)

Paul seems to have significantly elevated children in the eyes of the Christian community the same way the Lord Jesus did in the eyes of his disciples. Children are apparently very important to God, who desires a direct relationship with them and not an indirect connection with them through their parents.

Role of Children in Qualifications of Elders (Titus 1:6)

It is interesting to note that in Crete one of the qualifications of elders was that their children be believers (*pistos*). Paul stresses both before and after the reference that an elder must be "above reproach" (verses 6-7). God's commands in Deuteronomy emphasized the need to train children in the Law of Moses which, by extension, means the people of God today also must instruct their children in how to love and obey God. If this principle was not in place in a father's life he could not be trusted with care of the church of God. He is "God's steward" (verse 7) and has to have a track record of dependable care of those entrusted to him.

The phrase "children are believers" is translated from the Greek *teknon échō pistos*. The terms for children (*teknon*) and faith/believe (*pistos*) are explained in detail above, but *échō* adds a new dimension to the picture of children in the early church. It means "to have or possess objects or property (in the technical sense of having control over the use of such objects)—'to have, to own, to possess, to belong to'" (Louw and Nida 1996, s.v. "echo"). In this case it means

children who possess the faith. Not only can children believe, but on Crete Titus was not to ordain anyone whose children were not believers. To believe is not to say one has attained perfection, and there is a second condition Paul gives as well, “not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination” (verse 6b). This means believing children would actually be living out Paul’s instructions in Ephesians and Colossians to be obedient to their parents. Not only is there ample evidence of children who trusted Jesus in the early church, but that they also lead lives that brought honor to His name.

Philosophies of Childhood Conversion

Traditional Philosophy

*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 lost, since he is **safe under the covenant** by belonging to a Christian family.*

There is indeed a special blessing for children who grow up in a Christian home, as Paul states in 1 Corinthians 7:14b. Paul writes such children are not unclean, in the sense of being defiled and needing to be placed outside the camp as with ancient Israel. Rather they are holy or set apart, but not that they are ‘grandfathered in’ to the Body of Christ. A significant error in this view is that environment does not automatically shape the child as witnessed in the life of Samuel and words from the prophet Ezekiel:

- Ezekiel 18 explains how the fathers would not bear the iniquity of the sons and vice versa. Each will bear his own sins and each generation has the responsibility to make their own decision to obey God. “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The

righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself” (Ezekiel 18:20).

- A good example of this is found in 1 Samuel chapters 2 and 3. They document how Samuel grew in favor with man and God even as he lived in the midst of the horrible corruption of Eli and his sons. Though revelation from God was very rare in those days, the Lord spoke to Samuel to reveal what He was about to do, because Samuel remained faithful.

All have sinned (Romans 3:23) and each one needs to call upon the Lord in faith (Acts 16:31; Ephesians 2:8-9). There is great benefit in growing up in the Christian home, but that does not convey salvation to the children therein. Rather, the parents need to follow the instructions of Moses listed above in teaching the child at all times and through every available means to convey the will of God to them, which is also enjoined in Ephesians 6:4. Would Timothy have been useful to Paul or even interested in serving Jesus through all the hardships if not for the careful instruction of his mother and grandmother in his early years (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15)?

Educational Philosophy

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.

Christian education is commendable and to be undertaken as it was in Timothy’s childhood, but it is not enough. To train the mind in knowledge and the hands and feet in the ways of God are good, but there must be much more. Deuteronomy 6:6 tells us the commands of God are to be on our heart as well. Deuteronomy 31:12b shows the goal is to possess an awe and reverence for God. Christianity is not about religion, though there are religious aspects to it. But it is primarily about relationship: sharing in the life of Jesus in total surrender, obedience and

loving relationship with the Father through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. This philosophy falls far short by not helping children at an early age to enter into a relationship with Jesus.

I experienced a church tradition that prized imparting biblical knowledge and understanding to children from birth, yet not believing children were able to come to saving faith as children. I began to see that children could come to saving faith while young, but I did not know just how young genuine faith could be experienced until I witnessed it in my own daughter. Krissy grew up in our Christian home where her mother and I devoted our lives to God and to teaching our children of His ways. She attended Bible classes at church where she learned more about God and the teaching of her parents was reinforced. It was not until she asked me at the age of three about partaking of communion and being baptized that I realized she possessed genuine faith at her tender age. She understood Jesus was the perfect Son of God who had died for her sin and she received Him as her Savior while watching the *Jesus* video.

Only then did I understand why she had watched this video on the life and ministry of Jesus two dozen times or more and could not seem to get enough of it. She told me she prayed the prayer at the end of the video several times and I have never had reason to doubt the genuineness of her profession of faith. Looking back I thank God that He overruled our ignorance and reached our daughter with the Gospel. He reached my toddler daughter with the Gospel via video long before her mother or I would have thought she was ready to hear and respond to the Lord's call for saving faith. Romans 10:14-17 shows the importance of the Gospel being presented and a choice being offered. Just as with young Jesse Overholtzer, how many children are ready and just waiting for one willing harvester to share the Gospel and lead a child across the threshold from darkness to light, from death into life?

Psychological Philosophy

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

This approach is even a greater hindrance to children than the two discussed above. Why do we try to figure out the mysterious ways of God and constrain Him with our machinations and convoluted religion? Making such hoops to jump through is reminiscent of the roadblocks the Pharisees placed before Jews (Matthew 23:13). The things of God can only be spiritually discerned through the understanding granted by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:6-16). Children need not be able to think abstractly when they are perfectly capable of understanding concrete examples of abstract concepts with the help of the Holy Spirit. We dare not limit the Holy Spirit and His ability to convey truth to the child (John 16:13). Regarding those who wonder whether children know what prayer is and how to pray, Howard Hendricks warned, “If you doubt the child’s ability to communicate with God, don’t doubt God’s ability to communicate with the child” (Herlein 2014). Those who hold to this philosophy feel a child must come to an adult’s understanding of the world and theology to come to saving faith in Jesus, but is it really all that complicated?

Dr. Karl Barth was one of the most brilliant and complex intellectuals of the twentieth century. He wrote volume after massive volume on the meaning of life and faith. A reporter once asked Dr. Barth if he could summarize what he had said in all those volumes. Dr. Barth thought for a moment and then said: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” (Hird 1993)

Child Evangelism Philosophy

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 the child can begin to develop Christian character, which is the outward expression of a new inward life.

This approach is the only one of the four that is in agreement with the Scriptures. As seen above in Matthew 18 and Mark 10, Jesus commended the simplicity of the child and the openness with which the average child receives the Kingdom and responds to God's love for him or her. Jesus told the disciples they needed childlike faith to even enter the Kingdom, not that the child had to achieve adult-like reasoning or sophistication. Ephesians 2:8-9 makes it clear we are saved by grace through faith, not by knowledge, intellect or the number of candles on your birthday cake. Faith is actually strongest in young children and tends to diminish over time.

The command from the Lord to "proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15b) did not give an age limit. Scripture makes clear that all mankind are born in sin and in need of the Savior (Romans 3:23; 5:12). David said he was conceived in sin (Psalm 51:5), so there is no minimum age to have a problem with sin. Likewise, there is no minimum age to receive the Savior. The Lord Jesus made it clear in Matthew 18, Mark 10 and numerous other passages that He welcomed the children coming to Him. In fact, His double censure of the disciples' keeping them away in Mark 10:14 and pronouncement in Matthew 18:6 that it is better to die a horrible death than to cause a little one to stumble and lose faith in Him ought to cause those embracing the other philosophies to seriously reconsider their stance. "Children, like adults, must be converted in order to enter the kingdom of God; but they do not have to become like children—they are children already. This is an advantage for them" (Doherty 1986, 87).

As reported above, my daughter Krissy received Jesus around the age of three. I personally received him as my Savior at age 10. All are in need of the Savior, for there is no other means for salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

Scripture fixes no age for the conversion of the child, and neither must we, seeing it is not a matter of intellectual attainment, but of spiritual revelation—the Holy Spirit revealing Christ to the heart by the Word of God. I have known of children who date the reception of the Savior to the age of 3, 4, or 5, and a very large

number between 6 and 10. Experience and statistics point clearly to the fact that small children can understand the Gospel and be savingly converted to God. Polycarp, Isaac Watts, and Lord Shaftsbury were converted between 7 and 10. We must not limit the power of God in this matter. . . . It is not for us to fix ages—for it is as easy for the Holy Spirit to reveal Christ in the heart of a small child as it is for Him to do so in an older person. (Doherty 1986, 68)

Timothy's experience must also be noted in this context. Paul remarks on the faith passed down from his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5) and how "from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). One need not be an adult to understand the message of salvation contained in Scripture.

The Christian Obligation

There are various philosophies extant today as discussed above. This is not even a topic of general debate or even conscious consideration except among those such as Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF) who are called to labor with the Lord on behalf of the children. One's theology or working paradigm on this critical topic of child conversion will determine the degree of importance placed upon the evangelization and discipleship of the young. The words of the Lord Jesus are powerfully instructive to all of His disciples today, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14b). The Spirit is raising up a Gideon's army of Christians around the world dedicated to the evangelization of children through CEF who are convinced that children can and must be evangelized, disciplined and established in healthy local churches at every opportunity. CEF has clearly decided to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in being one of the leaders in child evangelism. It behooves others to heed the adage to "lead, follow, or get out of the way."

Conclusion

This study has analyzed the following:

- Instructions given by the Lord to ancient Israel to teach their children everything He had given to them so they would know the Lord and be blessed in their possession of the Promised Land.
- Gospel passages showing the passion of the Lord Jesus that children should be allowed to come to Him and should in no way be hindered in doing so.
- That the kingdom belongs to those who are as humble as children. It is adults who must become like children to enter the kingdom, not the other way around.
- The way the Apostle Paul addressed children in his letters to the churches shows he believed children were converted and thus listed them among the faithful saints.
- Four general philosophies of child conversion influencing the church today and the inadequacy of those which are in conflict with Scripture.

Perhaps nothing sums up this topic as well as the passionate comments from the Prince of Preachers, Charles Spurgeon:

I thank God that in our Sabbath School we believe in the salvation of children as children. How often it has been my joy to see of boys and girls who have come forward to confess their faith in Christ! Go on, dear teachers, and believe that God will save your children. Be not content to sow principles in their minds which may possibly develop in after years, but be working for immediate conversion. Expect fruit in your children while they are children. (Doherty 2011, 171)

Especially in post-Christian America it behooves those who share the Lord Jesus' heart for children to take every opportunity to share with them the lessons from Scripture and the message of salvation, Thus they may be spared needless years of wandering in spiritual darkness and be given the opportunity to devote the best years of their life in joyful service to their Savior

bringing His light, His love and His life to those around them. Most importantly, they will be able from a young age to share in loving fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit now and throughout eternity.

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