

As you read the pages of holy scripture you will discover that children play an important part in God's dealings with mankind. This book looks at God's work in and through children in the Old and New Testaments and applies the truths revealed to the lives of children today. A detailed study of the main passages will help you gain a biblical perspective that will enable you to serve God amongst the boys and girls. Many questions are answered from the Bible that will help you see that you have a responsibility to pray and care for the children. It is vitally important that children are taught the truths of the Gospel that will bring them to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and live for Him. This definitive work will deepen your understanding of what the Bible teaches about children.

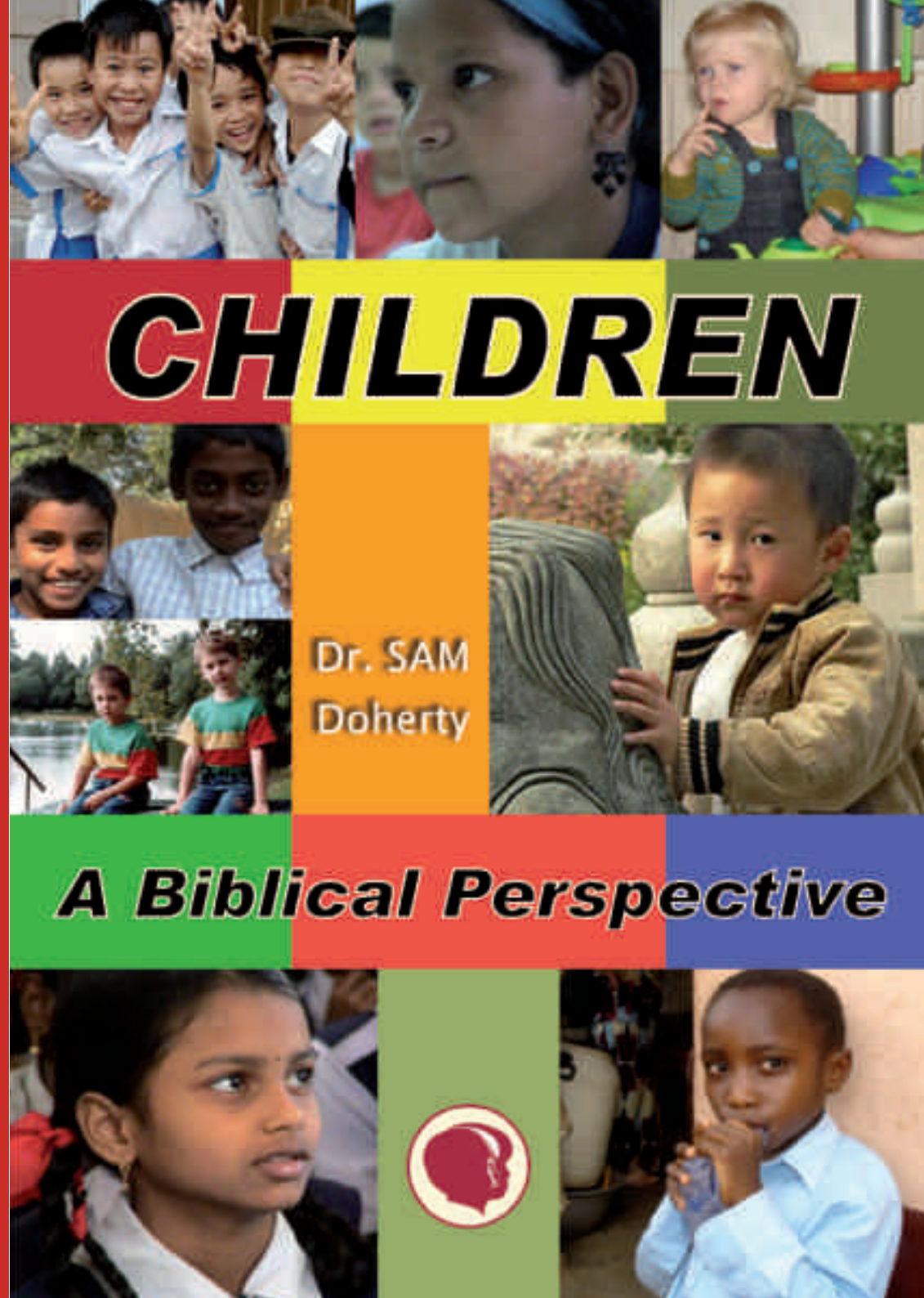
Dr Sam Doherty writes from the background of a life time given to ministry amongst children. He began as a school teacher where his burden for the spiritual needs of children led him to establish the work of CEF in Ireland in 1950. Many years were given to leading the work of CEF in Europe, and in more recent years he has authored over 35 books which have been published in over 60 languages. This book reflects many years of studying the Bible and a deep burden for the spiritual needs of children.

May you find in this book help and encouragement for a biblical ministry to the children around you.

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CHILDREN - A Biblical Perspective

Dr Sam Doherty



CHILDREN - A Biblical Perspective

WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT CHILDREN



**BY
DR SAM DOHERTY, BA, EdD**

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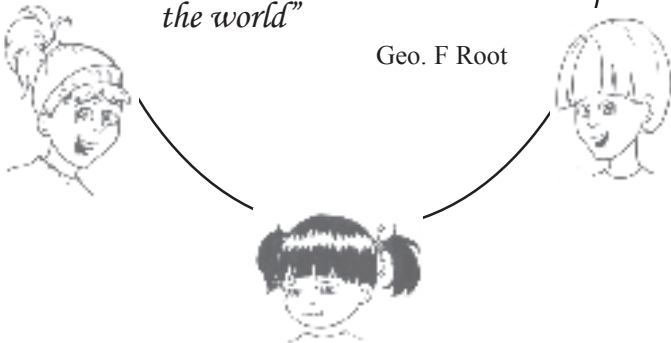
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*“Jesus loves the little children,
All the children of the world
Red and Yellow, Black and White;
All are precious in His sight.
Jesus loves the little children of
the world”*

Geo. F Root



Foreword

Someone has said, “*Children do not make up 100% of our population, but they do make up 100% of our future*”. Today’s kids will grow up all too quickly and will be the ones who shape the direction of our lives and society. They’ll be the government officials, lawmakers and judges, the educators of the next generation, the scientists, the clergy, the medical personnel, the moms and dads, and anything else we can imagine! Will they live their lives and make decisions from a secular, worldly perspective or will their lifestyle and decision-making be based on Biblical Truth?

Down through the years our educational institutions have instilled in children the ungodly philosophies of humanism, evolution, gay rights, the new tolerance, materialism and a host of other ideologies against God and His Word. As a result, in this generation we are witnessing the ungodliness and moral and spiritual decay of our respective countries around the world—a bitter outgrowth of those former “kids” who are now our leaders!

God knows how critical children are to the future. In Psalm 78 He urges His people through Asaph to be careful to raise up the next generation according to His laws. He exhorted the original receivers as well as us today to declare to the children of future generations “*the praises of the Lord, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done*” (verse 4). The reasons are clear in verses 7 and 8: First, “*that they may set their hope is God*”;

second, that they would “*not forget the works of God but keep His commandments*”; and third, that they would “*not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright. And whose spirit was not faithful to God*”. If we want to change the future, we must trust God to change our children by the power of the Gospel!

It’s time for Christians everywhere to rise up and get passionate about reaching children for Christ and discipling them in the Word of God. This is the only way we can transform the world. We must raise up a new generation focusing on the 4/14 Window – that period in human life, ages 4 to 14, when 85% of Christians came to faith in Jesus Christ. This 10-year period is the most opportune for spiritual development. In his book, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, author George Barna, informs that by the age of 13 a child’s spiritual identity is largely set in place. This means that what a child believes by age 13 is what he will most likely believe the rest of his or her life. Our investment in the 4/14 Window is critical for the future of our world.

For over 60 years Sam Doherty has invested his life in the 4/14 Window, making him uniquely qualified to write a book on the subject “*CHILDREN - A Biblical Perspective*”. Sam is a gifted speaker and has trained hundreds of children’s ministry leaders down through the years. As a theologian, Sam has a passion for Biblical accuracy. I have used his book “*The Biblical Basis of Child Evangelism*” as a textbook for over 25 years as I have taught the course “*Theology of Child Conversion*” at our CEF Children’s Ministries Institute both in Latin America and in the USA. I’m happy that Sam has decided to use his first book as a foundation and broaden its scope to include the wider subject of children and everything the Bible teaches about them.

“*CHILDREN - A Biblical Perspective*” is truly an important work – one that should be required reading for church leaders

as well as laypeople. It is a must read for all those who want to make an impact on today's kids – the future generation. Parents will gain invaluable insights for raising godly children. Church leaders will be challenged to make ministry to children the number one priority of their church. Church members will be inspired to pray, give financially and invest their time in raising up the future generation of children who will transform their world for Christ. And all you have to do is become aware of God's perspective about children and follow the Biblical principles set forth in this book.

May God open your eyes and give you a burden and passion for reaching children with the Gospel. Remember, children do not make up 100% of the world's population but they do make up 100% of the world's future! Reach the children – change the future!

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Executive Director
CEF of the State of Maryland, USA

Former CEF Missionary and Director of Education for CEF of Latin America (1973 – 1989)
Former Vice President of Education for CEF worldwide (1989 – 2009)

INTRODUCTION

Children are a vital part of our lives. They may be our own children, or our grandchildren, or our neighbour's children, or the children in our church or Sunday school. They are everywhere and we are always in contact with them. And as Christians we have, or should have, a special interest in them.

But we have often many questions about our children – questions to which we need answers:

- Where do they fit into God's plan?
- What does God wish, or expect, from them?
- Can a child really trust Christ and be converted? Or do they need to wait until their mid teens (at least)?
- At what age can a child trust Christ?
- Are children without Christ lost? What does that mean?
- At what age?
- What about babies?
- Is there an age of accountability?
- When is it?
- Should we evangelize children?
- When should we evangelize children?
- What should we say when we evangelize them?
- Should we speak about sin?
- Should we speak about judgment?
- Are all little children in the Kingdom of God?
- Are all the children of believers in the Kingdom of God?
- How should Christian parents treat their children? Should they treat them as already in God's Kingdom – or as sinners who need to be evangelized?

- Should we evangelize parents – and then let them evangelize their children? Or should we evangelize children directly?

And there are many more questions we need to get the answers to. Where can we get our answers?

- We will not get our answers from educational experts, philosophers and intellectuals, although it will always be interesting to hear their views.
- We will not get our answers from leaders and teachers in the Christian and religious world – unless they are corroborated by Scripture.
- We will not get our answers by our own human resources, theories and desires.

The only place where the answers to these questions can be found is in the Bible, the Word of God – and the answers to all the above questions can be found there.

Your approach to children and your understanding of them therefore should be guided by, and based upon, the clear teaching of the Word of God. People's views, opinions and theories have their place, but must be subservient to the Scriptures. You must measure what you think and say, and what others think and say about children, against what God **HAS** said. Education, philosophy and psychology are all very important in their own place, but the Bible must hold first place. Where a theory differs from the teaching of the Bible, then it is wrong!

It is necessary, therefore, to start any study of children by seeking to find out what the Bible actually says concerning them because one's methodology and whole approach to children will be determined by one's theology, and by what one believes about them.

It is important to remember that the Bible does not teach a theology of childhood which is separate from, and different to, a theology of adulthood. Instead, the Bible gives a theology of man which includes both children and adults. While there are many differences between the child and the adult physically,

psychologically, socially and, in some ways, spiritually, their position before God is basically the same.

Rather than propound theories or speculate, I have tried in this book to outline the Bible facts about children **as they are**, with a minimum of deduction, and with no preconceived ideas about what I think these facts should mean. Some people might feel that what I have presented seems rather simplistic! But I believe that it is necessary to “get back to the Word” and find out what is **there**. Remember, we are dealing with the eternal welfare of precious boys and girls. So there is no room for speculating or theorizing.

So in this book we are going to set out on a detailed study of what the Bible teaches about children and make it our goal to find out God’s answers to all our questions. Are you ready to start out on this exciting journey with me and see where it takes us?

I have also included many quotes from well known theologians, pastors and Christian leaders from the past and from the present – and I believe that these can be a great help to us. For example you will find many quotations from the writings of Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

Charles Spurgeon was one of the greatest pastors and preachers of all time and was greatly used by God in England during the latter half of the nineteenth century. He was pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London for many years and had congregations every Sunday morning and evening of between 5,000 and 6,000. He also founded a College to train pastors, and a large orphanage. In addition he had a very extensive writing ministry, and millions of his Sunday sermons were printed and distributed all over the world.

He was a great lover of children and an enthusiastic believer in the evangelism of children. In keeping with his interest in children he established forty nine branch Sunday schools in addition to the main one in the Tabernacle. The enrolment in all of these schools was 7,887. He also encouraged the 500 children from the orphanage to sit on the front seats in his church every Sunday morning to hear him preach. From time to time he also held evangelistic meetings just for children, with as many as 8,000 present and many of them professed faith in

Christ. Seventeen years later he would point out many "pillars of the church" who had been converted as children in those meetings.

I felt that it would be a special encouragement for pastors to read these relevant comments from him and other Christian leaders. When I include a quotation from a Christian leader I just give the name of that person in the text. But I give information about each person quoted, or used as an example, in the appendix at the end of the book on pages 328-334.

I should point out that substantial parts of this book have been taken from the book *"The Biblical Basis of Child Evangelism"* published by European Child Evangelism Fellowship in 1981. This was the very first book I ever wrote and it has been, I believe, a great help to many children's workers since then.

This present book, while based upon the original, goes into much more detail on the subject - not just the subject of child evangelism - but the wider subject of children and everything the Bible teaches about them.

I have also written a shorter, more concise, outline of what the Bible teaches about children in one of my 'U-can' books - *"U-can Know God's Plan for Children."* The goal of all six 'U-can' books is to provide simple and concise help to children's workers. But we felt that a much more detailed book on the biblical teaching concerning children was needed and would be helpful to pastors, full-time children's workers, and those who train teachers. This book is the result.

I also received help, and included excerpts, from publications by Dr Martha Wright who was for many years Vice President and Education Director of Child Evangelism Fellowship, and from Herman Van Brummelen, retired CEF missionary in Holland. I also found many other books, which are too numerous to mention, to be a help in my research.

I especially want to express my appreciation to all who have helped with the production of this book - to Dr Wright for writing the foreword, Michel and Naomi Rhodin for the artwork used throughout the book and all the members of the SBM team who gave much time to typing, checking and editing.



SECTION I

THE VALUE AND IMPORTANCE OF GOD'S WORD - THE BIBLE

*"But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."
2 Timothy 3:15*

CHAPTER 1

THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD

If we are going to base our study of children on the Bible, and what it says about children, we need to be clear as to what the Bible is, and how true it is in every respect. If it is not completely true, or if there are errors, mistakes or inconsistencies in it we cannot base our studies on it. If it is God's Word, completely true and without mistake, then we have a source of truth which can be completely depended upon. We need to be clear that there is no other objective revelation of truth.

And so we need, at the beginning of our studies, to be sure that the Bible is truly and completely the Word of God, that it was given to men by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that the original text was completely without mistake and error, and that the text we have today is as close as possible to that original, inspired text. If the Bible is not completely true, we have no foundation for our lives, or for our ministry - or, in this case, for our study. How can we be sure that the Bible is God's Word and completely true?

How do we know that the Scriptures are verbally inspired and are completely true?

➤ **They claim to be the Word of God:**

- ✓ Old Testament claims about itself include Exodus 20 v1; Hosea 1 v1.
- ✓ New Testament claims about the Old Testament include Acts 1 v16; Acts 28 v25 and 1 Peter 1 v10,11.
- ✓ New Testament claims about itself include 1 Corinthians 2 v13; 14 v37; Galatians 1 v11,12; 1 Thessalonians 2 v13; 2 Peter 3 v1,2.

- ✓ The Old Testament uses over and over again expressions such as “God said” and “The Lord spoke”. These back up the claims to inspiration. Such expressions can be found about 250 times.

Either these claims are true or false. If the latter, the Bible is a book containing lies, and/or false claims, and cannot be depended upon for anything. It is either the Word of God (as it claims to be); or it is not a good book.

- **Many prophecies in the Bible have been exactly fulfilled centuries after they were recorded.**

Only God can know the future and be able to record what will happen. It is of special value and interest to read all the prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ and see how every one has been fulfilled exactly e.g. Isaiah 7 v14; 9 v6; Micah 5 v2; Zechariah 9 v9; Zechariah 11 v12, 13.

- **Christ repeatedly used and testified that the Old Testament is the Word of God.**

He obviously regarded it as the Word of God - and so should we e.g. Matthew 5 v17, 18; 12 v39,40; Matthew 24 v37-39; Mark 12 v36; Luke 24 v25-27, 44, 46; John 3 v14. This is a very important evidence of the inspiration of Scripture, and should be continually emphasized.

- **The Word of God has a wonderful harmony and unity.**

This is quite remarkable when we realize that it was written by approximately 40 men from different backgrounds and different countries over a period of 1600 years.

- **The Bible has shown its power to change lives, homes, communities and even nations.**

No other book in the world has changed lives, as the Bible has, and “turned sinners into saints”. No other book has had such an influence on millions of homes, many communities and even in a number of nations.

- **The witness we have in our hearts, from the Holy Spirit.**

This witness gives us assurance that it is truly the Word of God - 1st Thessalonians 1, v5, 6; 1st Thessalonians 2, v13; 1st John 2, vs20, 27.

CHAPTER 2

THE WORD “CHILD” IN THE BIBLE

I believe that, as we study what the Bible teaches about children, we should also study and understand the meaning of the words “child” and “children” as they are used in the Bible.

I am neither a Hebrew nor a Greek scholar! So what I write in this chapter is gathered mainly from two books – Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words”, and Lawrence Richard’s “Expository Dictionary of Bible Words”. I have also made much use of Young’s Concordance.

“CHILD” IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

There are six main Hebrew words which are translated “child” or “children”.

- **BEN** is used over 5000 times and refers to all ages. This is the word, for example, which is used in the phrase “**Children** of Israel”.
- **TAPH** is used generally to describe children, as opposed to adults.

*“And we utterly destroyed them, as we did to Sihon king of Heshbon, utterly destroying the men, women, and **children** of every city” (Deuteronomy 3, v6).*

It can include all ages from birth to 20 – but generally refers to younger children. It is usually translated as “little children” or “little ones”. A good example is Deuteronomy 31, v12-13 *“Gather the people together, men and women and **little ones** (TAPH) and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may*

hear and that they may learn to fear the Lord your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, and that their **children (BEN)**, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God and carefully observe all the words of this law."

- **NAAR** refers to children anywhere between 2 and 20. There are certainly times when it refers to very young children and slightly older children. *"But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, not until the **child** is weaned, then I will take him, that he may appear before the Lord and remain there forever"* (1st Samuel 1, v22). *And the Lord visited Hannah, so that she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile the **child** Samuel grew before the Lord"* (1st Samuel 2, v21)

With regard to these two words (**TAPH** and **NAAR**) the age of the children can often be determined by the context.

- **YELID** generally means "young male children".
 - ✓ It can include those in infancy *"But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the **child** in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river's bank"* (Exodus 2, v3).
 - ✓ It can include those in early teens *"And the **child** grew. Now it happened one day that he went out to his father, to the reapers"* (2nd Kings 4, v18).
 - ✓ It can refer to those in mid-teens *"Young men in whom there was no blemish"* (Daniel 1 v4).
- **OLEL** or **OLAL** invariably means infant, suckling or little one. Jeremiah uses this word, for example, in Lamentations 2 v.11: *"My eyes fail with tears, my heart is troubled; my bile is poured on the ground. Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, because the **children** and the infants faint in the streets of the city."* Verse 19 *"Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches; pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord. Lift your hands toward Him for the life of your **young children**, who faint from hunger at the head of every street."*
- **YANAQ** is a nursing or suckling infant as in Psalm 8 v2 *"Out of the mouths of babes (**OLEL**) and **nursing infants (YANAQ)** you have ordained strength, because of your enemies, that you may*

*silence the enemy and the avenger.” And in Lamentations 2,v.11
 “My eyes fail with tears, my heart is troubled; my bile is poured on
 the ground. Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people,
 because the children and the **infants** faint in the streets of the city.”*

It is difficult to be dogmatic when deducing the age of a child from the Hebrew words used, because they are often used quite generally. But a study of the context will always be a help.

“CHILD” IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

There are a number of Greek words which are translated “child” or “children”, or “little ones”, and I have included most of them here.

- **BREPHOS** is a word which clearly means a newly born or slightly older infant.

*“This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their **babies**, so that they might not live” (Acts 7,v19).*

*“And this will be a sign to you, you will find the **babe** wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Luke 2 v12).*

It is interesting from our point of view that this is the word used in 2nd Timothy 3 v15 *“And that from **childhood** you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”,* and in Luke 18 v15 *“Then they also brought **infants** to Him that He might touch them...”*

- **PAIS** is a general word for “children” and one expert says that it could refer to children between the age of 7 and 14 (Matthew 17, vs18; 21,v15; Luke 2,v43). But it is also used of smaller children (Matthew 2,v16). It is also translated as “servant” (Matthew 8,v6) or “maiden” (Luke 8,v51).
- **PAIDION** is a word which means a little child and it is sometimes used to describe a child up to, under, around, or just above seven years of age. It is a diminutive of the word **PAIS**. It is used to describe the young daughter of the Syro-

phoenician woman (Mark 7 v28); the Lord Jesus when He was young (Matthew 2 vs 8&9; Luke 2 v27); the 12-year old girl in Mark 5 v41; the children playing in the street (Luke 7v32), and the children in bed with their father (Luke 11 v7). And this word is also used of much younger children from infancy onwards (Luke 1 v59,80; 2 v27,40; Hebrews 11 v23). And from the point of view of our studies it is interesting that this is the word used in Matthew 18 vs.2,3,4&5 and 19 vs 13&14.

This word is also used by John in 1st John 2,v13 "*I wrote unto you **little children** because you have known the Father.*" And the context implies that he is speaking literally to little children.

However, there are also two times when this word is used affectionately with reference to adults. "*Little children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming*" (1st John 2 v18). "*Then Jesus said to them, **children**, have you any food?*" (John 21, v5) These two references clearly refer to adults.

This word is also used on one occasion to describe believers who are deficient in spiritual understanding: "*Brethren, do not be **children** in understanding: however in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature*" (1st Corinthians 14 v20).

- **PAIDARION** is another diminutive of PAIS and refers to little, or young, children. It is only used twice in the New Testament: "*But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like **children** sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions ...*" (Matthew 11 v16) "*There is a **lad** here who has five barley loaves and two small fish ...*" (John 6, v9). As with all these words, the context determines the age of the child concerned.
- **TEKNON** is the main word used in the New Testament for children, and is usually in the plural. It refers to children in a general and wider sense with little or no reference to age. It is often used in the context of the family and parents. "*Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his **child**; and **children** will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death*" (Matthew 10 v21). "*But they had no **child**, because*

*Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years” (Luke 1 v7. “I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your **children** walking in truth...” (2nd John 1, v4).*

*“Beloved now we are **children** of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1st John 3 v2).*

This is the word translated as “children” in two of the verses we will study later – as children in the context of their family. *“**Children**, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Ephesians 6 v1). “If a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful **children** not accused of dissipation or insubordination” (Titus 1 v6).*

- **TEKNION** is a diminutive of TEKNON and is therefore usually translated “little children”. It is always used in the plural - as a term of affection and endearment by the Lord Jesus when He speaks to His disciples (John 13 v33); by Paul writing to the Christians at Galatia (Galatians 4, v19); and, especially, by the aged apostle John writing to his beloved friends (1st John 2, vs 1,12,28; 3 vs 7,18; 4, v4; 5, v21). However, it would seem that his use of this word in 1st John 2, v12 was literally directed towards little children. The context of the verse which speaks of three age groups would indicate this: *“I write to you, **little children (TEKNION)** because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake” (1st John 2 v12) And this is backed up by the use of the word “**PAIDION**” in verse 13 “I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you **little children (PAIDION)** because you have known the Father.”*
- **HUIOS** in its meaning is somewhat similar to TEKNON – and is used as a general word which is applicable to all ages. *“But the Lord said to him, Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the **children** of Israel” (Acts 9,v15) The word is usually translated as “son”. “Then a voice came from heaven, you are My beloved **Son**, in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1 v11).*

*"And because you are **sons**, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'"* (Galatians 4,v6).
*"You are all **sons** of light and **sons** of the day..."* (1st Thessalonians 5,v5). *"For you are all **sons** of God through faith in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3 ,v26).

- **MIKROS** is an adjective which means and is translated "little", "least", "small" or "little ones". It can be used in several ways:
- ✓ To describe small in number *"Do not fear, **little** flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"* (Luke 12, v32)
 - ✓ To describe small in size *"Even so the tongue is a **little** member and boasts great things"* (James 3,v5).
 - ✓ To describe small in stature *"And he" (Zacchaeus) "sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of **short** stature"* (Luke 19 v3).
 - ✓ To describe small in importance *"There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the **Less** and of Joses, and Salome"* (Mark 15, v40). Other verses which seem to use the word to indicate "little in importance or standing" are Acts 26,v.22, Rev.11,v.18; 13,v.16.
 - ✓ To describe young in years *"But whoever causes one of these **little ones** who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea"* (Matthew 18 vs6). *"Take heed that you do not despise one of these **little ones**, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 18,v10). *"Even so, it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these **little ones** should perish"* (Matthew 18,v14).

The context usually indicates what is meant and when it is used regarding children (e.g. Matthew 18, v6 , where it obviously refers to little children like the one in the arms of the Lord Jesus.)

There are several times when this word is used in conjunction with its opposite word (**MEGAS**) or great - *"To whom they all gave*

*heed, from the **least** to the greatest, saying, 'This man is the great power of God'" (Acts 8,v10). "Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to **small** and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come" (Acts 26, v22). "None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord', for all shall know Me, from the **least** of them to the greatest of them'" (Hebrews 8,v11).*

The same two words are used together in Revelation 11 v18, 13 v16, 19 v5 and 20 v12. It is not clear which of the five uses of the word "**MIKROS**" outlined above is used here. It could probably mean "not important", but the other uses could not be ruled out, including the possibility of children being referred to.

The important truth emphasized in each case is that everyone is included.



SECTION II

THE VALUE AND IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN IN THE BIBLE

“Higher than every painter, higher than every sculptor and than all artists, do I regard him who is skilled in the art of forming the soul-life of children.”

Chrysostom

CHAPTER 1

Children Are Valuable To God

We live in a world which, generally speaking, places little value upon children. This can be seen especially in the wholesale murder of millions of children in many of our countries through abortion. In many circles childhood is just seen as a necessary step or stage in human existence which leads to and prepares for that which really matters – adulthood. And unfortunately this lack of value in childhood and its present possibilities can also be found in many of our churches where children are often demoted to a subsidiary place in all their activities and ministry.

But God sees children differently – and He has set and expressed the great value He has placed on our little ones – and this divine estimate of their value is demonstrated and stated clearly, first of all, in His Word and also in the deductions we can make from it:

Children are part of God’s Plan

Right from the start it was God’s plan for the human race that every man and woman (except for Adam and Eve) coming into this world should come by means of birth and then continue through infancy, childhood, and teenage years to adulthood. *“Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. (Genesis 1, v28a).* So He set His seal of approval upon childhood from the beginning – and made it clear that childhood is a necessary stage of life for everyone. Children are therefore an essential part of God’s plan for the world.

Children are God’s Creation

We can go further and state categorically that every child born into the world is a creation of God. This means that there exists a

direct (creational) relationship between God and the child because he has been created by God Himself. The Psalmist writes, *"It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves."* (Psalm 100 v3).

- The creation of the human race can be viewed and explained in two ways:
 - ✓ The first two chapters of Genesis give the account of how God created the first man and woman. God made them and gave life to them. That is the original creation of the human race, and every child born into this world is a descendant of them, is therefore part of the original creation and continues to breathe the breath which God gave to them.
 - ✓ It is equally true to say that each child born into this world is a fresh example of God's creative power.
 - David, speaking of his conception and birth said in Psalm 139, v14). *"I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well"*. And in v15 *"My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth."*
 - Elihu said to Job in Job 33 v4: *"The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life."*
 - And Paul says in Acts 17 v25, *"He gives to all life, breath, and all things."*

God uses the union of a man and woman to give birth to a child, but He determines through them the physical features and personality of the child – and it is He Who imparts life to the child.

- When we realize and understand that each child is, therefore, an individual creation of God we can come to a number of important conclusions based upon Scripture:
 - ✓ Children have dignity, respect and worth because they are the result of God's handiwork. And we should treat them with dignity and respect.
 - ✓ Children are responsible to God as their Creator.

Paul underlined this truth in Athens when he preached in Acts 17, v24-31.

- God made the world and everything in it (verse 24)
- He gives to all life, breath and all things (verse 25)
- In Him we live and move and have our being (verse 28)
- We are the offspring of God (verse 29)
- He commands ALL men everywhere to repent (verse 30)
- We are to seek Him (verse 27)

And Solomon emphasized this truth in Ecclesiastes 12 v1, *“Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth.”*

And we should teach this responsibility to our children.

- ✓ Children have an intrinsic desire to worship someone or something. That’s the way God made them. Augustine prayed, *“Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.”* Many children as they grow up will, like the Athenians, worship *“The unknown God”* (Acts 17 v23, 24). That’s why we need to present them with the truth about God.
- ✓ Children, even though they are created differently from each other, are created equal in the sight of God, and we should also treat them equally. God created all children. A child’s race, colour, culture, country or circumstances do not make him any more (or less) favoured by God. *“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings”* (Acts 17, v26).
- ✓ Children are created as whole beings. God did not create them just with bodies or just with souls or just with spirits – they are whole beings – and we need to treat them and teach them as such.

God the Son became a Child

We have seen that children have value to God because they are an essential part of His plan for the world, and also because He has created each one of them. We also know that children and childhood are valuable and precious to God because that is the way He, God the Son, came into this world. He was

born as a baby of a human mother and lived through the years of infancy and childhood – like any other child (but without sin). In so doing He hallowed childhood and showed its great value and importance to Him and His Heavenly Father.

God the Son loves Children

And God the Son, our Lord Jesus, showed the value He has placed on children and His concern for them in four different ways:

- ✓ By receiving and welcoming them (Matthew 18 v2; Mark 10 v16).
- ✓ By giving commands to His disciples concerning them:
 - To let them come to Him (Mark 10 v14).
 - To receive them (Matthew 18 v5).
- ✓ By warning His disciples and others concerning them:
 - Don't forbid them to praise Him (Matthew 21 vs15 & 16).
 - Don't forbid them to come to Him (Mark 10 v14).
 - Don't offend them (Matthew 18 v6).
 - Don't despise them (Matthew 18 v10).
- ✓ By expressing His love and care for the children and His desire for their salvation and blessing (Matthew 18 v14; Mark 10 v16).

We will look at all of these later in the book and give detailed explanations of what the Lord Jesus meant.

God the Father loves Children

And God the Father shows His love and concern for children and His evaluation of them by the multiplicity of commands He gives to His people concerning children – commands He wants them to obey so that the children will be blessed and helped.

These commands are outlined in later chapters but they include commands like Deuteronomy 4 v9; 6 v7; Psalm 34 v11; Ephesians 6 v4; and Colossians 3 v21.

CHAPTER 2

Children Are Valuable To Us

In the light of all we have seen concerning the value and importance of children to God should they not be equally valuable and important to us who are believers? And we need to ask ourselves the question – do we give the children the proper place, the place they deserve in our thinking, in our prayers and in our activities? How much of the ministry in our churches and missions is directed towards the boys and girls?

In the Greco-Roman world, and down through history since then, children have often been held in very low esteem all over the world. And it is a tragedy that this is still the case in many of our churches.

Our Ministry to Children

It seems to me that there are four attitudes and beliefs concerning children in our evangelical churches and homes today, and these attitudes result in four different kinds of ministries (or absence of ministries) towards them:

- In some churches and homes children are seen to be unimportant as far as their spiritual life and spiritual potential are concerned. They are told stories, kept quiet and amused – but are not seen as capable of understanding symbolism or abstract concepts. Much of the teaching they receive centers on their need to be good, to behave and to be obedient to their parents. They are certainly not evangelized and their spiritual life and needs are largely ignored until they reach early or mid teens.

- In many churches and homes there is a concern for the spiritual needs of the children, and both the stories and truths of the Bible are taught to them. It is believed that they can understand many of these – and the goal is to “sow the seed” of God’s Word in their hearts. BUT it is not believed that a truly genuine saving response is possible until they reach early or mid teens. So they are not evangelized.
- In a number of churches and homes the children of Christian parents are seen to be “safe under the covenant”. In other words, because of their parents, they are born into a right relationship with God – and will remain there until or unless they decide to leave it. If and when they do so they will then be evangelized. These children are taught how wonderful it is for them to be God’s children (because of their parents), and are encouraged as they grow older to stay in that position.
- The fourth viewpoint is that ALL children are spiritually dead and separated from God, and that they can be saved, even at an early age, by trusting Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Therefore they need to be evangelized right from the beginning; and we can expect to see spiritual growth and spiritual maturity in the lives of those who trust Christ. This is the viewpoint presented throughout this book and the one which I personally believe. I am convinced it is truly biblical and as a consequence I reject the other three viewpoints.

So we believe it is necessary for us to give priority to children and their spiritual needs – today – when they are still children.

The Potential of Children

Not only do we have clear biblical teaching that we should place great value on the children, and great importance on our ministry to them, but there are other simple reasons why we should give priority to them and to their spiritual needs:

- Children learn more in their first five years than any other 5-year period. Indeed some people say that when a child is seven years old he has learned fifty per cent of all he will ever learn!

- Experts tell us that a person's character traits are set by the time he is seven years old.
- It is a recognized fact that children are much more open and responsive to teaching and influence than adults – and the older they become the less responsive they are.
- One third of the population in many countries are under the age of 15 – and in other countries the percentage rises to 50%. So when we think or speak of children we are thinking or speaking about a large percentage of the world's population – or our own area's population.
- "The child of today is the church of tomorrow." This is true but we could also correct this statement to read, "The child of today is the church of today."

Childhood is Important

Herman Van Brummelen writes: *"It is important to realize and understand that childhood is not just a period of preparation for adolescence, just as adolescence is not just a period of preparation for adulthood".*

It is true that our lives can be divided up into periods such as infancy, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, mature adulthood and old age. But we must see that each of those periods, including childhood, stand on their own – and God deals with us in that period in the way most suitable.

Each period is not just preparation for the next period and then it fades away when the next period comes. That is not so. It is of course true that every period of life does prepare and train us for the next period – but these periods are more than periods of preparation. There are lessons to be learned and experiences to be gained in each period which are peculiar to that period – and God deals with us in each period in accordance with that period, so that we might learn to live in that period as He wants us to. And what we experience in each period becomes an essential and integral part of our character for the future and forever. And so the fruit and result of each period of life is brought into and assimilated by the next period. These periods are therefore closely

connected to each other – and we do not just leave a period behind us when we move into the next period.

Childhood is not, therefore, a period of life which is purely preparation for the next period, and which the child leaves behind when he comes to that next period. It is much more than that. The years of childhood determine in many ways the character of our years of adulthood and during childhood preparations are made for important decisions later in life. Consequently, childhood is important in itself and for that which can and does take place only during this period of life. Childhood is like a field of flowers and fruit which can only grow in that particular field – but which are preserved and brought through all the different periods of life into eternity.

What are these flowers and fruits? What are the attitudes and attributes of childhood which God wants us to preserve into the periods which follow, and which can be used by God to accomplish His purposes in our lives? They include attitudes such as trust, humility, dependence, submission, receptivity and willingness to learn! It is not God's will that we shake off and leave behind such attitudes and characteristics of childhood but that we as adults should learn to live in our adult years according to these relationships and attitudes of our childhood years.

That is why the Lord Jesus said the following:

“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 18, v3). ‘Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 18, v4). ‘Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it’ (Mark 10, v15). ‘At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes’ (Matthew 11, v25).” The Christian who grasps this wonderful truth, and understands it, is amazed at the importance God has attached to the years of childhood and has given those years a greatness and dignity which we should remember and reflect on.”

Christian Leaders see the Importance of Children

It is good to be able to record the statements of well-known Christians and Christian leaders to show how much they realize the value and importance of children:

- ✓ Gypsy Smith said, *“When you save an old man you save a unit, when you save a boy you save a multiplication table.”*
- ✓ Billy Sunday said, *“The only way you will ever solve the problem of reaching the masses is by getting hold of the children. You get the boys and girls started right and the devil will hang crepe on his door.”*
- ✓ John Knox wrote: *“The minister must take care of the children and youth of the Parish, instructing them in their first rudiments and especially in the catechism. Every master of a household must be commanded either to instruct, or else to cause to be instructed, his children, servants and family, in the principles of the Christian religion.”*
- ✓ Chrysostom said: *“Higher than every painter, higher than every sculptor and than all artists, do I regard him who is skilled in the art of forming the soul-life of children.”*
- ✓ John Wesley wrote: *“Unless we take care of the rising generation, the present revival of religion will last only the age of man.”*
He also told his preachers: *“Spend an hour a week with the children in every large town whether you like it or not. Talk with them any time you see any of them at home. Pray in earnest for them.”*
- ✓ Dr. E B Meyer wrote *“If Protestantism loses out, it will be because it has lost faith in the reality of a child’s religion and has not understood and not his need. It is painful to think how often we neglect the children and then labour with agonizing prayer and heroic appeal for the conversion of men and women.”*

The Evangelism of Children is Often Neglected

Dr Martha Wright writes: *“Historically evangelical churches have emphasized adult and youth evangelism, but the children have very often been neglected. Children’s ministry leaders who have studied child development theories have made dogmatic statements that children*

cannot understand symbolism of abstract concepts and therefore cannot understand the truths of the Gospel until they are 11 or 12 years old. They take an 'intelligence-based' approach to evangelism which implies that a higher level of intellectual development must be reached before children can make a decision for Christ. Others believe that we should install biblical knowledge from a young age and hopefully one day the child will make a decision for Christ. There is little or no emphasis on presenting the Gospel. These erroneous philosophies of child conversion have infiltrated many of our churches. Further, some children's ministry workers are inhibited about presenting the Gospel to children and giving them an opportunity to respond because of faulty decisions or 'recommitments' made in later life. Unwise workers ask children, 'How many want to go to Heaven?' and seeing raised hands declare these children 'saved'. Some children are told to just 'pray a prayer' without any instruction about the Gospel. Some children's ministries merely entertain children. These philosophies and faulty approaches to children's ministry have caused children in our churches to grow up with a false security of salvation and/or head knowledge about the Bible, but they do not know the God of the Bible personally. They think they are 'saved' because they attend church, said a prayer, or because they are 'good.' As a result a large percentage of these children become involved in the 'world' and eventually leave the church because the Bible and church are not relevant to them personally. If they do stay in church their well-meaning teachers wonder why there is no spiritual growth evident in the children's lives. 1st Corinthians 2,v.14 gives us insight into the reason: "The man without the spirit does not no or accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned." Many of our children's ministries attempt to teach children how to live for God when they have not yet received eternal life. Just as it is against physical nature for a dead plan to grow, it is against spiritual nature that spiritually dead children grow in Christ. The Biblical order is salvation and then spiritual growth."

I agree wholeheartedly with this perceptive conclusion!

CHAPTER 3

Children Are Valuable to Others

And we can, and should, see how the world puts great value upon children.

- ✓ J. Edgar Hoover, former director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in USA said: *"Today's unchurched child is tomorrow's criminal."*
- ✓ Queen Victoria, the longest reigning monarch of the United Kingdom asked a man called John Bright the question, *"Where did all these great people come from?"* John replied, *"From babies your Highness."*
- ✓ Socrates, the great Greek philosopher said *"If he could get to the highest place in Athens he would lift up his voice and ask the citizens why they were turning every stone to scrape wealth together yet taking so little care of their children to whom they must one day relinquish all."*
- ✓ And who can forget the words of Abraham Lincoln, one of the most famous of Presidents of USA:
"A child is a person who is going to carry on what you started. He is going to sit where you are sitting, and when you are gone attend to those things you think are unimportant. You may adopt the policies you please, but how they are carried out depends on him. He will assume control of your cities, states and nations. He is going to move in and take over your churches, schools, universities and corporations – and the fate of humanity is in his hands."
- ✓ Louis Pasteur, the famous French scholar said, *"When I approach a child he inspires in me two sentiments – tenderness for what he is, and respect for what he will become."*

It is a serious indictment of Christians and the Christian church when we see the value others who are not Christians place upon children:

- ✓ The Communists saw the importance of indoctrinating children from their earliest years by excluding them from Christian teaching, and by enrolling them in all kinds of programmes and organizations which propagated the doctrines of Communism.
- ✓ The Jesuits launched their Counter Reformation by concentrating on the children. One of their early leaders made the well-known statement, *"Give me a child until he is seven and you can do what you like with him after that."*
- ✓ But we can especially see the value the world places upon children by watching today's advertisers who direct much of their promotion on television and in print towards the children. *"Get them when they are young"* is their philosophy *"and we will have them for their whole lives"*.

Can we not, at least, learn from them and be convicted of our neglect of the children in our ministries – and should we not do what we can to remedy and correct that neglect.

CHAPTER 4

The Dangers Children Face

As we think about the value of and importance of children to God - and also their value to ourselves - we also need to remember the great dangers faced by these valuable and important people:

Physical Dangers

Many children face and are harmed by dangers which exist in the world today which can do great damage to their bodies - and also their souls:

- ✓ The danger of drugs. The age of those involved in drugs gets lower every year.
- ✓ The danger of alcohol. This is a growing problem among young people and, more and more, among children.
- ✓ Sexual abuse is more common than we think.
- ✓ Child abuse, cruelty and neglect is becoming more and more prevalent.

Mental Dangers

There are those who are trying to poison the minds of our young people and children:

- ✓ Through many of the magazines which are published and have such low moral standards.
- ✓ Through the programmes on television many of which present a completely false sense of values. Foul language and blasphemy are common and sexual immorality is presented as a normal part of life.
- ✓ Through the availability of DVDs, and the programs and pictures on modern communication gadgets which are

sometimes worse than television and cause great harm to our children.

- ✓ In our schools, and even in some of our churches, evolution is freely taught, not as a theory, but as a fact; and alternative religions are taught on the same level as Christianity.

Can we stand by and allow our children to be harmed and damaged forever by these unscrupulous forces? Or are we willing and ready to do something positive about it?

Spiritual Dangers

But the worst and most serious dangers of all are those in the spiritual realm.

On the one hand children are being influenced by an increasingly agnostic society which declares in one way or another either that there is no God or that we cannot be sure that God exists. Christianity is lampooned and Christian beliefs scorned.

On the other hand, the spiritual instruction and evangelism of children is often neglected by the church of Jesus Christ.

Consequently, as a result of these two factors, most of our children grow up in spiritual darkness – and that is a great and serious danger.

An Apt Parable

The Invaders Mistake

Once upon a time there was a MIGHTY ARMY which went forth at the command of the Great King.

Its task was to conquer and to bring into subjection the whole land which was under the domination of the wicked and cruel Black Prince.

And as the Army marched through the land, castles and counties, towns and cities were taken, one by one. They were subdued and their allegiance transferred from the Black Prince to the Great King.

For it was the King's wish to unite the land and rule over it wisely in order that His subjects might be safe and happy.

Now this Army was very powerful and well equipped for all kinds of warfare. It had never suffered a defeat – although there were numerous strongholds in the land which had stoutly resisted its onslaughts, refusing to submit to the King.

One day this Army chanced to come upon a very small castle, which seemed from a distance to be very easy to conquer. As they came nearer they saw that its name was "CHILD SOUL". It was open to all comers; its drawbridge was down, the Castle door was open wide. Friendly faces peered over the parapets and from the narrow windows came sounds of friendly greeting.

Said the Captain, "Castle of Child-Soul is ours – whenever we wish to take it. There is no resistance - with a dozen men we can take it at our convenience."

So they passed the little castle by and went on their way and many victories were theirs in the name of the Great King.

After a time they again passed the Castle and they saw with surprise that a wall had been built around the Castle and that it had become a small town. Its name too had been changed. It was now called "YOUTH-SOUL". There were other changes too. The drawbridge over the moat was up; the door closed, and there was a watchful and almost suspicious air about it. Yet its citizens were friendly enough. There were sounds of music and laughter from within and there was no outward hostility. It still seemed easy enough to the leaders of this powerful Army. "We could take it with fifty men when we are ready", the Captain said. "We'll have no trouble with Youth-Soul when the time comes." So again they went their way and the little town was almost forgotten by them.

Years passed before they came again – and what a change had taken place!

The walls had been still further extended and the little town had become a city called "MAN-SOUL".

Not only was the drawbridge up and the door was shut but the windows were partially closed also.

From them looked sullen and indifferent faces – some even defiant – others scornful and mocking.

There was a flash of spears along the parapets. There were archers on the towers.

From within came the sound of battle cries and marching feet. "What a change!" the leaders cry. "The wide-open Castle has become the hostile city. There is powerful resistance and rebellion. We must lose no time

in laying a siege. Bring on more warriors. Bring on the battering rams and every engine of war. Only a hard battle can win the victory now. O why did we wait so long?"

I trust we do not make the same mistake regarding our children and are forced to cry one day "Why did we wait so long?"



SECTION III

A STUDY OF THE FIVE MAIN PASSAGES IN THE BIBLE ABOUT CHILDREN

“And He said to them: ‘Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your CHILDREN to be careful to observe; all the words of this law.’ “

Deuteronomy 32 v46

CHAPTER 1

Our Duty to Juniors in Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy is the fifth book in the Bible and the fifth book written by Moses.

INTRODUCTION

It is important to remember the circumstances in which this book was given to the children of Israel. After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness they had come to the borders of the Promised Land. They were about to begin a completely new stage in their personal lives and in the life of Israel as a nation. Ahead lay conquest and occupation.

It was forty years since God gave them the law and the events recorded in the book of Exodus. Now in Deuteronomy God gives Israel their final instructions reminding them of what He had told them forty years previously and outlining what they should do when they enter the land. This book makes it clear that their future would depend upon the generation of children who would grow up there. No nation can prosper if it neglects its children:

- In regard to their intellectual education.
- In regard to their spiritual and moral life.
 - ✓ Their spiritual life is in the hands of the Lord's people who alone can show them God's will and plan for their lives.
 - ✓ The moral life of the nation will parallel the spiritual level.

Therefore the welfare of a nation – be it the nation of Israel or our nation – depends, to a large extent, on how God's people minister to their children.

As a result much emphasis in the book of Deuteronomy is devoted to the children and the responsibility of adults to the children. Every teacher and parent can learn many valuable lessons today from what is taught about children in this book.

There are four main passages concerning children in Deuteronomy – Deuteronomy 4 v9, 10; 6 v3-7; 11 v18-21; 31 v12, 13. The Hebrew word for children used in all but one of these references is BEN – a general word for children of all ages. But in Deuteronomy 31 v12 the word TAPH is used and it usually refers to young children.

Deuteronomy 4 v9, 10

God's Warnings to those Who Teach Children

“Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your CHILDREN and your grandchildren, especially concerning the day you stood before the LORD your God in Horeb, when the LORD said to me, ‘Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their CHILDREN.’ “

It is absolutely vital that those who work with children – be they parents grandparents or Sunday school teachers – listen carefully to God’s warnings concerning themselves and their ministry to children; and these two verses warn us that there are four commands we need to obey:

- *“Only take heed to yourself”* (verse 9a)

We need to TAKE HEED to ourselves

This means that we should be sure that we, ourselves, have a correct relationship with God. It is essential that every children’s worker examines himself to see that he is in this right relationship. It is not possible to teach satisfactorily unless we are “right with God”.

- *“and keep your soul diligently”* (verse 9b)

We need to KEEP our souls diligently

This means that we should build and maintain a constant communion with God – so that we will be spiritually healthy. Our spiritual lives need to be jealously guarded and encouraged by constant communion with the Lord and the study of His Word.

- *“lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life”* (verse 9c).

We need to REMEMBER what the Lord has done – and especially what He has done for us.

The children of Israel were to remember their deliverance from slavery, the dividing of the Red Sea, the manna, the tabernacle and especially the giving of the law (verse 10).

And we ourselves need always to remember what the Lord has done for us – how He has saved us, kept us, met our daily needs, answered our prayers and blessed us over and over again.

- *“And teach them to your children and your grandchildren”* (verse 9d).

We need to TEACH these truths to the children.

According to these two verses God’s people were commanded to teach their children the works of God (verse 9) and the words of God (verse 10).

And our teaching ministry to the children should center upon these two main themes

- ✓ What God has done (verse 9)
- ✓ What God has said (verse 10)

“Especially concerning the day you stood before the Lord your God in Horeb, when the Lord said to me, gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children..” (Deuteronomy 4,v10). This verse told them to gather the people together so that a number of results will and should follow.

- ✓ They should listen to God’s Word
- ✓ They should learn to fear and trust God
- ✓ They should teach their children

TAKE HEED – KEEP YOUR SOUL – REMEMBER – TEACH
Those are God’s warnings to be heeded.

Deuteronomy 6 v3-7

God’s Commands to Those Who Teach Children

“Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the LORD God of your fathers has promised you; ‘a land flowing with milk and honey.’ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your CHILDREN, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6 v3-7).

These five verses can be divided into three parts:

➤ **GOD’S ONE INITIAL COMMAND – LISTEN TO YOUR SOVEREIGN GOD**

The first step and the first thing God commands them to do is to LISTEN to what He wants to say to them. And isn’t that also the first step for us in our ministry – we must listen before we can speak and teach.

And so God through His servant tells His people twice – TO LISTEN:

✓ In verse 4 *“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord”*

He is our God and He is the Sovereign Lord Jehovah.

God wants to speak to us about our beliefs; about our doctrine, and He wants us to listen. It is most important that we have a clear understanding of the doctrines of God – and especially that He is the One and only God. Our doctrines should be God-centred, our lives should be God-centred and our teaching of children should be God-centred.

✓ In verse 3, *“Hear therefore, O Israel and observe to do it”*

God’s people are to listen to what He says, to what He commands – and then to DO IT.

- *“Hear”* – listen to what the Lord says.

- “Observe to do” – obey what the Lord says.

Are we listening – so we can know what to believe, and what to do?

- **GOD’S TWO-FOLD PROMISE – HEALTH AND WEALTH**
“that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the LORD God of your fathers has promised you - a land flowing with milk and honey” (Deuteronomy 6 v3).

This part of the verse starts with the word “that” – which shows that what follows is a consequence of what has gone before. If God’s people listen to what He says and if they obey what He says there will be a two-fold result:

- ✓ *“It may be well with you.”* If we listen and obey God’s Word we will receive blessing, we will have joy – and we will enjoy **SPIRITUAL HEALTH**.
- ✓ *“that you may multiply greatly or increase”*. If we listen and obey God’s Word we will multiply and grow. Others will be blessed and saved through us. And we will in this way enjoy **SPIRITUAL WEALTH**.

At the time of Moses God wanted His people to be spiritually healthy and, at the same time to grow numerically. This is also God’s will for His people today – but we must listen to Him and obey Him.

- **GOD’S THREE MAIN COMMANDS – LOVE, LEARN AND LABOUR**

- ✓ *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength”* (verse 5)

God’s first main command is to love Him, the Lord our God – He wants us to **LOVE THE SAVIOUR**.

The relationship of every children’s worker with the Lord should have first priority in his or her life.

In John 21 v15 the Lord Jesus asked Simon Peter the question, *“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?”* He said to Him, *‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’* He said to him, *“Feed My lambs.”* He did not command Simon Peter to feed the lambs until, first of all, He had ensured that Simon Peter really

loved Him, and that there was a right relationship between them.

And our work among children must start, therefore, with a right relationship to our Lord. Do we love Him as we should?

✓ *“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart”* (verse 6).

This is God’s second command – LEARN THE SCRIPTURES. However this verse makes it clear that it is not just a question of having the Word of God in our heads – but that it should be hidden in our hearts. We need to read it, hear it, understand it, meditate upon it and let it sink down into our hearts. God gave His Word not only for our information (although that is important), but also for our transformation. When God’s Word is in our hearts our lives are transformed and then we are best able to teach the children from a heart filled with the Word of God.

The river can rise no higher than its source.

✓ *“You shall teach them diligently to your CHILDREN, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes”* (Deuteronomy 6 v7, 8).

This is God’s third command – LABOUR FOR THE SOULS OF THE CHILDREN

The children need to be taught the Word of God and this is the responsibility of God’s people. This verse not only commands us to teach the Word of God to the children, but it also answers several important questions concerning our ministry to them.

- How should we teach children?

“You shall teach them diligently”

The phrase *“teach diligently”* is the translation of one Hebrew word which could be translated *“sharpen”*. They were to sharpen their children. Matthew Henry believed these words meant that God’s Word should be taught through repetition and that doing so would

be “a sharp way to pierce the heart.” Another translation of these two words is “*impress*” – put the right mark or impression on them. Both these translations indicate clearly that the teaching of children which is required is not just saying something or telling a story; it is a conscious desire on the part of the one teaching to so teach as to lead to a change in the character, life and actions of the child. And this is not always easy. That why I have used the words “**labour** for the souls of the children.”

- Where should we teach children these words?
“and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way” .

Where? Everywhere – in all places – inside the house and outside in the open-air. There is no special place for teaching the children, and we must never forget the children outside. We must make the most of every possible opportunity.

It is interesting to note that the two main ministries to children of our Mission - Child Evangelism Fellowship, are Good News Clubs (meetings for children in the homes of believers) and Five-Day Clubs (open-air meetings for children). So we are completely in line with this verse.

- When should we teach children?
“when you lie down, and when you rise up”

When? At all times – in the evening and in the morning. There is no one special time for teaching the children.

The children of Israel needed, and we need, to take every opportunity to reach and teach children – choosing the time which best suits them and us.

- What should we teach children?
Verse 7 tells us we should “*teach **them** diligently*” to the children and “*shall talk of **them***”. What does the word “**them**” refer to? They are the words from God

as explained in verse 6. They were to teach *“these words which I command thee”* to their children – and the Word of God should also be the foundation of our ministry to the children.

And verse 8 tells us that we can only do this well and thoroughly if we, ourselves, fulfill three conditions:

- We need to **live** the Word of God out in our daily lives
“bind them for a sign upon your HAND”
- We need to **look** at the Word of God and think about it
“they shall be as frontlets between your EYES”
- We need to **let** others know about the Word of God
“write them upon the DOOR POST of your house and on your GATES”

And if we fulfill these three conditions the children will come to know the Word of God and respond to it.

Deuteronomy 11 v18-21

God’s Word and Those Who Teach Children

“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your CHILDREN, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your CHILDREN may be multiplied in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth” (Deuteronomy 11 v18-21).

God, as He speaks through Moses, reminds His people again about the importance of His Word, what He wants His people to do with that Word and what the results will be:

➤ **FOUR COMMANDS FROM GOD CONCERNING HIS WORD**

✓ They need to **HIDE** His Word in their hearts:

“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul”

That is our first responsibility – to make sure the Word of God is buried deep within us – in our hearts and souls.

- ✓ They need to SEE and READ His Word

“bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.”

They could not have it in their hearts if they had not, first of all, seen it and read it for themselves.

- ✓ They need to TEACH His Word to the children

“You shall teach them to your CHILDREN, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”

That is the next step. If the Word of God has been read and stored in the heart it must then be shared with and taught to the children – anywhere (inside and outside), and at any time (late and early in the day).

- ✓ They need to SHOW His Word to others

“And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates”

They needed to remember the children outside. Those outside also needed to see the Word of God – and they would see it if it was upon the doorposts.

➤ TWO RESULTS PROMISED BY GOD

“..... that your days and the days of your CHILDREN may be multiplied in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth.”

God then tells His people that if they follow and obey the four commands He has given concerning His Word there will be two results:

- ✓ *“Your days may be multiplied ... in the land”*

This promise is not so much related to His people having longer lives – but that they as a people shall prosper, be blessed, multiply and, especially, stay LONGER in the land God gave them.

- ✓ *“and the days of your children”*

But this promise was not only one for those who were listening. God also extended it to their children – if, of course, they were obedient to God’s four commands.

And all of this has a direct application to us today. If we read God's Word, store it in our hearts, teach it to children and share it with the children outside, God will bless us – and He will also bless the children through us – and, through them, our nation.

Deuteronomy 31 v12-13

God's Aims for Those who Teach Children

“Gather the people together, men and women and LITTLE ONES (TAPH), and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, and that THEIR CHILDREN, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess.”

These verses were addressed to the priests, Levites and to all the elders of Israel (verses 9-11) and their purpose is to show these spiritual leaders of God's people how to fulfill their responsibility to their people – including the children.

In these two verses the leaders were given six things which they should aim at and six steps they should take – so that they could achieve six results in the lives of men, women, children and strangers.

We will concentrate on that third section of the people in whom we are most interested – the children:

- Their first aim was to GATHER THE CHILDREN together
“Gather the people together, men and women and LITTLE ONES”.
They could not help them or teach them if they had no access to them. So their first step and their first responsibility was to bring the children together so that they could speak to them and teach them. The Hebrew word used here is “TAPH” which specifically means “little ones” and should be thus translated.

It is equally obvious to us that we cannot teach and evangelize children if there are none there! So our first responsibility is to bring a child, a small group of children or a large group of children to where we are – so we can speak to them and they can listen to us. We can invite them to come to our homes or

Sunday school or to a Good News Club in our home – or we can go out into the open-air and bring a group together there. Our first aim then is directed towards the children’s FEET - we want them to come.

- The second aim is to get the children to LISTEN to us

“Gather the little ones that they may HEAR.”

Having a group of children before us is not enough. Speaking to them and teaching them are not enough. Nothing can be accomplished unless the children listen to us:

“How shall they believe in Him of Whom they have not HEARD”
(Romans 10 v14).

“Faith comes by HEARING and hearing by the Word of God”
(Romans 10 v17).

What were they to hear or listen to?

These verses tell us that they were to hear *“the words of this law”* – its commandments, statutes and judgments which especially set forth the justice and the holiness of God. They should hear not only about the love of God and His blessings; but also His judgment – a knowledge of which leads to *“fear”* and respect for Him.

And one of the greatest challenges we face in our ministry is getting the children to listen to what we are saying – especially the children of today. Therefore we need to teach attractively and in a way which creates interest and attention – and it is the Word of God which we are to teach.

Our second aim is therefore directed towards the children’s EARS.

- The third aim is that the children may LEARN or UNDERSTAND what we are saying.

“that they may LEARN”.

It is not sufficient for the children to hear or listen. They need to UNDERSTAND what they are hearing. They do not learn all they hear. Telling is not teaching and listening is not learning. So the responsibility comes back onto the teacher to be sure that he is not using words or concepts beyond the

children's understanding. The effective teacher needs to know how to teach truth both attractively and simply.

Isn't it amazing that Moses, several thousand years ago, was already stating the principles involved in modern teaching methods?

Our third aim is therefore directed towards the children's HEADS or INTELLECTS.

- The fourth aim and the most important aim is that they might FEAR or RESPECT or TRUST the Lord.

"..... and FEAR the Lord your God."

Our goal in all that we do and teach is that the children come into a right relationship with God – and these verses tell us that it is possible for children to do this. They, like the other three groups, are exhorted to FEAR the Lord and to have a personal trust in Him. And this is the activity of the HEART. Coming with the feet, hearing with the ear and learning with the mind are only steps – but essential steps – to the all important step of trusting with the heart. Our goal is not just that the children might come, not just that they might listen, not just that they might understand – these are only stepping stones to a work of grace in the heart – but our main goal is that the children come to fear God and to put their trust and hope in Him.

And these two verses show us that it is possible for children - "*the little ones*" (TAPH) - to do so.

We must therefore spend much time in prayer, asking God to work in the hearts of our children to enable them to put their faith in Him. This is a work which only He can do, but He expects us to believe it is possible and to pray and trust Him for the children's salvation.

- The fifth aim and goal of the person who works with children is that they might OBEY the Lord.

"and carefully OBSERVE all the words of the law."

When the child has come, has listened, has understood and has, in his heart, come to fear and trust the Lord he must then show his faith and his new life by continuing OBEDIENCE to

God and His Word. As an obedient disciple of the Lord he must put into practice, as best he can, the Word of God – “*all the words of the law.*” And so in our teaching we should seek to encourage and teach the children to live a life of such discipleship and obedience. At the same time we should not set our expectations too high. We need to remember they are children, that they have much to learn and a long way to go and grow.

Our fifth aim is therefore directed towards the **WHOLE PERSON**.

- The sixth aim we have is that we will be able to reach others through these children – and especially that they themselves will reach their own children at a later date.

“and that their CHILDREN (BEN), who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess” (verse 13).

Our next goal then is their transmission of the message to others – through the use of their tongues.

When we reach children we reach a multiplication table. They will pass the message on to other children and when they grow up to their own children, and seek to lead their own children to do what this verse says – “*to hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God.*”

And so our sixth aim is directed towards their **TONGUES**

SUMMARY

In the light of Deuteronomy 31 v12 and 13 what do we want our children to do?

- 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 **TRUST** Jesus Christ as their Saviour when they understand.
- To **OBEY** Jesus Christ in their everyday lives.
- To **WITNESS** to others concerning their faith.

AND THESE VERSES SHOW US THAT IT IS POSSIBLE FOR CHILDREN, EVEN LITTLE CHILDREN, TO DO ALL OF THESE.

OTHER REFERENCES

There are a few more references to children in the book of Deuteronomy.

➤ The little ones were also to enter into God's covenant.

"All of you stand today before the LORD your God: your leaders and your tribes and your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel, YOUR LITTLE ONES (TAPH) and your wives; also the stranger who is in your camp, from the one who cuts your wood to the one who draws your water; that you may enter into covenant with the LORD your God, and into His oath, which the LORD your God makes with you today, that He may establish you today as a people for Himself, and that He may be God to you, just as He has spoken to you, and just as He has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Deuteronomy 29 v10-13).

God also loves the children and wants them to enjoy all the blessings He has for His people. He wants to be their God also.

➤ God's people were told to command their children to obey carefully all the words of the law.

"And He said to them: 'Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your CHILDREN (BEN) to be careful to observe; all the words of this law' " (Deuteronomy 32 v46).

This verse, towards the end of this key book, reiterates again how important it was for God's people to teach God's Word to the children - and to encourage them to obey it.

CHAPTER 2

Build A Wall At The Top

The Importance Of Teaching And Evangelizing Children

Psalm 78: 1-8

This is one of the main passages in the Bible concerning children and provides us with much information about them. These verses also bring a very special challenge to reach them and teach them the Word of God.

We will look at each verse in turn and examine what it teaches.

➤ Verses 1 and 2 – AN INTRODUCTION

“Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old.”

The Psalmist stresses that what he has to say is important and unchangeable. They are the words of His mouth and should be listened to!

➤ Verse 3 – OUR PRIVILEGE

“Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.”

We are believers today (humanly speaking) because someone told us about the Saviour. We heard “the words of His mouth” Someone was faithful in giving us the Gospel. We heard those precious words and we trusted the Lord. What a privilege it is for us to have been evangelized and led to Christ! Many others have not – but we have. May God help us to appreciate this privilege.

➤ Verse 4 - OUR PROMISE

"We will not hide them from their CHILDREN, telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done."

The Psalmist's privilege leads to a promise. As he contemplates all that he has known, and all that he has been told, he makes a promise not to hide these things from the children. The Hebrew word used here and in verses 5 & 6 is BEN - a word used to describe children and also people of all ages. He does not want to keep these things to himself, but as he looks at the children, he realizes how important it is for them also to know these truths.

May God help you and me to make a promise like this! As we see the many children around us, may we desire with all our hearts to share with them the truths that we ourselves have heard.

The Psalmist also outlines for us the three things which he wants us to share with the children:

✓ *"The praises of the Lord"*

He desires, especially, that the children should know WHO THE LORD IS. If you read the rest of the Psalm, you will find that the Psalmist underlines especially the greatness, goodness, faithfulness and righteous judgment of God.

Our teaching and evangelism must center on the Person of the Lord. That is where we start. Our children need to know Who the Lord is and what He is like.

✓ *"His strength"*

The Psalmist wants to share with the children WHAT THE LORD CAN DO. The remainder of the Psalm shows especially how God guides and provides. God is strong and powerful and can do many things in their lives.

It is necessary for us to teach the children firstly who the Lord is, and then, secondly, to show them what He wants to do for them. It is especially important to show them that the Lord Jesus wants to be their Saviour.

- ✓ *“His wonderful works that He has done”*

He wants to look back and describe WHAT THE LORD HAS DONE for them. The acts of which the Psalmist speaks later in the Psalm are: the deliverance from Egypt, the ten plagues, the entrance into Canaan, the choice of Jerusalem and of David.

For us today, this includes taking the children back to Calvary, the Resurrection and the Ascension – to show that what the Lord wants to do in their lives is based upon what He has already done!

We should examine OUR teaching to make sure that all three of the Psalmist’s points are in it! - the praises of the Lord, the power of the Lord and the provision of the Lord.

- Verse 5 – GOD’S PRECEPT (or command)

“For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their CHILDREN.”

It is important to teach *“the testimony”* and *“the law”* to children because: *“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple”* (Psalm 19 v7). That is why those early *“fathers”* were **commanded** to teach them to their children. They needed to know them.

And, similarly, reaching and teaching the children is not an option for us. It is something which we are **COMMANDED** to do. The Lord Jesus in Mark 16 v15 said, *“Preach the Gospel to EVERY creature.”* Children are included. We do not choose whether to teach the children or not. We **MUST** teach them and evangelize them – because He has told us to:

- ✓ The first responsibility for teaching children is that of believing parents. Ephesians 6 v4 says: *“Fathers ... bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”*
- ✓ The local church also has a responsibility to teach the Word of God to children. One of the gifts of the Spirit to the church is the gift of teaching (Ephesians 4 v11). The purpose of this gift is to perfect the saints, and these saints include some boys and girls (Ephesians 6 v1).

- ✓ All believers should be ready, and willing, to teach the Word of God to children and reach them with the Gospel, especially the children outside. We see an example of this to imitate in Matthew 18 v12, 13.

➤ Verse 6 - GOD'S PLAN

"That the generation to come might know them, the CHILDREN who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their CHILDREN."

As the children were reached and as they set their hope in God, they would grow and, in turn, reach their children, who would grow, and, in turn, reach their children, and so on. In the book of Joel ch.1 v3 we read: *"Tell your children about it, let your children tell their children, and their children another generation."* This was always God's plan. If the children were neglected, not only would it mean their loss, but the loss of succeeding generations.

And this is still God's plan today. And, as a result, we also need to realize that children who are saved are able to reach other children with the Gospel - NOW.

➤ Verse 7 - GOD'S PURPOSE

"That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments."

This verse is the climax of the passage because the Psalmist expresses here God's purpose in all that He has set forth in the previous verses. What was the goal of their teaching? What was God's purpose for their ministry to the children?

- ✓ The Psalmist says firstly

"That they might set their hope in God."

The teacher's aim was not that the children should just know more about the Bible and about God (although that was necessary). His goal was that the children SET THEIR HOPE IN GOD. This is a step beyond the knowledge of verses 5 and 6 and is in the realm of experience. And this verse makes it clear that it was possible for a child to set his hope in God. He does not need to wait until he is older.

And exactly the same applies to our teaching. We should be praying that every child may have a real heart experience with God through the Lord Jesus Christ - by putting their trust in Him.

- ✓ The Psalmist says secondly

"And not forget the works of God."

The children are to REMEMBER what God has done for them.

- ✓ Then thirdly the Psalmist adds

"but keep His commandments."

Their hope in God should result in a changed life and continuing obedience to the Word of God.

God's purpose for the children was:

- ✓ To trust - *"set their hope in God"*
- ✓ To remember - *"not forget His works"*
- ✓ To obey - *"keep His commandments"*

And God's purpose for our children is exactly the same. We want them to *"set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments."* And we pray that God's purpose will be realized in their lives as we evangelize them and as they respond to our Gospel message.

Jesus Christ came, and died, that sinners (including children) might be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5 v20). Biblical evangelism should therefore commence with teaching about God - His nature, His works and His demands. It should then show how Jesus Christ, God the Son, bore the righteous judgment of God the Father on sin, as He died upon the Cross (2 Corinthians 5 v21) - so that sinners (including children) could be saved and, by trusting in Him, have the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to them, and thereby be RIGHT WITH GOD. And we will rejoice as we see this happen in the lives of our children.

- Verse 8 - A POSSIBILITY

"And may not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God."

This verse presents a terrible possibility. The Psalmist speaks in verse 8 of a stubborn and rebellious generation, *“a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God.”* He calls them *“their fathers”*, and emphasizes that if the children were not reached and taught, and if they did not set their hope in God and keep His commandments – then they would grow up to be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation.

But even if one generation of people in a country is godless, God could still intervene and the next generation could set their hope in God. The key was to teach God’s Word to the children (verse 5). And as the children – the generation to come – knew God’s Word and responded to it, they would *“set their hope in God”* and be a contrast to, and completely different from, this stubborn and rebellious generation.

And exactly the same applies today. All around us today we can see such a stubborn and rebellious generation. If we do not reach the children with the Gospel they may grow up to be ANOTHER stubborn and rebellious generation. The time to reach them is NOW – while they are still open, and willing to listen. The children are standing, as it were, at a place where two roads meet. One road leads to God, to salvation, to a life of usefulness and service, and to Heaven. The other road leads to a life of worldly pleasure, a heart that is hard and unresponsive, and a place in yet another stubborn and rebellious generation. It is our responsibility as children’s workers to **seek** to lead the children onto the road which leads to God.

Life can be compared to a cliff, with many people falling over it. At the bottom of the cliff are many broken lives and bodies – broken by sin. What a tragedy! Many Christians are working at the bottom of the cliff with these bodies and lives, seeking to build a “spiritual hospital” where such lives can be treated and mended through the Blood of Christ. Praise the Lord for this work! It is greatly needed. But God calls some people to leave the bottom of the cliff and the treatment

of these broken lives, to go to the top of the cliff where, instead of building a hospital, they can build a wall or a fence! In this way, they can seek to prevent people – the children - from falling over the cliff; and reach them before sin has left **too strong** a mark upon their lives.

Building the wall, at the top of the cliff, is child evangelism. God calls some of us to do this work. Are you one of those whom God calls? If so, then get busy building the wall!

A father told his son the story of the lost sheep – how it found the hole in the fence and crawled through; how glad it was to get away; how it wandered so far it couldn't find its way back. Then he told him of the wolf that chased the sheep; and how, finally, the shepherd came and found it and carried it back home. The little boy was greatly interested. His one question was, "Did they fix the hole in the fence?"

Preventive care for a child is far more important than working with juvenile delinquents later. The only proper way to fix the hole in the fence is to lead the child to a knowledge of his own sinfulness and his need of the Lord Jesus Christ, before he "gets out" into the world.

Build the Wall at the Top

'Twas a dangerous cliff, as they freely confessed,
 Though to walk near its crest was so pleasant,
 But over its terrible edge there had slipped
 A duke and full many a peasant.
 So the people said something would have to be done,
 But their projects did not at all tally,
 Some said, "Put a fence around the edge of the cliff,"
 Some, "An ambulance down in the valley."

Well, the cry for the ambulance carried the day,
 For it spread through the neighboring city,
 A fence may be useful or not, it is true,
 But each heart became brimful of pity.

For those who slipped over the dangerous cliff,
And the dwellers in highway and valley,
Gave pounds or gave pence, not to put up a fence,
But an ambulance down in the valley.

Then an old sage remarked: "It's a marvel to me
That people give far more attention,
To repairing results than to stopping the cause,
Why they'd much better aim at prevention.
Let us stop at its source all this mischief," cried he,
"Come, neighbors and friends, let us rally!
If the cliff we will fence, we might almost dispense
With the ambulance down in the valley."

"Oh, he's a fanatic," the others rejoined,
"Dispense with the ambulance? Never!
He'd dispense with all charities, too, if he could,
'No No' We'll support them forever.
Aren't we picking up folks just as fast as they fall?
And shall this man dictate to us? Shall he?
Why should people of sense stop to put up a fence,
While the ambulance works down in the valley?"

But a sensible few, who are practical, too,
Will not bear with such thinking much longer,
They believe that prevention is better than cure,
And their voice will soon be the stronger.
Encourage them, then, with your purse, voice, and pen,
And while other philanthropists dally,
They will scorn all pretense and put up a stout fence
On the cliff that hangs over the valley?

Better guide well the young than reclaim them when old,
For the voice of true wisdom is calling,
"To rescue the fallen is good, but 'tis best
To prevent other people from falling
Better close up the source of temptation and crime,
Than deliver from dungeon and galley,
Better put a strong fence round the top of the cliff,
Than an ambulance down in the valley."

(Author unknown)

CHAPTER 3

A Child In The Midst

Matthew 18 v1-14

*(along with the two parallel passages Mark 9 v33-37
and Luke 9 v44-48)*

Introduction

These fourteen verses constitute the main passage in the Bible concerning children. The Lord Jesus calls a little child unto Him in verse 2 and uses him to do two things:

- In verses 1-4 He uses the child to teach His disciples about themselves – encouraging them to imitate children and be humble. The theme of these four verses is “greatness in the Kingdom”.
- In verses 5-14 He uses the child to teach His disciples (and us) about children – encouraging them to understand, help and reach children. The theme in these ten verses is “children in the Kingdom”.

I would suggest that just now, before we proceed with our study of these verses that you read these verses carefully and prayerfully – especially verses 5 – 14. You will find that these verses refer specifically to children because the words “children” and “little ones” are used and because the Lord Jesus refers over and over again to the child in His arms – “one of THESE little ones”. I wanted to emphasize this at the start because many commentators write and teach that these verses refer to believers of any age who are young in the faith. But it is clear to me, when reading these verses, that the Lord Jesus has children

in His mind as He speaks. I will come back again to this subject at the end of this chapter.

Verses 1-4 A Question Concerning Greatness In the Kingdom of Heaven - And The Answer

➤ Verse 1 - A QUESTION

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ “ (Matthew 18 v1).

We read in the parallel passage in Mark 9 v33 and 34 that, on the way to Capernaum, the disciples had been arguing as to who was the greatest and the most important among them. The actual conversation is not recorded but we could imagine that Peter or John or even Judas could have been claiming to be the greatest. Peter may have claimed this position on the basis of our Lord’s commendation (Matthew 16 v17); John on his description as the *“beloved disciple”* (John 13 v23; John 19 v26); and Judas may even have claimed greatness because he was the treasurer of the group.

When they arrived in Capernaum and entered a house there, the Lord Jesus asked them what they were arguing about (Mark 9 v33). But the disciples did not at first answer Him (Mark 9 v34) – probably because they were ashamed of what they were arguing about. But Matthew records in this verse that they then came to the Lord Jesus and asked Him *“who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?”* or *“Which of us is the number one?”* It would seem that after their silent response to the Lord’s question they decided to come to Him and get Him, once and for all, to point out which of them was the leader.

They may have said, *“Let’s ask Him. He will give us the answer – and we will all agree to go with His decision and His choice.”*

➤ Verse 2 - THE ANSWER (Part I)

“Then Jesus called a LITTLE CHILD to Him, set him in the midst of them” (Matthew 18 v2).

The Lord Jesus does not say anything to them. Instead He calls a little child and asks him to come to Him. The Lord Jesus may even have called him by name because it was probably Peter's house (Matthew 17 v24-26) and He had often been in this house. Perhaps the child was over in the corner of the room watching all those men and wondering what was happening. But he came to the Lord Jesus and we read in Mark 9 v36 that the Lord Jesus took him in his arms. He did not take him "up in his arms" like a baby as He did with some infants in Mark 10 v16. He put his arms around him and placed him or set him in the center of the twelve disciples.

The scene is a remarkable one. The Lord Jesus seated with a child in His arms - surrounded by the disciples who were probably very surprised at what was happening. Why did He call a child? Why did He not answer our question? What is happening?

We know what was happening and what the Lord Jesus was doing, and preparing to do. He had called a child and had taken him in His arms to use him, firstly, as a visual aid to teach the disciples to be humble, and secondly to teach them about children like this one. He was going to teach them visually - through their eyes - through the child they could now see.

It is most important, at this time, to examine the child whom the Lord Jesus is using as a basis for His teaching in these verses. There are three "clues":

- ✓ The word used for the child in verses 2, 3, 4 and 5 is the Greek word PAIDION which means "little child". The same word is found in other parts of Scripture as the name of a child eight years old (Luke 1 v59), a recently born baby (Luke 2 v17, 21; Hebrews 11 v23); a girl of 12 years old (Mark 5 v41). The Lord Jesus also uses it once as a term of affection to His disciples in John 21 v5.

- ✓ The Lord Jesus also uses the word “MIKROS” three times in verses 6, 10 and 14. This word means “little ones” – and, as the Lord Jesus has a child in His arms and refers to him as He uses these words, we can again conclude that this child is a little child.
- ✓ And yet this child is not an infant (like those who were among the children brought to the Lord Jesus in Luke 18 v15-17). The Lord Jesus took him in his arms (Mark 9 v36) but not up in His arms. This means that He put His arms around him. And this verse tells us he was old enough to come when he was called. And the word “called” in Greek is a word demanding an intelligent response (as in Matthew 15 v32; Acts 16 v10).

How old was he? We cannot be sure. Mr Overholtzer, the founder of our Mission, felt he was possibly 6, 7 or 8 years old and possibly even younger – but not over 10. And I believe that this is close to the truth.

Let us therefore keep in mind, as we study these verses, that the Lord Jesus is speaking about A LITTLE CHILD.

➤ Verse 3 – THE ANSWER (Part II)

“And said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as LITTLE CHILDREN, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.’ “

To answer the question the disciples asked, the Lord Jesus first of all did something (verse 2); and now He says something (verse 3). This is the second part of His answer. But He does not yet seem to give the answer the disciples were looking for.

Instead of giving them the qualification for greatness in the kingdom of Heaven and telling them who was the greatest, He gave them the qualifications for ENTRANCE into the kingdom of Heaven.

Doesn't that make sense? There is no point speaking of greatness in the kingdom unless we are sure that we are in the kingdom. Perhaps as the Lord Jesus was saying these words He was thinking of Judas Iscariot – and may even

have looked at him at that time. Was Judas one of those arguing about greatness when he himself was not in the kingdom of Heaven?

And so the Lord Jesus, first of all, explains in this verse how one enters the kingdom of Heaven. It is only through conversion - a turning from sin to God. The Greek word used is "STREPHO" and literally means "to turn - an active and voluntary turning from sin." It is far more than a mental acknowledgement of the truth or intellectual assent. There is no other way. And that 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 us that to be converted (to turn), to enter the kingdom of Heaven we must become like children and have these qualities. (And incidentally we will see later in the book that because a child already has these qualities it is easier or more simple for him to be converted and enter the kingdom of Heaven - than for an adult who does not have them. And if all must become childlike to enter the kingdom, it must be possible for a child to do so.)

It is vital that you, the reader, ask yourself at this point, the question "Am I converted?" "Am I born again?" "Have I turned from my sin and put my trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour?" Don't think about your service or greatness in the kingdom of Heaven unless you are sure that you are already in it. Your service among children, for example, needs to be preceded by your own salvation and entrance into the kingdom of Heaven.

"Jesus answered, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God' " (John 3 v5).

➤ Verse 4 - THE ANSWER (Part III)

"Therefore whoever humbles himself as this LITTLE CHILD is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18 v4).

To answer the disciples' question the Lord Jesus, first of all, did something (He called a child to be an object lesson), and then He said something (He gave the one and only condition for entrance into the kingdom of Heaven). And now He says something else which directly answers the question. Using the child as an illustration He explains that the quality which makes one great in the kingdom of Heaven is HUMILITY. The child is our model. We must become humble like children to be great in the kingdom of Heaven. And this is, of course, completely opposed to their arguments and their conceptions of greatness.

Just imagine that little boy in the center of all those men. How shy and overwhelmed he must have been; perhaps with eyes downcast and moving his foot nervously. "Look at him", says the Lord Jesus, "See how humble he is. He is your model."

It is interesting that children are never told, in the Bible, to become like adults; but several times adults are told to become like children.

It reminds me of a little poem:

*Last night my little boy
Confessed to me some childish wrong
And kneeling at my knee, he said with tears,
"Make me a man like Daddy – wise and strong.
I know you can."
Then while he prayed I knelt beside his bed
And prayed with low bowed head
"Dear God, make me a child like my child here.
Pure, guileless, trusting Thee with faith sincere."*

We can see then from these two verses (3 and 4) that both our conversion experience and our post conversion experiences are determined by our adopting the mind and action of a child:

- ✓ Likeness to a child brings us into the kingdom.
- ✓ Likeness to a child gives us advancement in the kingdom.

The question which the disciples had asked has now been answered. But the Lord Jesus still has a little child in His arms and He continues to talk to the disciples. He no longer speaks about them and their questions – since they have been dealt with. He now takes the opportunity in the next ten verses to speak about CHILDREN, and their responsibility to children. And in these ten verses we can find many great truths concerning boys and girls.

Verses 5 – 14

Our Lord's Teaching Concerning Children

We will again take each verse individually and discover what we can learn about children from that verse.

➤ **Verse 5 - A PROMISE AND AN EXHORTATION CONCERNING CHILDREN**

"Whoever receives one LITTLE CHILD like this in My name receives Me" (Matthew 18 v5).

- ✓ In this verse we can see, first of all, a promise – an amazing promise. We are told that to receive a child is like receiving Jesus Christ – and Mark 9 v37 makes this promise even greater and stronger:

"Whoever receives one of these LITTLE CHILDREN in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me."

The words *"to receive"* is used here in the sense of *"to welcome"*. The Lord Jesus says that if we receive or welcome a little child (like this one) in His name it is just as if we are receiving or welcoming Him – and, even more, receiving or welcoming God the Father. This is an amazing promise. The Lord Jesus identifies Himself with children – and says *"What you do to them, or for them, you do to Me, or for Me."*

So if I receive a child into my home or church, in the name of the Lord Jesus and because of Him - to care for

him, to show him the love of the Lord Jesus and to help him know about the Lord Jesus – it is just as if I am receiving or welcoming the Lord Jesus Himself.

What a privilege it is to work among boys and girls.

- ✓ And with such a promise comes, obviously, an exhortation or encouragement for us to receive or welcome little children. The Lord Jesus identifies Himself with children to encourage believers to turn their attention, more and more, to the little ones, to invite and welcome them and do all we can to help them – especially to help them spiritually.

A number of years ago God used this verse to speak to the heart of a wealthy Christian woman who lived in a large and expensive home in the midst of many other such homes. She thought, “How wonderful it would be to welcome the Lord Jesus into my home. And I can do that – by inviting, and welcoming all of the children from these homes around me into my home.”

And that is exactly what she did. She started a Good News Club in her home, which was attended, every week, by almost all the children from that district. Most of them did not attend Sunday school; but they were taught the Word of God regularly in this woman’s home; and a number of them put their trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour during the many months and years which followed.

Is God speaking to your heart? Would you like to follow this exhortation and invite and welcome children into your home or church? Just think of the promise attached to doing so!

It is interesting to read a quote from Charles Spurgeon concerning this subject:

He writes, *“Those who receive little ones in Christ’s Name will grow (or become) like them – and in this way receive Christ into their own souls by becoming more like Him.”*

Harry Ironside writes, *“To receive a little child in His name is to receive Him, because He identifies Himself with all who trust*

Him. He is not only the Saviour of those who, because of wasted years in sin and debauchery, realize their need of forgiveness and cleansing, but He is also the Saviour of the little ones who, in their comparative innocence, are attracted to Him because of His tender interest in them."

➤ Verses 6 and 7 – A WONDERFUL FACT, AND A SERIOUS WARNING CONCERNING CHILDREN

*"But whoever causes one of these little ones **who believe in Me** to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offence comes!" (Matthew 18 v6, 7).*

From verse 6 onwards of this chapter the Lord Jesus uses the words "little ones" (MIKROS) instead of the word "little child" (PAIDION). But it is obvious from the context that He continues to speak about little children, and from the fact that the Lord Jesus continues to hold a little child in His arms and keeps referring to him as "*one of these little ones.*"

✓ A WONDERFUL FACT

This is probably the most important truth concerning children contained in these verses.

The question is often asked, "Is it possible for a little child to trust Jesus Christ for salvation and be born again?" Some people say "Yes"; some people say "No"; and many say "I don't know". But here in this verse we have the answer to this question from the lips of the Lord Jesus Himself. As He holds a little child in His arms He says "*ONE OF THESE LITTLE ONES WHO BELIEVE IN ME.*" He is speaking there-fore about little children like the one He is holding in His arms and He makes it clear that they can "*believe in Him*".

The words "*believe in*" which are used here are the translation of the Greek word (PISTEUO) which is used for saving faith throughout the New Testament.

- It is used by Paul when the jailer asks him how to be saved.

“So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’” (Acts 16 v31).

- It is often used by the Lord Jesus Himself to explain how a person can receive eternal life:

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever **believes in** Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3 v16).*

*“He who **believes in** the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” (John 3 v36).*

The Lord Jesus is, therefore, making it clear, once and for all, that it is possible for a little child, like the one in His arms, to believe in Him, to trust Him, to be saved and to be born again.

So that is surely the final answer to all who have doubts about the possibility of a child – even a little child – trusting Jesus Christ for salvation. These are the words of the Lord Jesus Himself which make this fact clear. Any one who argues against this fact is arguing against the Lord Jesus.

✓ A WARNING

But with this wonderful fact comes a very serious warning. We must not offend these believing children, or cause them to stumble and sin.

Verse 6 says that if we offend even one of these believing children it would be better for us that we were drowned in the depths of the sea with a millstone, a large one turned by animals, around our necks. And for Jews drowning was considered the worst kind of death. It was particularly repulsive to the Jews because the Gentiles used it as a form of execution. What a terrible thing it is to cause a little child, a little believing child, to stumble – especially because children are so helpless, more helpless than adults, and less able to help themselves. They depend so much on us. And the awful truth is that these offences to children are more likely to be caused by

believers – because these children place so much store upon what we do and say – than upon what unbelievers do and say.

It is so easy for us to offend little believing children if we are not careful, and there are several ways we can do this.

- We can offend believing children and cause them to stumble by setting them a **WRONG EXAMPLE**. Children watch us and imitate us. If the example we give them is a bad one we are leading them astray and causing them to stumble.

A little boy's father was an alcoholic. One morning after a heavy fall of snow the father left the house to go to the local bar. His son followed him but because the snow was so deep the only way he could do so was by jumping from one of his father's big footprints in the snow to another. His father saw him following him and told him to go home. But the little boy said, "Go ahead, Dad, I'm following in your footsteps." The father stopped, thought about what the child had said – and returned home.

- We can offend believing children by a **WRONG ATTITUDE** – and by expressing or showing doubt concerning their salvation. If a child trusts the Lord Jesus and we feel that he is too young to understand, the child senses this and is offended – and if we express our doubts verbally it is even worse. I myself have seen this happen a number of times.

I led a child to Christ a number of years ago after a meeting. The next Sunday he rushed into his Sunday school and told his teacher (who was himself a believer) that he was saved, and the teacher said to him, "Don't be silly, you're too young to be saved." The child returned home in tears and told his father what had happened. Fortunately his father was a Christian and able to assure him that if he had trusted

Christ he was saved. And today the child is a pastor. But what would have happened if that child had not had a father who could give him the encouragement he needed? That teacher had offended this child by a wrong attitude.

On another occasion I visited the home of a child I had led to the Lord. The child's mother, who was one of the leaders in the local evangelical church, answered the door. I told her I had come to speak with her daughter who had trusted Christ. She said "That's nonsense, she couldn't do that, she's too young" Unfortunately the child, who was standing there heard her mother say this and she was offended. But we need to remember that we can also offend believing children by a wrong attitude without saying a word to them. Imagine a boy coming home from a meeting where he had trusted Jesus Christ. He rushes into the kitchen and shouts to his mother who is a Christian, "Mum, I'm saved. I have trusted the Lord Jesus." And his mother says, "Good, now get your homework done." And the child wonders why his mother is not pleased or excited. He remembers that when Uncle Bob came and told his mother and father that he was saved, they were so happy and joyful, and couldn't stop speaking about it. "Why is she not like that now?" thinks the child, "Oh I know. She doesn't really believe I am saved. Perhaps I am not." And the child is offended.

- We can offend believing children by EXPECTING TOO MUCH from them - by expecting them to live and act as adults - and then being critical of them when they don't measure up to those standards. We need to remember that children who have trusted Christ are still children, that they are immature in many ways, and that they have not the same experience, background and ability as adults to deal

with the problems they face. We need to be patient with them.

- We can offend believing children by **WRONG TEACHING**.

If we teach them things which are harmful we will cause them to stumble. But, even more likely, if we neglect to teach them what they need to know in order to grow in their Christian lives we are also causing them to stumble.

Our believing children need encouragement. Are we stepping stones or stumbling blocks? Are we helping them or hindering them? If we offend them in any of the above ways we will discourage them and harm them – and we will leave ourselves open to God’s chastisement.

Harry Ironside wrote *“The word offend means ‘to cause to stumble,’ that is to lead into sin. Jesus warns against it in strong language; it seems to me that what He is doing in this section (Matthew 18 vs1-14) is making the evangelism of children a divine imperative. He gives top priority to winning children to Christ. I commend anyone who is working with children today. There is nothing as important as that.”*

Verse 7 tells us that offences are bound to come in a sinful world but that the person who actually does the offending is the one who will be judged because of the harm he has done: *“Woe to the world because of offences! For offences must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!”* Reading this verse in its context shows that this judgment or chastisement applies especially to those who offend believing children.

- **Verses 8 and 9 – A SERIOUS WARNING ABOUT OURSELVES**

“ If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather

than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire. Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 18 v8, 9, 10).

These two verses are a kind of parenthesis in this passage because they relate to ourselves rather than to children, and these two verses develop the concept of offences.

After warning the disciples not to offend believing children and not to cause them to stumble and sin the Lord Jesus warns the disciples not to offend THEMSELVES and cause THEMSELVES to stumble and sin. He is speaking about "Your hand"; "Your foot"; or "Your eye" offending "YOU" - not the children this time. At the same time we need to be reminded that if we offend ourselves and cause ourselves to stumble, not only will we suffer the consequences, but the children we minister to will also be gravely affected.

The disciples of the Lord Jesus should have nothing to do with anything which would cause themselves to stumble - and so these two verses apply to the subject of offences, first of all, to us as His disciples. If my eye, hand or foot would cause me to stumble in my Christian life it would be better to get rid of them - not literally of course ,but to get rid of the sin and the problems sin causes. The hand stands for action, the foot for conduct and the eye for desire. The Lord Jesus wants us, His disciples, to get rid of sinful actions, sinful conduct and sinful desires at all cost.

But these verses also apply to those who profess to be Christians and aren't.

True discipleship is entered into only by genuine repentance and faith. If an unsaved person is hindered from this true discipleship because his members (his hand, his foot or his eye) are pulling him in the opposite direction - it would be better for him, as it were, to lose those members, than to lose his own soul. This MIGHT be, again (see verse three) a direct admonition to Judas Iscariot - a professing disciple who was not converted, and who had allowed his own

personal sin and desires to hinder him from salvation and true discipleship.

How necessary it is for you and me to “*examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith*”; to “*prove our own selves*” (2 Corinthians 13 v5); and to “*make our calling and election sure*” (2 Peter 1 v10). We need to remember the solemn words of our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 7 verses 21-33: “*Not everyone that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in Heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name? And in Your name have cast out demons? And in Your name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess to them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*”

➤ Verse 10 – ANOTHER FACT AND ANOTHER WARNING CONCERNING CHILDREN

“*Take heed that you do not despise one of these LITTLE ONES, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 18 v10).

This verse, at first glance, seems a little more difficult to understand than the others – but it is still about “*one of these little ones*”.

✓ A FACT

This verse teaches that believing children – “*these little ones*” in verse 6 have angels.

We know from the Scriptures that believers have angels who guard and protect them – and minister to them and to them only.

“*Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?*” (Hebrews 1 v14).

There are other verses which teach the same truth.

“*The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them*” (Psalm 34 v7).

“*For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways*” (Psalm 91 v11).

“So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried” (Luke 16 v22).

“But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out” (Acts 5 v19).

Therefore the Lord Jesus must be referring to believing children in verse 10. This view is strengthened by linking this with verse 6 which speaks about *“one of these little ones (the same words) which believe in me”* and continues the same train of thought in that verse.

- Verse 6 says *“Do not offend believing children”*.
- Verse 10 says *“Do not despise (believing) children”*.

Why? Because they have been given angels who look after them.

Jesus Christ left Heaven to save them (verses 11-13); and it is the Will of God the Father that they be saved (verse 14). And then the Lord Jesus adds this piece of interesting information that these angels of believing children *“always behold the face of my Father which is in Heaven”*. God thinks so much of these little believing children that their angels have continual access to His throne; He gives them special dignity and honour and this leads us on to the warning which the Lord Jesus gives to His disciples.

✓ **A WARNING**

The Lord Jesus tells His disciples that they must not DESPISE these believing children; they must not look down on them; they must not think little of them – or be scornful towards them. And as we have seen He also gives them a reason, or fact, why they should not despise them. If His Father esteems believing children so highly as to give them angels – angels with special access to Him – they (and that includes us) were to make sure that they did not despise even ONE of them.

It is a natural tendency with many adults, and that includes adult believers, to look down upon a child, to

feel that he is unimportant and of no value in the Lord's work.

- Eli didn't think a child could hear God's voice (1 Samuel 3 v5).
- Pharaoh's daughter must not have thought a young child could be trained in God's ways by his mother (Exodus 2 v8).
- David's brothers didn't think a lad could win a victory in God's name (1 Samuel 17 v28).
- The priests didn't think children could or should praise the Son of God (Matthew 21 v15).
- The disciples didn't think young children should come to the Lord Jesus (Matthew 19 v13).
- The disciples didn't understand a child's simple faith in God and His answers to prayer (Acts 12 v15).

We can all make mistakes like that.

But the Lord Jesus emphasizes that we must not despise children. They are capable of much more than we think – and that includes salvation.

Matthew Henry wrote in his commentaries: *“Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones. We may understand this literally of little children; of them Christ was speaking (vs. 2, 4). Or figuratively; true but weak believers are these little ones, who are like little children, the lambs of Christ's flock.”*

“The gracious design of Christ concerning them is that He is come to save that which was lost. This is a reason, first, why the little ones' angels have such a charge concerning them, and attend upon them; it is in pursuance of Christ's design to save them. Secondly, they are not to be despised; because Christ came to save them, to save them that are lost.”

➤ **Verses 11-13 – A STORY AND A CHALLENGE CONCERNING CHILDREN**

“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find

it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray."

These verses and the verse which follows them illustrate two wonderful truths about our Saviour and Shepherd.

✓ His diligence in seeking His sheep (verses 11,12).

✓ His delight in saving His sheep (verses 13 and 14).

And they challenge us to have that same diligence so that we can participate in that same delight.

Verses 12 and 13 contain a story or parable. Verse 11 is the introduction to the story (This verse does not appear in some translations - but its absence does not weaken the teaching given, because verses 12, 13 and 14 teach the same truths as verse 11). Verse 14 which will be dealt with separately is the conclusion to the story.

✓ A STORY

It is important, first of all, to understand the parabolic method of teaching which the Lord Jesus often used. A parable is an "earthly story with a heavenly meaning". The purpose of these stories was to teach one basic truth to the disciples in an attractive fashion. It was never the intention of the Lord Jesus that some spiritual meaning and significance should be attached to EVERY little detail of the story. We should, instead, endeavour to see the context of the story, and then find the truth or truths which the Lord Jesus is especially teaching through the story.

- **The context**

There is no doubt that the context concerns children. Immediately before this story (in verse 10), the Lord Jesus has been speaking about children or little ones. And the word "for" at the beginning of verse 11 links this story in with verse 10.

Verse 14 which follows the story commences with the words "even so" (which refer back to the story) and contains a revelation of God's desire concerning the little ones, or children. It is therefore reasonable

to assume that the Lord Jesus is thinking of a child when He tells this story.

Also it is obvious that the One who seeks the sheep in the story is none other than the Lord Jesus Himself. Verse 11 makes that clear.

- **The truth**

What truth does this story teach us about children? Notice the words which the Lord Jesus uses with regard to the sheep in the story.

It was “*lost*” (verse 11) – the same word as in 2 Corinthians 4 v3; Luke 1 9 v10.

It had “*gone astray*” (verse 12 and 13) – the same word as in 1 Peter 2 v25; 2 Peter 2 v15.

It could “*perish*” (verse 14) – another form of the Greek word translated “*lost*” in verse 11. The same word is used in 2 Peter 3 v9; 2 Corinthians 2 v15; John 3 v16; 2 Thessalonians 2 v10.

There is no need, here, for speculation. The Lord Jesus is simply teaching us that children NEED HIM! They are sinners who need a Saviour. They are lost or separated from God. The context of this story especially teaches that the child is lost in the sense that he is OUTSIDE “the fold”. The shepherd leaves the other sheep and goes out to look for the one that is outside. The children are by nature and birth outside the Kingdom of God and they need to be brought into the Kingdom. They are lost and it is also possible for them to perish. So often we are sentimental about children, and we do not like to think that a child can be lost, or separated from God eternally. But the words of the Lord Jesus make it clear that THIS IS POSSIBLE.

And we need to remember, also, that the words “*saved*” and “*lost*” go together. If it is possible for someone to be saved, it is also possible for them to be lost.

But the story also teaches us that the Lord Jesus is seeking these lost sheep, and that it is His desire to find them and save them. He came to this earth for this special purpose (v.11). They cannot find their way back alone; He is interested and concerned for each ONE individually and seeks them ONE by ONE.

The initiative and first step in their salvation is taken by the Saviour not by themselves.

- **A Summary**

There was one sheep which was:

- little (Matthew 18 v10).
- lost (Matthew 18 v11).
- lonely (Matthew 18 v12).

There was a Saviour and Shepherd Who was interested in that ONE sheep and:

- loved (John 10 v11-14).
- left (Matthew 18 v12).
- looked (Matthew 18 v12).
- located (Matthew 18 v13).
- lifted (Isaiah 40 v11).
- laid (Isaiah 40 v11).
- and led (Isaiah 40 v11).

And so we see in this story His diligence in seeking the lost sheep (verses 11-12) and His delight in saving it (verses 13-14).

✓ **A CHALLENGE**

As we read this story we are challenged concerning THE NEED of the children. Outside of Christ they are lost (verse 11); they have gone astray (verses 12 and 13); and it is possible for them to perish (verse 14). In other words, they are outside the kingdom.

These are solemn words but they are the words of the Lord Jesus Himself. May God burden our hearts concerning the great spiritual need of our boys and girls. This burden for the souls of children must be the basis of our work among

them. If we do not see their great spiritual need, there will be no real desire to evangelize them.

This story also outlines the example which we are to follow. The Lord Jesus is the Good Shepherd (Psalm 23 v1; John 10 v11), the Great Shepherd (Hebrews 13 v20) and the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5 v4). But we are His “under shepherds” (1 Peter 5 v2, 3; John 21 v15-17). We are to imitate Him. As He was willing “to leave” so must we be. That sheep needs us more than the ninety nine. As He was willing to go “to the mountains” (the difficult places), so must we be willing. As He found and rejoiced so shall we. He is our example to follow. What a challenge! Who will be the shepherd to find these little ones? Who is willing to leave - to seek - to find - and then, as we respond to the challenge, to rejoice?

➤ Verse 14 - A REVELATION AND AN ASSURANCE CONCERNING CHILDREN

“Even so it is not the will of your Father Who is in heaven that one of these LITTLE ONES should perish.”

- *“Even so”*. These words refer back to, and link up with, the story in verses 12 & 13 showing us that the Lord Jesus is still speaking about children who are lost and astray.
- *“it is not the will”*. These words speak to us of God’s burning concern and desire.

This word “*will*” used here means “wish” or “desire”. In 1 Timothy 2, v4 another form of the same word is used - “*God our Saviour - Who WILL have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*”

This does not mean that all men will be saved; but that it is God’s desire for all men to be saved. And 2 Peter 3, v9 emphasizes this:

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not WILLING that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”

Similarly therefore it is God’s desire that not one child should perish, or that one child should be outside His

kingdom. But the fact that God desires it not to happen means that it **may** happen. If I, for example, told you that I did not desire that you be knocked down by a car it must mean that such a possibility exists. Otherwise it would be pointless for me to say this.

- *“of your Father”*. These words remind us of the compassion of the One of Whom the Lord Jesus is speaking. Our Heavenly Father always acts in perfect love, and we can trust Him completely always to do what is best.
- *“which is in Heaven”*. These words emphasize
 - God’s holiness. His love is holy love and all that He does is just, righteous, and correct.
 - God’s power and sovereignty. We can trust Him to do His work and to accomplish His purposes.
- *“that ONE of these little ones”*. These words show us God’s intimate interest in, and love for, individual children. The word “one” is used five times in these fourteen verses with relation to children. We need to be interested in individual children and not just in large numbers and statistics.
- *“should perish”*. These words burden our hearts for the children as we think of the possibility of their eternal separation from God and the great loss and waste involved.

God has in this verse REVEALED His will concerning children. He does not want even one to be lost. Therefore when we are reaching children with the Gospel and teaching them the Word of God we have the ASSURANCE that we are very close to His will.

A Question Which Has Been Asked

“Some commentators say that Matthew 18 1-14 describes those who are young in the faith and not literally little children. The child is only used as an illustration, according to this view, and

the teaching is concerning those who are recently converted or weak in the faith." What do you think?

ANSWER:

A basic principle of biblical interpretation is to accept the literal meaning of a verse or passage, unless corresponding passages in the Scriptures indicate clearly that this should not be done.

To apply Matthew 18 v1-14 to those who are young in the faith goes against this rule of biblical interpretation.

It is true that the first four verses of the chapter are an answer to the disciples' question about greatness in the kingdom of Heaven. It is true that the Lord Jesus used a child to teach them the importance of humility. Therefore, the first four verses concern all believers, and emphasize their need for humility.

But from verse 5 onwards the teaching obviously concerns CHILDREN and not those who are young in the faith.

We know this because:

➤ The context throughout all of these verses is that of a child. In verse 2 the Lord Jesus calls "*a little child*" in verses 3, 4 and 5, He refers to a "*little child or little children*". Then in verses 6, 10, and 14, reference is made to "*one of these little ones*". The fact that the Lord Jesus has a little child in His arms as He speaks, shows clearly that the little ones referred to are children. There is absolutely no indication here that anyone except children are meant.

➤ The words used are "PAIDION" (or "*little child*") in verses 2, 3, 4 and 5, and "MIKROS" (or "*little ones*") in verses 6, 10, and 14. While the word "PAIDION" is used on very FEW occasions of adults (e.g. 1 John 2 v18), the context here, indicates clearly that the word is used in its literal meaning, as referring to "*little children*". The word "MIKROS" means "*little*" or "*small*" in size, quantity, number or dignity; and is used in Scripture in several of these ways (e.g. Acts 8 v10). But the context shows that it is used here of a child - and means in this case "*small in size or height*".

➤ Surely if the Lord Jesus had meant these verses to be a picture of those young in the faith He would have clearly indicated it.

➤ These verses can, of course, be applied to young believers of any age – to children in the faith. But this application is a secondary one, and I doubt if verses 11-14 could be applied in this way, because they refer to those “little ones” as lost. The primary application must be to children like the one the Lord Jesus had in His arms.

**FIVE OTHER BRIEF OUTLINES OF
MATTHEW CH.18, V.1-14**

OUTLINE 1

VERSE (s)	THE FACTS CONCERNING CHILDREN	THE COMMANDS CONCERNING CHILDREN
4	Children are humble	Imitate them
5	Christ identifies Himself with Children	Receive them
6	Children can be saved	Do not offend them
10	Children are precious	Do not despise them
11-14	Children are lost	Leave, go, seek and find them

OUTLINE 2

AWARNING	A BLESSING
Verse 3 To all who do not trust like children	Verse 4 For all who are humble like children
Verse 6 To all who offend children	Verse 5 For all who receive children
Verse 10 To all who despise children	Verses 11-14 For all who love and win children

OUTLINE 3

<p>➤ THREE TRUTHS FROM GOD ABOUT CHILDREN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ God the Father wishes their salvation - v14 - We know His PLAN ✓ God the Son worked for their salvation - v11-13 - We rejoice in HIS PROVISION ✓ Only God the Holy Spirit can enable them to believe- v6 - We trust His POWER <p>➤ THREE WARNINGS FOR US ABOUT CHILDREN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Do not forget them and their need - v12, 13 ✓ Do not despise them - v10 ✓ Do not offend them v6 <p>➤ THREE COMMANDS FOR US ABOUT CHILDREN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Go out and look for them - v12, 13 ✓ Receive them v5 ✓ Imitate them v4

OUTLINE 4

- In verse 14 we read a **PROCLAMATION** about children which is **EXCITING!** It is not our Father's will that even one of these little ones should perish.
So when we reach the children we are very close to **HIS WILL**.
- In verses 11, 12, 13 and 14 we read of a **POSSIBILITY** about children which is **EXPLICIT**. Our Lord here lets us know very clearly that children are lost (verse 11), gone astray (verses 12 and 13) and may perish (verse 14).
As we read these verses, may we have a real **BURDEN** for the children, and see their need of Christ as Saviour.
- In verse 6 we read about a **PROSPECT** concerning children which can be **EXPECTED**. "*One of these little ones which believe in Me*" says the Lord Jesus. A little child **can** trust the Lord Jesus as Saviour.
May He give us a **VISION** of the children who are waiting for the Gospel, and many of whom **will** trust the Lord Jesus, if only they have the opportunity.
- In verse 5 we see a wonderful **PROMISE** which is **EXTENDED** to us. Receiving children is like receiving the Lord Jesus Himself.
If we receive a little child into our homes in the Name of Jesus Christ it is just as if we are receiving **Him** into our homes. And then, as we **OBEY HIM** it will be a **PRIVILEGE** to be **EXPERIENCED** by us personally as we see children come to the Lord Jesus.
- These verses remind us that our **PRIORITIES** need to be **EXAMINED**. The trouble with the disciples in verses 1-4 and also in Matthew 9 verse 13 was that their priorities were wrong. In both cases they had things the wrong way round. They firstly wanted position and importance rather than humility; secondly they put adults and their needs before the children and their needs.
May God help us to put first things first and **REACH EVERY CHILD** in our area for Christ.

OUTLINE 5

GOD'S WILL FOR CHILDREN

- God the Father does not want one to perish (Matthew 18 v14).
- God the Son died so that none need perish and He came to save them (Matthew 18 v11).
- Only God the Holy Spirit can work in the hearts of children and enable them to believe (Matthew 18 v6).

CHAPTER 4

Let Them Come

Mark 10 v13-16

(and Matthew 19 v13-15 and Luke 18 v15-17)

“Then they brought LITTLE CHILDREN to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, “Let the LITTLE CHILDREN come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a LITTLE CHILD will by no means enter it. And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them” (Mark 10 v13-16).

This is probably the best known passage about children in the Bible. It is certainly one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible – and, above all, it shows us how much the Lord Jesus loved and valued children.

These verses give an account of a group of people who brought children to the Lord Jesus with the request that He lay His hands upon them and bless them. The disciples, however, rebuked them and sought to prevent them from doing what they wanted to do; but the Lord Jesus told them they were wrong and He took the children in His arms and blessed them.

There are four people or groups of people involved in the story contained in these verses. Let’s look at each of them in detail, examine the facts and see if we can learn a lesson or find an application from each of them.

The People Who Brought the Children

Fact:

We are not told who these people were. We often think of them as mothers – and they might have been. Or they might have been fathers or grandparents. They might have just been their friends or neighbours.

But the one thing we do know is that they wanted to bring the children to the Lord Jesus so that He might touch them and bless them. I understand that it was the custom for Jewish fathers in those days to bring their children to the rulers or elders of the synagogue so that they would lay their hands upon the children's heads and bless them and pray that they would "*grow up famous in the Law, faithful in marriage, and abundant in good works*" But these people, mothers, fathers or whoever, wanted the greatest blessing of all for the children – the blessing of the Lord Jesus.

Application:

Do we have, or know, children whom we love and do we want the best for them? We should then make it our goal, like those people, to bring our children to the Lord Jesus in faith, through prayer and through our ministry to them, so that He would save them and bless them.

The Children Who Came

Fact:

We should note that this was a mixed group of little children and infants:

- We know that there were little children in the group. Matthew 19 v13, 14; Mark 10 v13, 14 and Luke 18 v16 says that they were little children (PAIDION – the same word used in Matthew 18 v1-14).
- We also know that there were infants in the group. Luke 18 v15 says that there were infants there (BREPHOS – a word which means a new born child. This word is also used in Acts 7 v19 and 2 Timothy 3 v15).

And we also read in Mark 10 v16 that the Lord Jesus took these infants "*up in His arms*".

These children did not draw back or want to go away. They came to the Lord Jesus without any hesitation

Application:

Many children are ready and willing to come to the Lord Jesus today – not physically, of course, but spiritually, in their hearts. How necessary it is for us to show them how they can come to the Lord Jesus for salvation.

If you compare this story with the story which follows (Mark 10 v17-22) you can see a great contrast. Here was a young man who was invited to come to the Lord Jesus and follow Him, and had the opportunity to do so but refused it. What a difference and contrast between the children in these verses and this rich young ruler. The children came; the rich young ruler, the adult, turned away and left. And it may be that the Holy Spirit put these two contrasting stories beside each other in Scripture to remind us of the difference which often exists between children and adults in their response to the Lord Jesus.

The Disciples Who Tried to Stop Them

Fact:

The disciples rebuked the people who were bringing the children to the Lord Jesus and tried to stop them from doing so. How unfortunate that it was the disciples, not unsaved people, who tried to turn the children away.

Why did they do this? We don't know the answer:

- Perhaps they felt the Lord Jesus was too busy and they were trying to protect Him. Charles Spurgeon wrote that *"This may have been a zeal for God but it was not according to knowledge."*
- Perhaps they thought that the children were not important enough to be received and blessed by the Lord Jesus. We can see, for example, that they did not turn the rich young ruler away.
- Perhaps they felt the children did not need Him as much as adults with their spiritual or physical problems. Charles Spurgeon wrote: *"They forgot that in those children with all their*

joy their health, and their apparent innocence there was a great and grievous need of the blessing of a Saviour's grace."

- They might even have felt that the children's coming and presence would be derogatory to the Master's dignity. Although the Jews of that day saw their children as a blessing and a treasure from God, they occupied a very low rung on the social ladder.

We do not know the reason but we do know that they rejected the children. And in doing so, they did wrong to those who brought the children, and did wrong to the children, and above all they did wrong to the Lord Jesus because they did not understand that *"His heart was a great harbour wherein many little ships might cast anchor."*

Charles Spurgeon wrote: *"To put the thoughts of the apostles into one or two words; they thought that the children must not come to Christ because they were not like themselves – they were not men and women. A child not big enough, tall enough, grown enough, great enough to be blessed by Jesus! So they half thought. The child must not come to the Master because he is not like the man. How the blessed Saviour turns the tables and says, 'Say not, the child may not come till they are like you. It is no difficulty in the child's way that he is not like you; the difficulty is with you, that you are not like the child.' Instead of the child needing to wait until he grows up and becomes a man, it is the man who must grow down and become like a child. 'Whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.' Our Lord's words are a complete and all-sufficient answer to the thoughts of His disciples, and we may each one as we read them learn wisdom."*

Application:

There are still believers and church leaders who do not see the need for children to come to the Lord Jesus and who feel that they are not important. And there are even those who, in one way or another, would turn them away. It is especially sad when believers do this.

It is important that you and I are not among those people. The needs of adults may be more obvious but the children need Jesus

Christ too, and they need Him now. Children should be welcomed – not rejected – and not just tolerated.

The Lord Jesus

Fact:

The Lord Jesus reacted to all that had happened in three ways:

- He was “*greatly displeased*” (verse 14). I have read that this was the strongest word used about the Lord Jesus and His emotions during His earthly ministry. The Greek word used is “AGANAKTEO” and it implies “anger”. It means “greatly afflicted, indignant, sore displeased, moved with indignation.” The only other time this word is used with regard to the Lord Jesus is Mark 3 v5, when the hard-hearted and hypocritical religious leaders did not want Him to heal a man with a withered hand

Why was He so displeased? The disciples often made mistakes; they often showed a lack of understanding. Did either of these merit His extreme displeasure? No! What they did was not a mistake or a misunderstanding. Not too long before this incident the Lord Jesus had told His disciples how important it was to receive children (Matthew 18 v5; Mark 9 v37). So they were now guilty of disobedience. They were deliberately not doing what the Lord Jesus had commanded them to do – and they were doing what the Lord Jesus indicated they should not do.

- And then as a result of His displeasure the Lord Jesus gave a twofold command.
 - ✓ Firstly, He rebuked His disciples and said to them “*Forbid them not*”. I am sure the disciples were astonished about their Master’s reaction and rebuke. Instead of being indignant with those who brought the children the Lord Jesus was indignant with His well-meaning but disobedient disciples. He told them firstly that they must not turn the children away.
 - ✓ Secondly, He told them that they should “*suffer*” or “*allow*” the children to come to Him. They must not get

in their way. They should “stop preventing” them from coming; and they should “start allowing” them to come.

- And then He took the children (at least the infants among them) up in His arms, laid His Hands upon all of them and blessed them. The Greek word used implies that He “blessed them fervently again and again”. What a wonderful sight that must have been and how glad and happy the people who brought the children must have been.

The Lord Jesus loved the children. He wanted them to come to Him that He might bless them.

Application:

The Lord Jesus still wants children to come to Him; and He wants to save them and bless them. And it must be our goal to bring the children to Him at all times, and in all places and in every way we can:

- We should never forbid children to come to the Lord Jesus. This is a third warning to add to the two we saw in Matthew 18 v1-14:
 - ✓ Forbid them not (Mark 10 v14).
 - ✓ Offend them not (Matthew 18 v6).
 - ✓ Despise them not (Matthew 18 v10).
- We should allow (and even encourage) them to come. We should be signposts on the road and not barriers. It is interesting to remember again that the story of the rich young ruler follows immediately the story of the children brought to the Lord Jesus. But what a contrast! The children came and the rich young ruler - the adult, turned away and left.
- We should be sure that we ourselves have received the Kingdom of God like little children. *“Assuredly I say to you, whosoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.”* (Mark 10,v15). If a person is not willing to be converted and become like a child he cannot receive the kingdom of God (see also Matthew 18,v3).

A Summary Of These Verses

VERSES IN MARK 10	A. THE PEOPLE	B. THE FACTS	C. THE APPLICATIONS
13	THE FAITHFUL FRIENDS	They brought children to the Lord Jesus	We should seek to bring children to Him for His blessing
13	THE CONSENTING CHILDREN	They were willing to come	Children are easily influenced for good (or evil)
13&14	THE DISOBEDIENT DISCIPLES	They tried to stop the children from coming	Many Christians still do not see the need for children to come to the Lord Jesus; and may try to stop them
14 & 15	THE LOVING LORD JESUS	He was displeased with the disciples because of their disobedience and received and blessed the children	The Lord Jesus still wants to receive, save and bless the children

A Concluding Warning

We must not read into these verses things which are not there, nor should we use them to teach things they do not teach:

- There is no justification whatsoever to use this passage to teach that children are regenerated through baptism. This passage is not related to the baptism of infants in any way - except to use these verses to show that the Lord Jesus loves children.

- There is no justification whatsoever to use this passage to encourage us to lay our hands on children so that we can impart blessing to them. Only the Lord Jesus can bless children in this way.
- There is no justification whatsoever to use this passage as an example of child evangelism. These children in the passage were not evangelized (as we understand evangelism) and we don't know if they ever became followers of the Lord Jesus.

It is really a wonderful story that teaches us primarily and simply that Jesus Christ loves children and wants them to come to Him.

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION AND ANSWER

Question:

When the Lord Jesus says, "*Of such is the kingdom of God*" (Mark 10 v14) does this mean that all children are in the kingdom of God?

Answer

NO. THIS CANNOT BE SO - FOR FOUR REASONS:

- Because it would be against the general teaching of Scripture. This statement must be read in connection with what is taught elsewhere in the New Testament. There is no part of Scripture which teaches that all children are in the kingdom of God, although some people have used this verse to teach this. These people say that the kingdom of God belongs to children. And they say that our task is not to evangelize the children but to nurture them because they are already in God's kingdom. To the contrary, the Bible teaches that all people (including children) are lost, outside God's Kingdom and need a Saviour (e.g. Matthew 18 v11-14); and the only way into the kingdom of God is by the new birth - by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1 v12, 13; John 3 v3, 7, 16). Remember, our beliefs concerning children should be based on the **general** teaching of Scripture and not on what one isolated verse may **seem** to teach.

- Because the words “of such” in verse 14 describe a quality and not an identity.
This verse does not say “to these belong the kingdom of God”, but “to such as these belongs the kingdom of God”. The French Bible says it this way: “*Car le royaume de Dieu est pour ceux qui leur ressemblent*” (For the kingdom of God is for those who resemble children).
- Because the context – in verse 15 – especially teaches that the Lord Jesus is not thinking primarily about children (as He was in the previous verse) when He uses these words.
In verse 15 He is simply teaching that the person who enters the kingdom of God must receive that kingdom – like a little child. This verse is intended, primarily, as an explanation of the words which immediately precede it (in verse 14) – “*of such is the kingdom of God*”. The Kingdom of God, God’s present spiritual rule in people’s lives, does not automatically belong as a possession to children, but to “such as them” – to those who are like children.
- Because if the Lord Jesus had meant for us to understand that all children are in the kingdom of God, He would have said so very clearly and definitely.
He would want us to be sure about a vital and important matter such as this.

WHAT, THEN, DO THESE TWO VERSES MEAN?

- These verses mean that only those who receive the kingdom of God like little children can enter into it. Therefore the kingdom of God consists of those who are like children. This is the same teaching as we saw in Matthew 18 v3. In order to be saved adults must become like children – not children like adults. They are our models! This teaching was revolutionary in the world of those days – and it still is. “*And said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven’*” (Matthew 18 v3).

- If everyone must receive the kingdom of God in the same way as a child (verse 15), then surely the children need to receive it also. All, including children, who come to the Lord Jesus in childlike trust and dependence have complete and free access to Him. And these verses also mean that little children **can** enter the kingdom of God. If everyone must become like a child and have a childlike faith to enter the Kingdom, it must be possible for a child to do so and have a childlike faith. If “such as” children are welcome, surely children themselves are. If it were impossible for children to be saved this comparison would be worthless. It is also for them, and we must never turn them away. The Lord Jesus loves children, and wants them to come to Him.
- But both children and adults must enter the kingdom of God in the same way – the way of repentance and faith as taught clearly in many parts of Scripture. There is no other way.
- But it should be obvious that it is more simple and straightforward for a child to enter the Kingdom of God – because he already is a child and doesn’t need to become like one – which is, as this verse says, the preliminary step to conversion.

A Word of Warning

The theory that all children are born into the kingdom of God, and will remain in it until they decide to leave it – is one which is becoming increasingly popular in some evangelical circles. It is based primarily on these words in Mark 10 v14. But surely it can be seen that these two verses do not teach this at all; and that the teaching of Scripture is strongly opposed to such teaching.

I feel that I must sound a serious word of warning about this theory. If it is believed that all children are in the kingdom of God, and that it is not possible for any child to be lost or separated from God., the whole cause of child evangelism will suffer severely. Why evangelize those who do not need to be evangelized? Why teach children that they need to be saved when they do not need to be saved?

This theory will lead us, instead, to tell children that they are already in the kingdom of God, and encourage us to show them how to become better members of that kingdom – when, in reality, they may not be in it at all.

I trust you will see the irreparable harm which can be done to the cause of child evangelism by this theory; and, even worse, the eternal harm which can be done to the never-dying souls of boys and girls who have, in this way, been given a sense of false assurance.

This is a desperately serious matter and there is no room for speculation or mistakes.

Another Theory

And then there are some Christians who believe that the children of believers are born into the kingdom of God – and do not need to be converted or saved. They just need to grow spiritually. This theory is also based upon this verse (Mark 10 v14) and upon 1 Corinthians 7 v14 (see pages 224 to 227 for an explanation of this verse). But this could not be so for all that we have already written and explained about this verse repudiates the idea that “human child (or child of a believer) equals child of God”. John 1 v13 indicates that no one becomes a child of God by virtue of human birth. *“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”* (John 1 v12, 13).

The Lord Jesus points out in John 3 v3-7 that no one can see or enter the kingdom of God without spiritual rebirth: *“unless one is born anew he cannot see the kingdom of God”* and *“You must be born anew.”*

Charles Spurgeon wrote to believers, *“If you indulge in the novel idea that your children do not need conversion, that children born of Christian parents are somewhat superior to others and have good in them which needs developed, one great motive for your devout earnestness will be gone. Believe me brethren your children need the Spirit of God to give them new hearts and right spirits.”*

CHAPTER 5

The Book of Proverbs

In the first seven chapters of Proverbs Solomon, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives instruction and exhortation to his children. Also, throughout the book, the responsibilities of parents and of children are emphasized. I can only give an outline here of what Solomon says and teaches concerning children and parents. You would need to study these yourself in more detail.

➤ **Instructions to children**

- ✓ Fear and know God (1 v7; 2 v5; 24 v21).
- ✓ Give your heart to God (23 v26).
- ✓ Listen to, and obey, your parents (1 v8 and 9; 4 v1; 4 v20-22; 5 v1; 5 v7; 6 v20; 7 v24; 13 v1; 15 v5; 19 v27; 23 v22).
- ✓ Seek knowledge and understanding (2 v2-9; 4 v5-13; 7 v1-5).
- ✓ Love God's Word (3 v1-4; 3 v21-26; 28 v7a).
- ✓ Keep away from sin (1 v10-19; 23 v19-21).
- ✓ Do not despise God's chastening (3 v11-12).

➤ **A promise to children**

Children who seek God will find Him (8 v17).

➤ **Instructions to parents**

- ✓ Train your child (22 v6).
- ✓ Discipline your child (13 v24; 19 v18; 22 v15; 23 v13, 14; 29 v15; 29 v17).
- ✓ Be wise with your child (17 v2).

➤ **A promise to parents**

Instruct a child, your purpose being that he will begin to follow God's way and when he is old he will not turn from it (22 v6).

➤ **The importance and value of children**

- ✓ Children can be godly (or ungodly) (20 v11).
- ✓ Godly children bring joy to parents (10 v1a; 17 v6; 23 v15, 16, 24, 25).

However I have selected two verses from the book of Proverbs because they are so important.

- *“Train up a child (NAAR) in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it”* (Proverbs 22 v6).

This first verse gives a clear instruction or command and then a wonderful promise:

- We need to train our children – not just tell them or teach them. It means to open his appetite for the things of God as Eunice did for her son Timothy (2 Timothy 3 v15).
- But we need to train them *“in the way he should go”* – in the way of peace and of life – the way of the Lord. And we need to train each one according to his stage of development; his growth and his understanding. That is God’s command.
- And when they are old, as the Holy Spirit has worked in their hearts, they will continue in those ways. That is God’s promise.

Andrew Bonar wrote on this verse:

“The person with whom this text is a favourite probably applies it like this – ‘Only teach the plan of salvation to a child, and show wisdom’s happy ways to a child; and, though at the time the child be not converted, yet, when he is old, he will no doubt take the way you have taught him.’ But is this true? And is this the sense of the text? Very far from it! The Holy Spirit means to teach us quite another lesson by these words, viz., Only be sure that you get the child in the way WHILE STILL A CHILD, and you need never fear in regard to that child’s after perseverance.

It is, ‘Initiate a child in the way’ (see the Hebrew), or at the beginning of the way: get the truth introduced into his soul while he is a child, and rest assured that he shall go on, as he has begun. It is a blessed text to encourage us to seek the PRESENT AND IMMEDIATE CONVERSION OF CHILDREN.”

A good illustration of this verse and the principle contained in it, can be found in the way Moses was taught and trained as a child by his mother – and his resulting obedience to God at a later date (Exodus 2 v1-10 and Hebrews 11 v23-26). I am sure that Ezra 8 v21 expresses the prayer we all bring to God: *“Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our LITTLE ONES (TAPH) and all our possessions.”*

➤ Our second verse is Proverbs 8 v17: *“I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently (early - KJV) will find me.”*

This is also a wonderful promise – that those who seek Him early will find Him.

Pray that our children will seek Him early in life and we know that if they do they will find Him.



SECTION IV

AN OUTLINE AND STUDY OF CHILDREN PORTRAYED IN THE BIBLE

*"Take heed that you despise not one of these
little ones." Matthew 18 v10*

INTRODUCTION

It is fascinating and very helpful to look at the children who are portrayed in the pages of the Word of God, and to find out what we can learn from them.

These pictures of children can give us the answers to a number of questions by illustrating for us what children can do. And I believe that in the pages which follow we will find answers to questions like the following:

- Can children pray? (Page 95)
- Can children be obedient to the will of God? (Page 96)
- Can children live godly and holy lives? (Page 98)
- Can children be so influenced and taught when they are tiny that they will, later, trust and serve God? (Page 99)
- Can children be part of God's plan? (Page 101)
- Can children respond to the Word of God and come to know Him? (Page 102)
- Can children trust God when faced with problems? (Page 103)
- Can children take their stand for God? (Page 105)
- Can children witness for God? (page 106)
- Can children do what is right in the sight of God? (Page 107)
- Can believing children backslide? (Page 108)
- Can God work in a child's heart? (Page 110)
- Can children give all they have to God? (Page 111)
- Can children praise God? (Page 112)
- Can children believe that God answers prayer? (Page 113)

- Can children understand the Word of God? (Page 114)
- Can children be judged by God? (Page 115)
- Does the Lord Jesus care for children and minister to them? (Page 116)
- Why did the Lord Jesus become a child? (Page 117)

And we will see in this section that there are children or young people in the Bible who will answer all these questions for us.

Ishmael - The Boy Who Prayed

The story of Ishmael is an interesting one. God had promised Abraham and Sarah that they would have a child – a son. But the years passed by and they got older and there was no sign of a son. So Abraham and Sarah became impatient and decided to take things into their own hands (Genesis 16 v2). Sarah asked Abraham to have a child by her servant Hagar and Abraham did so and Ishmael was born.

Afterwards Sarah regretted what she had done and she expelled Hagar from their presence (Genesis 16 v6). The angel of the Lord found Hagar close to a fountain of water and asked her what she was doing, then told her to return to her mistress and promised she would have a child called Ishmael. And that was what happened.

Later God's promise to Abraham and Sarah was realized and Sarah had a son called Isaac (Genesis 21 v2). But as Isaac grew up, problems arose in that household. Ishmael made fun of Isaac (Genesis 21 v9) and Sarah told Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael. Abraham did so (Genesis 21 v14). Hagar and her child went into the wilderness, but before long the water in the bottle which Abraham had given her was finished and she "cast" the child under a bush because she thought he was going to die. Then she sat down and wept.

But we read in verse 17 that "God heard the voice of the lad" and opened Hagar's eyes so she could see a well of water, from which she and her son drank and lived. The interesting fact we learn from the story of this boy is that God heard his voice. We don't

know what the lad said – perhaps he just wept. But, more likely, he said something. He may have asked God to supply the water they needed, or he may even have “reminded” God of the promise He had made in Genesis 17 v2, that He would bless him and multiply him. But no matter what he said, God heard him, God saw his need and supplied him with water. And it is especially interesting to know that the name Ishmael means “God will hear.”

We don’t know how old Ishmael was at this time. He was certainly over 13 years of age (Genesis 17 v25; compare Genesis 16, v16 and 21, v5). But in those days when people lived longer than today, it is probable that he was more like a much younger person of today, or even a child. , This possibility is supported in Genesis 21 v14 where Abraham put a bottle of water and, it would seem, the boy on her shoulder; and again in Genesis 21, v15 when Hagar “*placed the boy under one of the shrubs.*” Also in Genesis 21 ,v18 the angel said to Hagar “*lift up the lad.*” The Hebrew word translated ‘boy’ in these verses is “YELED” and often refers to younger children (Exodus 2, v3, 1 Samuel 2, v5, 1 Kings 17, v21 and 2 Kings 4, vs18,34). The Hebrew word translated “lad” in these verses is NAAR and can refer to a child, a young person or a servant.

And the simple lesson we can learn here is that children can PRAY AND GOD HEARS THE VOICES OF THE LADS (AND LASSIES). He cares for them, answers their prayers and meets their needs.

“Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones” (Matthew 18 v10).

Isaac – The Boy Who Obeyed

Isaac was, as we have seen, the only son of Abraham.

In Genesis 22 v2 God told Abraham to take his son to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering. Abraham obeyed and three days later arrived there with his son. Then he and Isaac ascended the mountain. On the way Isaac asked

his father where the lamb was for the burnt offering and he told him that God would provide the lamb. Isaac did not know, of course, that he was to be the lamb!

At the top of the mountain Abraham built the altar, put the wood on it, tied Isaac and laid him upon the altar (Genesis 22 v9). He was about to kill his son when the angel of the Lord spoke and stopped him from doing so. Then Abraham offered up a ram instead of his son (Genesis 22 v13).

What an amazing act of obedience, as far as Abraham was concerned. He was willing and ready to obey his Lord no matter what it cost. And Abraham's obedience has been praised (and preached on) for centuries.

But what about Isaac? He was also willing to obey his Lord, and his obedience would cost him more than his father's, because he was the one who was to die! And so Isaac shows us that a boy can be obedient to the will and command of God, even when such obedience would be very costly.

We don't know how old Isaac was at this time, but he was probably a young teenager. Like Ishmael, he may have been physically and emotionally younger than his age group today - more like a child than today's teenagers. This possibility is supported in Genesis 22 v9 where we read that Abraham bound, or tied up, his son BEFORE laying him on the altar. This would indicate that Isaac was closer, physically, to modern/late childhood than modern teenage years.

The Hebrew word which describes Isaac and is translated as "lad" in verses 5 and 12 is NAAR. It is translated "child" in a number of verses (eg. Judges 13 v24, 1st Samuel 1 v22, and 2nd Kings 5 v14). But it is also translated frequently as "lad" (as in these verses) - with the thought of "a young person" or "young man", or "servant."

And so we see from this story that **IT IS POSSIBLE FOR A CHILD TO KNOW THE WILL OF GOD AND HIS COMMANDS - AND BE OBEDIENT TO THEM.**

"Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones" (Matthew 18 v10).

Joseph – The Godly Teenager

Joseph is one of the most interesting and beautiful characters in the whole Bible. It has often been pointed out that, unlike many other men and women of God in the Bible, no examples of sin, deception or evil are recorded of him in Scripture. He was not sinless, of course, but he was certainly a godly person.

- He was godly in his home – when he was IN
- He was godly away from home – when he was OUT
- He was godly in prison – when he was DOWN
- He was godly in the palace – when he was UP

Joseph is first introduced to us in Genesis 37 v2, and it is recorded there that he was a lad (NAAR) of seventeen when the events recorded from verse 12 onwards took place. He was feeding the flock with his brethren (verse 2).

We don't know if Joseph received the special coat of many colours from his father at 17, or if it was given to him earlier. And we also do not know if the dreams recorded in verses 5-11 took place around this time. They could have occurred earlier and before he was seventeen years old.

We should also remember that in those days a seventeen year old could be more equated to a young person of today in his early teens. Certainly the naivety Joseph displayed would indicate he was like an early teenager. And it is interesting to note that Reuben (the oldest brother) calls him a lad or child (YELED) in verse 30 (and again a boy (YELED) in Genesis 42,v22).

But we see in this chapter a picture of a teenager who was simple, harmless and without guile – as he honestly recounts his dream to his brothers who hated him (vs 5 & 10), and we also see a picture of complete obedience to his father when given instructions to look for his brothers (v13). “*Here am I*” he responds, and he persisted to look for his brothers until he found them (vs15-17).

Joseph is a wonderful example of a godly teenager who displayed that godliness in his own home; and surely the foundation of that godliness was laid in the preceding years.

TEENAGERS AND CHILDREN CAN LIVE GODLY LIVES.

"Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones" (Matthew 18 v10).

Moses - The Child Whose Future was Determined by his Early Years

The parents of Moses were people of great faith and they knew that their child Moses was a very special child (Exodus 2 v2; Hebrews 11 v23). It would seem that God had revealed this to them. So they hid their baby boy for three months so the Egyptians could not kill him. Moses' mother then thought of a wonderful plan whereby three things could happen to her baby boy:

- He could be safe and not killed by the Egyptians
- He could be instructed in the Word and ways of God.
- He could grow up in the Egyptian palace and receive the preparation he needed for God's plan for his life

Surely it was God Who revealed this plan to her. Was this the display of the faith of Moses' parents which is commended in Hebrews 11 v23? *"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw that he was a beautiful child, and they were not afraid of the king's command."* Was it "by faith" in God's revelation and command to them that they did what they did?

This God-fearing mother placed her baby in a little ark or basket and put it among the bulrushes beside the river at a place where Pharaoh's daughter came regularly (Exodus 2 v3). She also asked Miriam, her daughter, to be there to watch what would happen. The princess found the ark and the baby and she loved him. Miriam immediately stepped in and suggested she get a Hebrew nurse for the child (Exodus 2 v7). The princess agreed and Miriam brought Moses' mother to her. The princess gave

the baby to his mother, asked her to nurse him and look after him and promised to pay her for doing so! (Exodus 2 v9).

What a wonderful plan. Surely God must have revealed this to Moses' mother and, as we will see, Moses' sister played an important part in this plan.

Moses' mother took the baby home; she didn't have to hide him anymore, and lovingly nursed him. At the same time during the months and years which followed she, as a godly woman of faith, taught little Moses the Word of God and the privileges he had as one of God's people.

She then took the boy to Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2 v10). We don't know what age he was but he didn't need any more nursing or personal care. The Hebrew word "NAAR" often referring to a young child is used throughout the passage and is translated as "baby" in verse 6 and "child" in the other verses. So he could have been two, three, four or five years old. Moses became the son of Pharaoh's daughter, was instructed in the ways of the Egyptians during the years which followed, and became a highly educated and greatly gifted leader. Then at the age of forty he turned his back on all that Egypt could offer him (Hebrews 11 v24) - *"Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward"* (Hebrews 11 v25,26).

Why did he do this? What was the basis of his decision?

Surely it was because of those early years when he was instructed in the Word of God by his mother. It is possible that those years were his only contact with God's Word and his heritage and he never forgot what he had heard and learned. His mother had sown the seed and almost 40 years later it germinated and grew.

Andrew Murray wrote: *"The education Moses' mother gave her son during the years of his childhood was such as all the years of his training at Pharaoh's court could not obliterate."*

Isn't this a practical illustration of Proverbs 22 v6? *"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."*

And isn't this an encouragement to all Christian parents and all children's workers?

And so we learn from the story of Moses that THE WORD OF GOD SOWN IN THE MIND AND HEART OF A LITTLE CHILD CAN GROW AND, AT A LATER DATE, BRING HIM TO A PLACE OF FAITH IN GOD AND SERVICE FOR GOD.

"Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones" (Matthew 18 v10).

Miriam - A Child Who Played a Part in God's Plan

But we must not forget or omit the part played by another child or young person in the working out of God's plan for Moses.

Moses' sister, who was older than him, was willing to "stand on guard" when the baby was placed by the river (Exodus 2 v4), and she was ready to speak to Pharaoh's daughter and suggest she should have a Hebrew nurse (Exodus 2 v7). We do not know how old Miriam was, but it would seem that she was either an older child or a young teenager, nor do we know if she was told previously by her mother to do this. In all probability she was and she was only obeying her mother's instructions on the basis of what God had revealed to her. But it is also possible that her suggestion was impromptu and not planned and that God laid it directly upon her heart to say these words at the right time to the right person with the right results. And in doing so she provided a vital part to God's plan for Moses.

So, in one or both of these ways, God used Miriam to fulfil His plan and He enabled her to be resourceful and helpful at the right time. And she was more than willing to play her vital part in this plan. So this shows us that GOD CAN USE CHILDREN TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSES.

"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones" (Matthew 18 v10).

Samuel – The Child Who Came to Know God

Perhaps the best known child in the Old Testament, indeed in the whole Bible, is Samuel and his story is very well known. Hannah had no children (1st Samuel 1 v2). She prayed for a child (1st Samuel 1 v11). God answered her prayer and a boy was born (1st Samuel 1 v20). She called him Samuel which means “asked of God”.

After the child was weaned – probably around the age of 4 or 5, she brought him to the house of the Lord, as she had promised, so that he could serve the Lord there. Samuel worked for Eli, the high priest opening the doors of the House of the Lord in the mornings (1st Samuel 3 v15).

We read that Samuel ministered before the Lord (1st Samuel 2 v18) and onto the Lord (1st Samuel 2 v11; 3 v1), that he grew before the Lord (1st Samuel 2 v21), that he was “*in favour with the Lord and also with men*” (1st Samuel 2 v26), and that he also worshipped the Lord (1st Samuel 1 v28). We do not know how old Samuel was when all this happened, but the use of the word “*child*” (Hebrew – NAAR) (1st Samuel 3, v1,8), the fact that “he grew” (1st Samuel 3, v19), and the description of the naivety and simplicity of Samuel in verses 4-10, combine to show that he was still a child, perhaps somewhere between 4 and 10 years old.

We see, therefore, a child of young years serving the Lord and even worshipping the Lord (and we can conclude that it is therefore possible for a young child to serve the Lord and worship Him). But when we come to 1st Samuel 3 we find three key facts and truths about this child:

- He did not yet know the Lord personally (1st Samuel 3 v7). Although he served in the house of the Lord and actively took part in the worship service, he had not yet entered into a personal relationship with the Lord.
- The Lord spoke to Samuel three times (1st Samuel 3 v4,6 & 8) – but Samuel did not recognize that the Lord was speaking to him. But when the Lord spoke the fourth

time (1st Samuel 3 v10) Samuel responded “*Speak for Your servant hears.*” And that was the moment when that personal relationship between Samuel and the Lord began. The Lord spoke, and Samuel listened.

- And from that moment on Samuel grew and “*the Lord was with him*” (1st Samuel 3 v19).

This young child, first of all, did not know the Lord. Then he heard God’s voice and responded to Him. And the Lord was with him from that moment on.

And this shows us that IT IS POSSIBLE FOR A CHILD, A YOUNG CHILD, TO KNOW GOD, TO HEAR HIS VOICE, TO RESPOND TO HIM AND HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.

“*Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones*” (Matthew 18 v10).

David - The Teenager Who Trusted God

We all know the story of David and how God chose him as the next king of Israel. Samuel wanted to choose the oldest son in Jesse’s family, but God chose the youngest. And we especially know the story of David killing the giant, and that the basis of his victory on that occasion was his trust in God to do what he, on his own, could not do:

- He said to Saul “*The Lord will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine*” (1st Samuel 17 v37).
- And he cried out to Goliath, “*This day will the Lord deliver you into mine hand*” (1st Samuel 17 v46).
- And then he added in the next verse, “*The battle is the Lord’s and He will give you into my hands.*”

His dependence was on God alone - and he trusted Him for the victory.

It is estimated by most Bible scholars that David was in his mid or late teens when he so wonderfully displayed his trust in God and defeated the giant. Saul called him “*a youth*” (NAAR) (1st Samuel 17, v33 & 55), and Goliath “*disdained him for he was a youth*” (1st Samuel 17 v42).

But it is obvious from Scripture that this episode, wonderful as it was, was not the first time teenager David had trusted God:

- He himself says in Psalm 71 that he had trusted God when he was young:

“For you are my hope, O Lord GOD, You are my trust from my youth” (verse 5)

“O God, You have taught me from my youth and to this day I declare Your wondrous works” (verse 17).

The word “youth” is “NEURIM” and it means “a young person”. We don’t know, in either verse, how young. It is usually translated as “youth”, but in one case (1 Samuel 12,v2) it is translated “childhood.”

- Samuel was obviously surprised that God should choose someone so young to be king (1st Samuel 16 vs 5-11) but after he had anointed him the Spirit of the Lord came upon young David from that day forward (1st Samuel 16 v13). This was some time before his victory over Goliath. So he was certainly no stranger to God when he encountered Goliath.
- He had trusted God before all of this happened to deliver him from the animals which threatened his animals:
“Moreover David said, ‘The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear’” (1st Samuel 17 v37a).

David therefore seems to be portrayed in these passages as a teenager who trusted God but every indication is that this trust was based upon his experience with God and his trust in God when he was younger – perhaps quite a bit younger; and this encourages us to see and understand THAT YOUNG PEOPLE AND CHILDREN CAN REALLY TRUST GOD WHEN THEY ARE FACED WITH PROBLEMS.

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones”. (Matthew 18 v10).

Daniel – The Teenager who Took his Stand for God

Daniel and his three friends were taken captive by the Babylonians and brought to Babylon. All four were from the royal families in Israel (Daniel 1 v3), and the purpose of the king of Babylon was to integrate them into his people and use their gifts and abilities in his government.

But there were certain things which Daniel and his friends determined not to do because, if they did, they would disobey God. They would not defile themselves by eating the food especially prepared for them, probably because it had been offered to idols (Daniel 1 v8). They took a clear stand and refused to eat the food and drink the wine. And we know that God blessed them for this stand (Daniel 1 v17) and also made it possible for them to have another kind of food (Daniel 1 v14). As a result they were healthier than all the other young people. How old were they at this time? We cannot be sure. Most commentators see them as teenagers and, if they were, surely they were just displaying what they had learned when they were younger, and their stand must have been based upon earlier experiences with God in their childhood.

But we should note that the Bible uses the Hebrew word “YELED” with regard to these four young people (Daniel 1, v4,17) although it is translated “young men” in both cases. And, while this Hebrew word is not exclusively used to describe young children, it is often used in this way (Exodus 1 v17, 2 v6, 1st Samuel 1 v2, Ruth 4 v16, 2nd Samuel 12 v22), and so it could indicate that they were at least young teenagers.

But the interesting fact for us is that these young people took a clear stand for God and did what they believed God wanted them to do. And they show us that **IT IS POSSIBLE FOR CHRISTIAN CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS TO TAKE A STAND FOR GOD AND WHAT IS RIGHT.**

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones” (Matthew 18 v10).

Naaman's Maid – The Child who Witnessed for God

This Israelite girl, like Daniel and his friends, was also taken captive by invaders (2nd Kings 5 v2). The Syrian army captured her and, we can be sure, brought her with many others back to Syria, far away from her home and family. We don't even know her name. She would certainly had a right to feel angry and bitter towards her captors.

This little girl was taken to the house of Naaman the Syrian general and became the personal maid, or slave, or Naaman's wife, and it was not long before she became aware of her master's plight. For Naaman, in spite of his wealth, and importance, and popularity, and ability as a great general, had the dreadful disease of leprosy and it was gradually killing him. It is obvious that this nameless Israelite girl had a spiritual heritage and knew how God had blessed and used His servant Elisha. She also believed in her heart that God could use Elisha to heal her master, so she had some spiritual knowledge and some spiritual experience.

But what could she do? Should she keep quiet and say nothing because this man and his soldiers had taken her away from her home and family and made her a slave? Or should she tell him that God could heal him?

We all know what happened. She told Naaman's wife that there was a man in her home country whom God could use to heal her husband (2nd Kings 5 v3). And as a result Naaman found his way to Elisha's house, eventually obeyed his instructions to dip himself seven times in the river Jordan, and was completely healed (2nd Kings 5 v14).

How did this all happen? Who was responsible for Naaman's healing? It was the work of God of course, and He used Elisha to restore Naaman to good health again. But it all started with a girl who witnessed for God and told these two "strangers" what her God could do for them.

And Naaman was not only healed, but he became a believer in the God of Israel (2nd Kings 5 v15) and returned home a changed man. Not only was his body healed – his soul was also healed.

And all because a young girl witnessed to him about her God. We don't know how old she was but we have always presumed from the context that she was quite young - a child or a young teenager. The Hebrew word used to describe her in 2nd Kings 5 v2 & 4 is NAARAH. It is usually translated "maid" or "maid servant", or "damsel", and generally refers to teenagers and young people. So she may have been a teenager or a young person. But even if she was, what she did was based, surely, upon what she had heard and learned as a child.

And this shows us THAT CHILDREN OR YOUNG PEOPLE CAN WITNESS AND THAT GOD CAN USE THEIR WITNESS TO BE A MEANS OF BLESSING OTHERS.

Indeed they are often better and more fearless witnesses than many adults.

"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones" (Matthew 18 v10).

Josiah - The Child who Did What was Right

There is no doubt that Josiah was a child. The Bible describes him as eight years old (2nd Chronicles 34 v1) - and tells us that he became king of Judah at that age when his evil father Amon was murdered. And he would reign for 31 years.

This child of eight is described in 2nd Chronicles 34 v2 in three ways:

- He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. He must have had some understanding of God's statutes, and he obeyed them.
- He walked in the godly ways of David.
- He deviated neither to the right or to the left. He was steadfast.

What a testimony for an eight year old whose father was an evil man and who lived in an evil environment where the people around him worshipped idols and did other wicked things (2nd Chronicles 34 v4 onwards).

And this shows us that IT IS POSSIBLE FOR A YOUNG CHILD OF EIGHT YEARS OLD TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT FOR GOD IN SPITE OF UNGODLY PARENTS AND CIRCUMSTANCES - and it also shows us that God can keep and help a believing child in the midst of sin and wickedness. It is also highly probable that his grandfather Manasseh had a good influence on him after he had come back to God (2nd Chronicles 33 vs 12 & 13). According to 2nd Chronicles 33 v21, Amon, Josiah's father, reigned for two years after Manasseh's death. So the spiritually restored Manasseh could have had a strong influence on Josiah, his grandson, for the first six years of his life.

It is interesting also to note that after eight years of living for God, at the age of 16, *"he began to seek after the God of his fathers"* (2nd Chronicles 34 v3). This would seem to mean that Josiah longed for a deeper knowledge of God and deeper experiences of His power and goodness at that age. And then four years later, at the age of 20, he started to get rid of all the idol worship which had enveloped his people (2nd Chronicles 34 v4). And even later he repaired the house of the Lord (2nd Chronicles 34 v8), found and read the Word of God which had been lost (2nd Chronicles 34 v30) and instituted once again the Passover (2nd Chronicles 35 v1).

And it all started as a child of eight WHO DID WHAT WAS RIGHT IN THE SIGHT OF GOD.

What an encouragement to those of us who work with children. *"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones"* (Matthew 18 v10).

Joash - The Child Who Turned Back

But we must be realistic, because the Bible is realistic, and it also gives us an example of a young child, like Josiah, who did that which was right in the sight of the Lord and continued to do so for many years. But, in contrast to Josiah, the spiritual direction of his life was later completely changed and reversed - and his life ended in tragedy.

Joash, like Josiah, became king of Judah when he was still a child – in his case only seven years old (2 Chronicles 24, v1). The wicked Athaliah had ruled the land for six years, and had tried to kill all the members of the royal family. But Joash was hidden by the friends of Jehoiada, the priest, who obviously had a great influence on the boy during those early years of his life. Eventually Athaliah was killed and Joash, as the only member of the royal family remaining, became king at seven years of age (2 Chronicles 24, v1). And the Bible tells us that, like Josiah, he *“did that which was right in the sight of the Lord”* (2 Chronicles 24, v2). (But the Bible adds in the same verse that this was so during the days of Jehoiada, his spiritual father and counsellor).

And we also read that Joash, sometime after that, planned to repair the house of the Lord (2 Chronicles 24, v4). He involved Jehoiada in this work (2 Chronicles 24,v12) and together they finished it (2 Chronicles 24, v14). So it would seem that Joash was still doing what was right in the sight of the Lord.

However Jehoiada died some years later (2 Chronicles 24, v15) and left behind a wonderful testimony – *“he had done good both toward God and toward his own house”* (2 Chronicles 24, v16). But after his death the princes of Judah came to Joash and influenced him in such a way that he turned from the ways of the Lord (2 Chronicles 24, vs17 & 18). He instituted idol worship and he and the princes even killed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada for rebuking them and their sin. But the Syrian army invaded Judah (2 Chronicles 24, v23) and Joash was murdered by his servants (2 Chronicles 24, v25).

And so a life of great promise ended in tragedy. And this story reminds us realistically THAT CHILDREN CAN HAVE EXPERIENCES WITH GOD AND WALK IN HIS WAYS - AND YET IT IS POSSIBLE FOR BACKSLIDING AND TRAGEDY TO OCCUR IN THEIR LATER LIVES.

John the Baptist – The Child with a Very Special Experience

One of the most remarkable people in the Bible is John the Baptist.

- He was remarkable in his life. He was a godly man and the Bible testifies that he was “*great in the sight of the Lord*” (Luke 1 v15).
- He was remarkable in his ministry.
 - He preached repentance – and many responded to his preaching (Luke 3, v3).
 - He prophesied that the Messiah would come (Luke 3 v16). What a privilege that he should be the one to “*prepare the way of the Lord*” (Luke 3,v4)
 - He pointed out and identified the Messiah when He came to start His ministry (John 1, vs29,36).
 - He baptized the Lord Jesus (Matthew 3, v15).
- He was remarkable in his birth
 - He was born miraculously to a couple in their old age (Luke 1 v18,36).
 - Most remarkable of all, he was “*filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb*” (Luke 1 v15).

When we study in the Bible the experience known as the fullness of the Spirit, we find that it means to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, and that this is an experience we can enjoy when we are obedient to the Lord and His Word. Consequently, we are commanded to “*be filled with the Spirit*” (Ephesians 5 v18) – but that fullness is conditional on our obedience.

But John was filled with the Holy Spirit from the moment of his birth. His experience had no conditions attached to it, for he was not yet able to obey, believe or even understand.

This is all a mystery – and the only explanation is that what John experienced was a sovereign, unconditional work of God to prepare him for his future life and ministry. And we read that “*the child (PAIDION) grew and became strong in spirit*” (Luke 1 v80). He grew spiritually as well as physically.

What happened to John at his birth was unique. It was most unusual for a baby to be filled with the Spirit from his birth. This had never happened before and, apart from the Lord Jesus Himself, would never happen again. But this sovereign act of God, this miracle, shows us that God can work sovereignly and unconditionally in the heart and life of a child, or an adult – of any age. And IT SHOWS US HOW VERY MUCH WE NEED TO DEPEND UPON GOD AND HIS POWER WHEN WE ARE MINISTERING TO CHILDREN.

You never know what God is going to do in young lives.

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones” (Matthew 18 v10).

The Boy Who Gave All he Had to the Lord Jesus

In John chapter 6 we read about another child whose name is not given. In John 6 v9 he is simply called by Andrew “a lad”. The Greek word translated “lad” is PAIDARION. This word is a diminutive of PAIDION which itself means “young child”. The only other place it is used in the New Testament is in Matthew 11 v16. So the boy must certainly have been young – probably very young.

This lad or young boy was one of the immense crowd who had been listening to the teaching of the Lord Jesus. But evening was coming and the Lord Jesus asked His disciples where they could get food to feed the 5,000 men, plus women and children (John 6 v5). They had no idea how this could be done. But Andrew found a boy (the one we are thinking about here) who had with him five small loaves and two small fishes. We don’t know why he had these with him – perhaps he had left home that morning and his mother had given them to him for his lunch.

And so Andrew brought the boy to the Lord Jesus (John 6 v9). We don’t know what exactly transpired then. Perhaps the Lord Jesus asked the boy if He could have the loaves and fishes. But we do know that the boy gave them to the Lord and He multiplied them so that the whole crowd was fed and there

were twelve baskets left over - and all because a boy had given his lunch to the Lord. He did not have very much, but what he had he gave and the Lord used it to feed the people. Remember the boy was one of the five thousand who were fed and filled (John 6 v12); and if I know boys I believe it is possible that he ate more than the five loaves and two fishes which he gave!

But the lesson for us is that CHILDREN (EVEN YOUNG CHILDREN) CAN GIVE WHAT THEY HAVE TO THE LORD AND HE CAN USE THEM AND THEIR GIFTS TO BLESS MANY.

"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones" (Matthew 18 v10).

The Children who Praised the Lord Jesus

It was the beginning of Passover week and the Lord Jesus, riding upon a donkey, and His disciples, were entering Jerusalem. Crowds of people spread their garments and branches from the trees on the road and cried *"Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord"* (Matthew 21 v9). When the Lord Jesus arrived in Jerusalem He entered into the temple and cast out all those who were using it for the purpose of changing money and selling things like doves etc. Then He healed many sick people who came to Him (Matthew 21 v14). Then something very special and wonderful happened. A number of children were also in the temple and they started to praise the Lord Jesus *"crying out in the temple and saying, 'Hosanna to the Son of David.'" (Matthew 21 v15). And this word "crying" means "lifting up the voice with strength - a bold, full, hearty song."*

The Greek word translated children in Matthew 21 v15 is PAIS which, I understand, is a general word for children, and could refer to children between the ages of 7 and 14.

- These children certainly seemed to have some knowledge of, or belief in, the Lord Jesus that He was the *"Son of David"*.
- They wanted to praise Him - *"Hosanna to the Son of David"*.

But the chief priests and scribes heard the children praising the Lord Jesus and were very displeased and angry. They came to the Lord and complained - *'Do you hear what these are saying?'* (Matthew 21 v16). *"Yes"*, said the Lord, and then He reminded them that the Bible had prophesised that they would do this. And He quoted Psalm 8 v2 *"Out of the mouths of babes and nursery infants you have perfected praise"* (Matthew 21 v16) which would also indicate that the children praising Him were quite young. The two Greek words used here refer to very young children. We can conclude three things about the children in this story.

- These children saw what others did not see - even the priests and scribes with their knowledge of the Bible were blind to it.
- These children sang while others remained silent. The Lord Jesus received rebuke from the religious leaders and rejoicing from the children.
- These children received a blessing which others lost. They and only they were commended by the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus was so pleased with the praise of these children. And this shows us that THE LORD JESUS WANTS TO HEAR CHILDREN PRAISING HIM AND THAT THEIR PRAISE GIVES HIM GREAT JOY AND DELIGHT.

"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones" (Matthew 18 v10).

Rhoda - The Girl who Believed that God Answers Prayer

In Acts 12 verse 1 onwards we read about one of the most critical times in the history of the early church. James had already been executed for his faith. Then Peter was arrested and taken to prison awaiting his execution, probably within the next few days. The situation looked hopeless. Peter was in chains with 16 soldiers, working on a rota basis, making sure he could not be rescued (Acts 12 v4).

But in a house in Jerusalem, in the home of Mary and her son John Mark, the Christians met to pray for Peter and his release

(Acts 12 v5). And God answered their prayers, for an angel of the Lord released Peter from his chains and from his prison cell. Peter immediately went to the house where he knew they were praying for him (Acts 12 v12). He knocked on the door and a girl called Rhoda heard the knocking and came to the door. She is called a damsel (Acts 12 v13). The Greek word translated here as “damsel” is PAIDISKE. The concordance translates it as “little maid” or “young damsel”. But it is often used in a general sense as “maidservant”. So in the context Rhoda would probably be a teenager or an early teenager serving in Mary’s house.

Rhoda recognized Peter’s voice and was so excited that instead of opening the door she rushed in to tell those who were praying that God had answered their prayers and that Peter was at the door! But they did not believe her and told her she was mad (Acts 12 v15). And when she insisted it was Peter they told her it was his ghost!

Eventually the door was opened and Peter stood there. But the girl Rhoda had believed all along that it was Peter and that God had answered their prayers. And this shows us that VERY OFTEN CHILDREN ARE MORE BELIEVING, LESS SKEPTICAL AND MORE TRUSTFUL THAN ADULTS. Their faith is simple and profound and often puts us adults to shame.

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones” (Matthew 18 v10).

Timothy – The Boy who Understood the Word of God

Timothy was born into a very special home. His mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois were godly women (2nd Timothy 1 v5), and they not only studied their Old Testament Scriptures but they taught them to young Timothy.

“And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2nd Timothy 3 v15).

The word “child” or “childhood” in this verse is the Greek word BREPHOS which means “a baby”. This means therefore that

Timothy, even as a babe in arms, was under the influence of the Scriptures which the two ladies were studying in his presence – even though he did not yet understand anything. But as he grew older he came, through their teaching, to know and understand the Word of God (as our verse says), and this understanding was to lay the basis for what he heard and what he responded to when the apostle Paul came to his home town of Lystra and preached the Gospel (Acts 14 vs 6 & 7). Timothy had never heard the Gospel before, but his heart was well prepared through his study and understanding of the Old Testament, and he became a Christian. The Word he had come to understand made him *“wise for salvation”* (2nd Timothy 3 v15). He was probably a teenager at this time.

Paul returned at a later date to Lystra and, when he received a good report from the church there concerning Timothy, he invited him to join his missionary team. And Timothy became a preacher of the Word of God for the remainder of his life.

But it all started in those early years of childhood when he was exposed to God’s Word and came to understand it more and more. That was when the foundation was laid.

And the story of Timothy shows us that CHILDREN, EVEN YOUNG CHILDREN, CAN UNDERSTAND THE WORD OF GOD WHEN IT IS WELL TAUGHT TO THEM AND THAT THIS UNDERSTANDING CAN BE THE BASIS OF THEIR LIVES AND SALVATION.

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones” (Matthew 18 v10).

The Children who were Judged by God

But there is another picture of children in the Bible which we need to see and understand.

In 2nd Kings 2 vs 23-25 we read that when Elisha was returning to Bethel, after the miracle in Jericho (where the water in the river had been purified), children came out of the city and made fun of him. *“Then he went up from there to Bethel: and as he was going up the road some youths (little children – King James version)*

came from the city and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, you bald head; go up, you bald head." (2 Kings 2 ,v23). They called Elisha names but, worse than that, they derided the work of God which had just been witnessed in the rapture of Elijah.

Elisha turned and pronounced judgment on them. Verse 24: *"So he turned around and looked at them, and pronounced a curse on them in the name of the Lord. And two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths (children - KJV)."* Elisha did this, not because they were mocking him, but because they were mocking God, and this was God's judgment upon these youths.

What age were they? The word "youth" in verse 23 is the Hebrew word NAAR and is often used to describe those older than children and is often translated "youth" (as in the New KJV). But the word "youth" in verse 24 is a different Hebrew word (YELED) and usually refers to children, even though it is translated as "youth" in the New King James version. They were probably a mixed group of teenagers and children, and perhaps some young adults. But it is recorded that children were involved in the judgment which took place.

And this reminds us that CHILDREN CAN BE JUDGED. If a child is old enough to deliberately reject God he leaves himself open to God's judgment. And that is why the Lord Jesus refers to the possibility of children being lost or separated from God. *"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones"* (Matthew 18 v10).

The Children Ministered to by the Lord Jesus

When our Lord Jesus was here on earth He not only ministered to adults but also to children.

- He ministered to a number of them spiritually, as a section of the crowds to whom He spoke and taught. For example, the people whom He taught in Matthew 14 v21 did not only include men and women, but also children (PAIDION). And I am sure that they listened

intently and were helped by what they heard. We can well imagine how children would always flock to a crowd like this to hear what is being said.

- He ministered to a number of them physically and individually – to boys and girls who had physical problems. He loved and cared for them, and wanted to help them.
 - ✓ He cast out the demon from a Gentile girl (Matthew 15 vs 22-28).
 - ✓ He cast out the demon from a boy (Mark 9, vs 14-29). This child was in grave danger (Mark 9, vs 18 & 22) and was completely restored (Mark 9 v27). He had this problem since he was very young (PAIDIOTHEN) – verse 21; and was still a child (PAIDION) – verse 24.
 - ✓ He healed the nobleman’s son (John 4 vs 46-54). And it is interesting to read that this boy believed and trusted the Lord Jesus along with everyone in his home (John 4 v53);
 - ✓ He raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead (Mark 5 vs 38-43).
- He encouraged parents to trust Him with regard to their children and their needs.
 - ✓ He said to the mother of the Gentile girl *“Great is your faith. Let it be to you as you desire”* (Matthew 15 v28).
 - ✓ He said to the father of the demon possessed boy *“If you can believe all things are possible to him who believes”* (Mark 9 v23).
 - ✓ He said to Jairus and his wife *“Do not be afraid, only believe”* (Mark 5 v36).
 - ✓ And it is recorded that the nobleman *“believed the word that Jesus had spoken to him”* (John 4 v50).

And this encourages us to believe that THE LORD JESUS WILL ALSO MEET THE NEEDS OF OUR CHILDREN when we brings those needs to Him.

The Holy Child Jesus

But we could not close our study of the children portrayed in the Bible without thinking about the most important child of all, the perfect child, the Holy Child Jesus (Acts 4 v27) - our Lord Jesus Himself.

The child Jesus is of course very much different from all the other children we have studied.

- He chose to be born (Psalm 40 vs 6-8; Hebrews 10 vs 5-10);
- His birth was predicted (Genesis 3 v15; Isaiah 7 v14);
- He was born at the time He chose (Galatians 4 v4);
- He was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1 v35);
- He was born of a virgin (Isaiah 7 v14; Luke 1 v34);
- He was the perfect union of two natures - human and divine (Romans 1 v3);
- He was given the Holy Spirit without measure (John 3 v34);
- He was full of the Holy Spirit - as a permanent and continuous condition (Luke 4 v1);
- His birth had a definite purpose - He did not just come to live, but to die (Matthew 1 v21).

There never was, and never will be, a child like this.

He was, of course, God but it should be remembered that He was, at one and the same time, a child and completely human. And it is interesting to see Him described in Scripture (Luke 2 vs 17, 21, 27, 40) with the same word PAIDION which we have already noted with reference to other young children.

- His birth was the same as the birth of any other child; his conception was miraculous but His birth was normal.
- He lived in a family like most other children and was obedient to His parents (Luke 2 v51);

- He was circumcised after eight days like any other Jewish boy (Luke 2 v21);
- He was presented to God in the temple at Jerusalem (Luke 2:22-24);
- He asked questions like other children (Luke 2 v46);
- He was filled with wisdom (Luke 2 v40);
- He grew physically like any other child (Luke 2 v40);
- He grew spiritually (Luke 2 v40) in wisdom (Luke 2 v52) and in favour with God and man (Luke 2 v52).

We do not know any other details about His childhood, except for the time He spent in the temple speaking to and listening to the men there (Luke 2 vs 43-50).

We can learn four truths from this special and wonderful child - especially in relation to other children?

- The Lord Jesus deliberately chose to come into our world as a little baby and to grow as a child. He could have come in some other way - for example, as a fully grown adult - but He didn't.

SO IN THIS WAY THE LORD JESUS GIVES DIGNITY AND RESPECT TO CHILDREN.

- He was a child like all other children (yet without sin). SO HE UNDERSTANDS CHILDREN - THEIR NEEDS AND THEIR PROBLEMS.

- The Bible teaches us again and again that the Lord Jesus is our example.

SO HE IS AN EXAMPLE FOR CHILDREN TO IMITATE - ESPECIALLY WITH REGARD TO PARENTAL OBEDIENCE (Luke 2 v51).

- His childhood was important because it was the preparation and first step in His godly life and, finally, in His atoning death.

SO CHILDHOOD TODAY IS IMPORTANT AND A NECESSARY PREPARATION FOR A CHILD'S LIFE AND FOR HIS FUTURE MINISTRY.



SECTION V

AN OUTLINE OF OTHER REFERENCES TO CHILDREN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

*“He commanded our fathers that they should make
them known to their children” Psalm 78, v5b*

OTHER REFERENCES TO CHILDREN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

It is amazing to discover that there are so many references to children in the Bible, and we have already looked in detail at the main passages concerning them. In this section I will list other verses and short passages from the Old Testament and suggest in each case a fact we could conclude from these verses. Where the verses and passages refer definitely and directly to children I will say so, but when there is some other possibility I will make this clear.

I would suggest that you open your Bible and read all these verses and passages with me and see what lessons we can learn about children from them. You might even wish to underline these verses in your Bible so that you can clearly see them and be able to refer to them from time to time.

IT IS A PRIVILEGE TO BE BORN INTO A CHRISTIAN FAMILY

“Then the LORD said to Noah, ‘Come into the ark, you and all YOUR HOUSEHOLD, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation’ “(Genesis 7 v1).

“By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of HIS HOUSEHOLD, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith” (Hebrews 11,v7). These verses show us that God wants families to be saved. The ark was prepared for Noah and his house and was for the saving

of his house or family. God not only wants to save mothers and fathers but also their children – the whole family. Of course the faith of the parents does not save the children, but their teaching and example give their children the privilege of exposure to the Gospel and could, and should, lead to their trusting Jesus Christ. This same truth is stated in Acts 16 v31 when the Phillipian jailer is exhorted to *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”* And we read that *“his house”* was saved not because he believed, but because they, themselves, believed (Acts 16, v34) – helped and encouraged, I am sure, by their father’s faith and example. God wants to see *“household salvation.”*

It is interesting also to see that the command from God to His people before their release from Egypt was to choose and kill *“a lamb for a house”* (Exodus 12 v3).

These verses show us the importance of the Christian family.
“He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children” (Psalm 78, v5b).

PARENTS HAVE A GREAT RESPONSIBILITY

“For I have known him, in order that he may command HIS CHILDREN (BEN) and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him” (Genesis 18 v19).

One of the reasons God chose Abraham to be the founder of His people and the nation of Israel was because He had confidence in him and especially in his ministry and responsibility as a parent. He knew that his children would obey him and follow him so that the new nation would not only be born but would develop and grow. A child taught obedience in the home (as Isaac was) will always be more ready to obey God. It was not enough for Abraham to be faithful but his children and his house also needed to be faithful so that the nation could develop after his death.

And we can see how Abraham taught, influenced and commanded his children by the obedience of his son Isaac in Genesis 22. When Abraham told Isaac what was to happen he did not disobey or run away, He was even willing to die.

On the other hand, the Bible gives us examples of parents who did not teach their children obedience to themselves and to God, and whose children were, as a consequence, ungodly (1st Samuel 3,v13).

This verse shows us that the future of any nation is in the hands of today's children, and that parents and children's workers have the responsibility to teach them and prepare them for that future responsibility.

"He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children" (Psalm 78, v5b).

CHILDREN LEARN THROUGH WHAT THEY SEE

Right from the beginning of the nation of Israel the people were commanded to teach their children - as we have already seen especially in the book of Deuteronomy (see pages 30 to 43). But they were also told to use visual aids when they did so. Visual aids are not a modern invention. On a number of occasions the Israelites were specifically commanded to use objects (or events) which could be seen as an opportunity to teach Bible truths to children. The Hebrew word translated "son" in the following verses is "BEN" - a word which means children of all ages.

- *"Now the LORD said to Moses, 'Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him, and that you may tell in the hearing of YOUR SON AND YOUR SON'S SON the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD.'"* (Exodus 10,vs1-2).

One of the reasons God sent the plagues upon Egypt was to use them as demonstrations of His power and judgment to the children and the future generation.

- *“And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. It will come to pass when you come to the land which the LORD will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. And it shall be, when YOUR CHILDREN (BEN) say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ that you shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.’ So the people bowed their heads and worshiped” (Exodus 12 v24-27).*

One of the reasons for the institution of the Passover was to give the children a vivid visual reminder of how God had redeemed His people from the slavery of Egypt. The Passover is a type of our Lord’s death on the Cross, and the above verses remind us that we should explain Christ’s death to our children – for example, through the Communion service.

- *“Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters. And you shall tell YOUR SON in that day, saying, ‘This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt.’ It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the Lord’s law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt” (Exodus 13 v7, 8 and 9). “But every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb; and if you will not redeem it, then you shall break its neck. And all the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. So it shall be, when **your son** asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is this?’ that you shall say to him, ‘By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exodus 13 v13, 14).*

And the seven days of unleavened bread which followed the Passover and the redemption of the first-born were to be reminders to the children (and especially the sons) of what God had done for them. And we need to keep reminding

our children what God has done for them – especially at the Cross.

- *“When YOUR SON asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the LORD our God has commanded you?’ then you shall say to YOUR SON: ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand’ “ (Deuteronomy 6 v20, 21).*

These verses refer to the laws of God and, while they were heard rather than seen the same principle applies. They were to give the parents and teachers the opportunity to use them to satisfy the curiosity of their children and teach them Bible truths. And we should do the same.

- *“And Joshua said to them: ‘Cross over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and each one of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, that this may be a sign among you when YOUR CHILDREN (BEN) ask in time to come, saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever. And the children of Israel did so, just as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones from the midst of the Jordan, as the LORD had spoken to Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, and carried them over with them to the place where they lodged, and laid them down there” (Joshua 4 v5-8).*

“And those twelve stones which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal. Then he spoke to the children of Israel, saying: “When YOUR CHILDREN (BEN) ask their fathers in time to come, saying, ‘What are these stones?’ Then you shall let YOUR CHILDREN (BEN) know, saying, ‘Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land’; for the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as

the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over” (Joshua 4 v20-23).

One of God’s greatest acts was to make a path for His people through the river Jordan into the Promised Land. And God wanted all the children and the future generations to know what He did. So He instituted this wonderful visual aid with 12 large stones. It was most important that their children should know all that God had done for them and their nation – their deliverance from Egypt, their experiences in the desert, the crossing of the Red Sea (and now the Jordan), the manna, the tabernacle etc – so that through these stories the children would learn to trust God. And we have the same responsibility to help our children to know what God has done and to trust Him.. And it is interesting that all these visuals which God commanded His people to institute invariably led to the curiosity of the children and to their questions concerning them. And these questions gave the opportunity to use the visuals to teach the truths of which they were signs and emblems.

The use of visual aids is a wonderful way. instituted by God, to teach Bible truth to children (and you should welcome their questions).

“He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children” (Psalm 78, v5b).

CHILDREN NEED TO HEAR ABOUT GOD’S JUDGMENT

“And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the LITTLE ONES (TAPH) and the strangers who were living among them” (Joshua 8 v34, 35).

The whole nation – all the people – were assembled to hear the reading of the law. And that included the children – the little ones. They were also to hear it. And this command to teach

the law to the children can also be found in Deuteronomy 6 v1, 2, 6 and 9; Deuteronomy 11 v13, 19; Deuteronomy 31 v12 and Psalm 78 v5. And in Joshua 8 vs 34 & 35 it is specifically stated that both the blessings and cursings of the law (as found in Deuteronomy 29) were to be read and therefore heard by the children. There are some people who feel that children should not be taught about sin and judgment – that they should only hear about God’s love. These verses show that this is not a Biblical principle.

The possibility of children being judged by God can be seen in Jeremiah 6 v11: *“Therefore I am full of the fury of the LORD. I am weary of holding it in. I will pour it out on THE CHILDREN (OLEL) outside, and on the assembly of young men together; For even the husband shall be taken with the wife, The aged with him who is full of days.”* But, at the same time, the previous verse makes it clear that all those who were judged had deliberately turned from God and His Word. They were guilty – not innocent.

The same possibility of judgment is found in the prophet’s vision in Ezekiel 9 v6: *“Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and LITTLE CHILDREN (TAPH) and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary. So they began with the elders who were before the temple.”*

But we see again that this is the result and consequence of sin and rebellion (Ezekiel 9 v4, 9).

Children need to know about sin and God’s judgment – but it must be presented in the right way and with love

“He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children” (Psalm 78, v5b).

BABIES WHO DIE GO TO BE WITH THE LORD

“So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate. Then his servants said to him, ‘What is this that you have done? You fasted and wept

for THE CHILD (YELED) while he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food.' And he said, 'While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? **I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.**" (2 Samuel 12 v20-23).

These are interesting verses. David's recently born baby had died and at first he was absolutely shattered and inconsolable. And then David realized that he would see his little boy again one day in Heaven. He would "go to him". And David was reassured and at peace.

But the interesting conclusion for us is that infants who die go to Heaven and this is a wonderful assurance for all parents whose babies have died.

It is wonderful to know that every little one who has not yet reached the age of accountability goes to Heaven if they die. "He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children" (Psalm 78, v5b).

CHILDREN CAN DO EVIL

"Jehoiachin was EIGHT YEARS OLD when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months and ten days. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD" (2 Chronicles 36, v9). This is a remarkable verse because it states that this boy was only eight years old when he became king, and he reigned only three months and a few days. Yet during these months "he did evil in the sight of the Lord." How sad! However we should note that in 2 Kings 24, v8 it says that Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign. The NIV translation of 2 Chronicles 36,v9 also reads eighteen, although in the margin it states that most Hebrew manuscripts say eight. Many Bible scholars believe, from other references to Jehoiachin in Scripture that eighteen is the more accurate reading.

This verse shows us, according to this translation, that it is possible for an eight-year-old child to deliberately and consciously sin and do evil in God's sight.

"He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children" (Psalm 78, v5b).

OUR CHILDREN NEED OUR PRAYERS

*"Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us **and our LITTLE ONES (TAPH)** and all our possessions" (Ezra 8 v21).*

Ezra and his people asked God to show them the right way for their little ones to go – and so should we.

We should pray that they will be protected from evil influences, circumstances and people – and that they may come to trust, love and serve the Saviour of sinners Who bled, died and rose again for them.

He is *"the way"* – the right way and the only way (John 14 v6).

This verse reminds us that it is essential to pray for our children.

"He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children" (Psalm 78, v5b).

CHILDREN CAN PRAISE GOD

"Out of the mouth of BABES (OLEL) and nursing INFANTS (YANAQ) You have ordained strength" (Psalm 8 v2)

This is the verse which the Lord Jesus quoted in Matthew 21 v15 when the Pharisees criticized the children who were praising Him. What took place that day in the temple was on the one hand a fulfillment of this prophecy and, on the other hand, something which brought much joy and delight to the Lord Jesus.

We also read in Nehemiah 12 v43 about children rejoicing and giving thanks to God at the dedication of the newly built walls (Nehemiah 12, v27) for all that He had done.

"Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and the CHILDREN (YELED) also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off" (Nehemiah 12 v43).

And there are two other verses in the Old Testament which speak about children praising and thanking God and rejoicing in Him: Psalm 148 vs12 & 13 *“Both young men and maidens; old men and CHILDREN (NAAR). Let them praise the name of the Lord, for His name alone is exalted; His glory is above the earth and heaven.”*

Zechariah 10 v7 *“Those of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as if with wine. Yes, their CHILDREN (BEN) shall see it and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the Lord”.*

The Lord Jesus reveals truth to little children and loves to hear their praise.

“He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children” (Psalm 78, v5b).

WE NEED TO TEACH TRUTH TO OUR CHILDREN

David in the Psalms outlines two great truths about childhood.

➤ *“For You are my hope, O Lord GOD; You are my trust from my YOUTH. O God, You have taught me from my YOUTH; and to this day I declare Your wondrous works” (Psalm 71 verses 5 and 17).*

David tells us in this Psalm that he started to be taught by God when he was still young and that He trusted Him when he was still young. The Hebrew word for youth is *NEURIM* and could apply to teenage years or the early years of manhood.

➤ *“Come, you CHILDREN (BEN) listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34 v11-14).*

And now David wanted to share with children all he had learned especially the three secrets of a happy life – see good, do good and be good. And he knows, and teaches them, that this can only come through recognizing and experiencing the fear of the Lord and a personal relationship with Him.

And we need to follow David’s example – and teach these truths to the children.

“He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children” (Psalm 78, v5b).

CHILDHOOD IS THE BEST TIME TO TRUST CHRIST

“Remember now your Creator in the days of your YOUTH, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’” (Ecclesiastes 12 v1).

Solomon in this verse gives his advice, based upon a lifetime of experience, much of which was sad, - that young people should remember and trust God their Creator when they are young, and when they have the best years of their lives still ahead of them. The time will come that, if they don't do this, they will not give God the correct place in their lives and they will have no more interest in Him. The Hebrew word BECHUROTH (youth) is only used here and in Ecclesiastes 11,v9.

Youth is the time to start living for God and, if young people don't do this, they are less likely to do so at a later date.

“He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children” (Psalm 78, v5b).

CHILDREN NEED US

In the book of Lamentations, Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, gives a three point challenge concerning the children in Jerusalem and their needs. While these needs were physical we can see the spiritual application for children today and they present a challenge to us.

- *“My eyes fail with tears, my heart is troubled; my bile is poured on the ground because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, because the CHILDREN (OLEL) and the INFANTS (YANAQ) faint in the streets of the city. They say to their mothers, ‘Where is grain and wine?’ As they swoon like the wounded in the streets of the city, as their life is poured out in their mothers’ bosom” (Lamentations 2, v11-12).*

In these verses Jeremiah describes the sad PLIGHT of the children:

- *“Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches; pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord. Lift your hands toward Him For the life of your YOUNG CHILDREN (OLEL), who faint from hunger at the head of every street” (Lamentations 2, v19).*

In this verse Jeremiah requests PRAYER for the children:

- *“The tongue of the infant clings to the roof of its mouth for thirst; the YOUNG CHILDREN (YANAQ) ask for bread, But no one breaks it for them” (Lamentations 4 v4).*

In this verse Jeremiah tells us of the PROVISION these children need – and are not receiving.

We need to see the PLIGHT of our children. We need to PRAY for them. And then we must PROVIDE them with the Gospel and the spiritual food they need.

“He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children” (Psalm 78, v5b).

GOD HAS A WONDERFUL PLAN FOR OUR CHILDREN

“All your CHILDREN (BEN) shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your CHILDREN (BEN)” (Isaiah 54 v13).

What a wonderful promise for every parent to claim – and also for Sunday School teachers and children’s workers to claim:

- God wants our children to understand the truths of His Word and He is ready and willing to teach them through the Holy Spirit.
- God wants our children, as a result to enjoy spiritual peace and salvation – and these will be theirs through what they learn.

Pray that this will be true of your children.

“He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children” (Psalm 78, v5b).

GOD OFTEN CALLS THOSE WHO ARE YOUNG

“But the LORD said to me: ‘Do not say, I am a YOUTH’, for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak” (Jeremiah 1 v7).

What did Jeremiah mean? Was he really young at this time? Or did he feel like a child – “inexperienced and with little ability”. We don’t know. The Hebrew word is NAAR which can refer to children any-where between the ages of two and twenty, and it is translated as “child” in the King James Version. It is also used, for example, to describe a little child in 1 Samuel 1, v22 and 1 Samuel 2,v21. But we do know from Jeremiah 1v5 that Jeremiah had been set aside for his ministry even before his birth. **We should never doubt God’s ability to call children to His service.**

“He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children” (Psalm 78, v5b).

GOD LOVES CHILDREN

“And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left; and much livestock?” (Jonah 4 v11).

This verse gives an interesting insight into the reason why God did not judge the city of Nineveh. There were more than 120,000 people in that city who could not “discern between their right hand and their left hand.” This phrase could only refer to little children who had not reached an age of accountability and it shows how much God cares for such children.

God loves the little ones.

“He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children” (Psalm 78, v5b).

GOD HAS A PLAN FOR HIS PEOPLE

“The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel. Hear this, you elders, and give ear, all you inhabitants of the land! Has

anything like this happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? Tell your children (BEN) about it, Let your children (BEN) tell their children (BEN) and their children (BEN) another generation" (Joel 1 v1-3).

These verses give a clear outline of God's plan for His people and shows the responsibility of parents and adults towards the children. Each generation should reach and teach the next generation. And this verse stresses again how much the nations and families of the future depend upon the children of today and how we minister to them.

Jonathan Edwards was a great preacher and man of God in USA about 200 years ago. He was also a godly father who taught his children the Word of God. Someone has studied his family line over the generations which followed and has discovered that among his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, and down to the present day, there has been a succession of preachers, missionaries, doctors and lawyers - and many of them true believers. This is the way God wants it to be.

God's plan is that each generation should reach the next generation when they are still young.

"He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children" (Psalm 78, v5b).

WE MUST NOT LEAVE THE CHILDREN OUT

"Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the people, Sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children (TAPH) and NURSING BABES (YANAQ); let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, and the bride from her dressing room. Let the priests, who minister to the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar; let them say, 'Spare Your people, O LORD, And do not give Your heritage to reproach, that the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?' " (Joel 2 v15-17).

A solemn assembly was an opportunity for all the people to hear God's Word, to pray and especially to repent. These verses tell us that this assembly for prayer and repentance was also for children and even for babies (who obviously couldn't repent but could still participate and be influenced by the atmosphere). The very young could in this way witness the repentance of those who were older and could see a graphic example of sin. The older children who had sinned willfully should repent along with the others. Modern psychology would say "Leave the children out, it's no place for them." God says, "Bring them in and encourage their participation."

Children, even little children, can understand sin and turn from it.

"He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children" (Psalm 78, v5b).

CHILDREN BRING JOY

"Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of BOYS (YELED) and GIRLS (YALDAH) playing in its streets.' " (Zechariah 8 v4 and 5).

What a beautiful picture painted by the prophet. Bible scholars differ concerning what the prophet is pointing forward to.

- Was this prophecy fulfilled when God's people returned from captivity to Jerusalem?
- Will this prophecy be fulfilled during the millennium?
- Is this a picture of the New Jerusalem and Heaven?

We cannot be sure but we can be sure that, wherever it is, this verse tells us that there will be children there, and they will be happy.

"He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children" (Psalm 78, v5b).



SECTION VI

**AN OUTLINE OF
OTHER REFERENCES
TO CHILDREN IN
THE NEW TESTAMENT**

*“Take heed that you do not despise one of these
little ones” Matthew 18 v10a*

OTHER REFERENCES TO CHILDREN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We have already studied the two main passages in the New Testament concerning children:

- Matthew 18, v1-14 (with Mark 9, vs33-37 and Luke 9, vs44-48).
- Mark 10,vs13-16 (with Matthew 19,vs13-15 and Luke 18, vs15-17).

But there are a number of other verses and short passages in the New Testament which will help us understand more about children and what the Bible teaches about them.

As an introduction we need to remind ourselves of the main Greek words which are translated as “children” in the New Testament:

- The word BREPHOS means a baby or infant although it is sometimes translated as “child” e.g. 2 Timothy 3, v15.
- The word PAIDION means a little child and this is the word used generally with reference to children e.g. Matthew 18, v3; 19, v13, 14. It is a diminutive of the word “PAIS”

It is used for John the Baptist and Moses as babies (Luke 1 v59, 66, 76, 80 and Hebrews 11 v23). It is also used for the Lord Jesus when He was young (Matthew 2, v8, 9; Luke 2, v27) and of the twelve year old girl in Mark 5, v41.

Occasionally this word is used as an expression of endearment e.g. the aged John uses it towards all believers (1 John 2 v13, 18). But this use is rare, and the context makes it clear when it is used in this way. But John also uses it in 1 John 2, v13 where the context indicates he is actually speaking to little children.

- The word PAIS is a general word for children and could refer to those between the ages of seven and fourteen or earlier (Matthew 2v16; Matthew 21,v15).
- The word TEKNON is often translated children and is used in a very wide sense with little or no reference to age. (Matthew 10 v21; 2 John 1 v4)
- The word TEKNION is a diminutive of TEKNON and is usually translated “little children”. This word is also used by the apostle John in his first epistle as an expression of endearment to believers in general e.g. 2, vs1, 12, 28; 3, vs7, 18; 4, v4; 5, v21; and in the same way by the Lord Jesus in John 13,v33, and by Paul in Galatians 4,v19.
- The word MIKROS means “little ones”. Generally the context shows when it is a word for little children (e.g. Matthew 18 v6), but there are times when it is translated “small” and may refer to children or to those who are little in importance or standing (e.g. Acts 26 v22; Revelation 11 v18; 13 v16).

As we study the verses and passage which follow we will refer to the Greek words used to help us understand what the Holy Spirit is teaching us.

GOD ENABLES CHILDREN TO UNDERSTAND

“At that time Jesus answered and said, ‘I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to BABES. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.’ “ (Matthew 11 v25 and 26).

The word “babe” used here is BREPHOS, and there is no reason why we cannot interpret and understand this as it is written. God reveals truth to those who are really young, and are open and willing to receive it.

Of course, while this is the primary understanding of the verses, it is equally true to deduct from these verses that it is those adults who are babes in their simplicity, openness and trustfulness who understand truth rather than those who try to understand truth only through the use of their mighty intellect and intelligence.

Very often it is the more intelligent who understand the Word of God least. And you will often get a depth of spiritual understanding in a child which you will not get in many adults. They grasp and believe a truth (like the truth that God is a Trinity) when an adult is still trying to work it out. Our problem is more often getting adults to accept and believe what we are teaching.

But the application for us is, surely, that **God does reveal truth to little children and helps them to understand it.**

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones” (Matthew 18 v10a).

CHILDREN CAN PRAISE THE LORD

“But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and THE CHILDREN (PAIS) crying out in the temple and saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ they were indignant and said to Him, ‘Do You hear what these are saying?’ And Jesus said to them, “Yes. Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of BABES (NEPIOS) and NURSING INFANTS (THELAZO) You have perfected praise?’” (Matthew 21 v15, 16).

“Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger” (Psalm 8 v2).

The religious leaders were angry at the children (PAIS) who were praising the Lord Jesus, but He gladly accepted their praise and told the leaders that they were fulfilling Old Testament prophecy as found in Psalm 8 v2. The very young were praising Him and He compared them to babes and infants. The Greek word used here for babes is NEPIOS and refers to babies who cannot yet speak. And the second word (THELAZO) means children who are being nursed or suckled.

We can see in these two verses:

➤ **The origin of this praise**

The praise which came from the lips of these children originated with God - *“YOU have ordained”* - *“YOU have perfected”*.

➤ **The channel of this praise**

It pleased God to use the CHILDREN to praise the Lord Jesus in contrast to the criticism and rejection of the religious leaders.

➤ **The purpose of this praise**

The children's praise was a source of comfort and STRENGTH to the Saviour (Matthew 21 v16), and a strong stumbling stone to His enemies (Psalm 8 v2).

Mr A C Capon writes:

"From these verses we learn that children are capable of three essentials for true conversion:

- ✓ *Faith in the Saviour. They called Him "Son of David". This was a theological term and meant the Promised Messiah, the Redeemer of God's people, the Saviour. They believed in Him and in His claims.*
- ✓ *Commitment to Him. "Hosanna!" they cried, while others held back. They acknowledged Him with all their hearts. While adults are often reluctant to commit themselves to Christ, children (once they understand what is required of them) are sometimes almost too eager.*
- ✓ *A life of perfect praise. It would appear, from the words of the Lord, that children are sometimes capable of a more perfect act of praise than are adults. The reason is in Matthew 18 v4 – they are the most humble, the least contaminated by a desire for personal glory".*

We have already seen that there are also a number of other verses in the Old Testament which speak about children praising and thanking and rejoicing in God – Psalm 148 v12 & 13; Nehemiah 12 v43, and Zechariah 10 v7.

And the important truth for us from these verses is that **the Lord Jesus wants, and is very pleased with, the praises of children – little children..**

"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones"
(Matthew 18 v10a).

DO NOT OFFEND THE CHILDREN

“Then He said to the disciples, ‘It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!’ It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these LITTLE ONES” (Luke 17 v1, 2).

Luke briefly records in chapter 9 v46-48 part of what happened in Matthew 18 v1-14. He returns again to the same subject in Luke 17, vs.1 & 2. These two verses in Luke 17 refer to what he had said in Luke 9 and they show that **the Lord Jesus came back to the subject of offending little ones (MIKROS)** and causing them to stumble. This subject was so important to Him that He returned to it in these two verses and repeated His warning.

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones.” (Matthew 18 v10a).

THE LORD JESUS LOVES CHILDREN

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your CHILDREN together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate” (Matthew 23 v37, 38).

Several Bible scholars believe that the children referred to here are, in the context, descendants of those who killed the prophets in past years.

However it is possible that the Lord Jesus is referring here to literal children – *“your children” (TEKNON)*. This word is often used in a general sense and could refer to children of any age. If the Lord Jesus is thinking of literal children it is interesting to see three things:

- He wanted to gather them “under His wings”.
- The people of Jerusalem did not want Him to.
- As a result they would be destroyed.

The Lord Jesus loves children and wants them to be saved.

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones.” (Matthew 18 v10a).

CHILDREN CAN BE SAVED

“When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, ‘Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.’ The nobleman said to Him, ‘Sir, come down before my CHILD (PAIDION) dies!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go your way; your son lives.’ So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, ‘Your son lives!’ Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, ‘Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.’ So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, “Your son lives.” And he himself believed, and his whole household” (John 4 v47-53).

This is the story of a wonderful miracle. A nobleman was concerned for his son, for his child (PAIDION), and he asked the Lord Jesus to heal him, and the Lord Jesus just spoke and the boy was healed.

But an even more wonderful miracle took place. Verse 53 tells us that he *“himself believed and his whole house.”* His son, his child, was part of that house. So the child must have believed and this gives us further evidence **that a child can believe and be saved.**

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones” (Matthew 18 v10a).

THE LAMBS NEED TO BE FED

“So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Feed My LAMBS.’ He said to him again a second time, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me? He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love

You.’ He said to him, ‘Tend My sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed My sheep’ (John 21 verses 15-17).

The Lord Jesus had risen from the dead and he had a special meeting with Peter the disciple who had denied him three times. He asked Peter three times if he really loved him – and three times Peter told Him that he did. Each time Peter expressed his love the Lord Jesus gave him a command:

- *“Feed my lambs”.*
- *“Feed my sheep”.*
- *“Feed my sheep”.*

And it is important to remember that before the Lord Jesus gave these commands He wanted to know if Peter really loved Him. Our love for Him must precede our service for Him.

It is significant that the first command was to *“feed my lambs”*. The Greek word *“feed”* used here means *“to pastor”* or *“to give food”*. It is also used in verse 17 in the third command..

(The word *“feed”* in the second command (v 16) is rather *“to care for, govern and guide”*).

The Greek word translated *“lambs”* is ARNION and it means *“a little lamb.”* Peter was not just to feed lambs; he was to feed little lambs. (It is interesting that, apart from this verse, this word is only found in the Book of Revelation where it is used many times as a title of the Lord Jesus).

What is the difference between lambs and sheep? It is obvious. lambs and especially *“little lambs”* are young; sheep are old. It seems a logical conclusion to say that Peter’s first command was to feed and look after the children, the little lambs. And then twice he was commanded to look after the adults, the sheep. (It is interesting by the way to note that **one third** of the world’s population at any time consists of children).

The expression *“my lambs”* undoubtedly refers to the tender and young – and these would include both those who are young in Christian experience and those who are young in years.

And we also read in the Old Testament that God has a special love and care for these lambs. *“He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.”* (Isaiah 40, v11).

Andrew Murray wrote about *“The deep importance and the blessed reward of giving first place to the little ones of the flock. The prosperity of the church specially depends upon their feeding of the lambs. The first priority and concern of every shepherd is always for the lambs. They are the sheep of the future; and his first responsibility is to feed them because his future depends upon them. Also they are often incapable of feeding themselves. There is always something attractive about lambs and their helplessness which encourages special love – and, as a result of that, special attention. The sheep who make up two thirds of the population need shepherding (John 21 v16) and they also need food (John 21 v17). But the first priority and attention always need to be directed towards the little ones who on their own are so helpless and so defenseless. Any farmer or shepherd will confirm this”.*

Dr. Richard Lenski wrote *“Jesus mentions the lambs first but certainly not because they are less valuable or require less care; rather the reverse is true. Jesus here places His most loved possessions into Peter’s care. The spiritual feeding and nourishment of children is here made the first part of the great apostolic office.”*

Matthew Henry said when he preached to pastors in 1713, *“Let the ministers of Christ look upon themselves as under a charge to feed the lambs of God’s flock either publicly or privately, either in their solemn religious assemblies or in meetings on purpose for the work.”*

Charles Spurgeon wrote, *“The best of the church are none too good for this work. Do not think because you have other service to do that therefore you should take no interest in this form of holy work, but kindly, according to your opportunities, stand ready to help the little ones, and to cheer those whose chief calling is to attend to them. To us all this message comes, ‘Feed My Lambs’. To the minister, and to all who have any knowledge of the things of God, the commission is*

given. See to it that you look after the children that are in Christ Jesus. Peter was a leader among believers, yet he must feed the lambs."

Is it not the responsibility of the shepherd to give first place and priority to those who are most weak and most helpless – those who need most help? All shepherds know and practice this. So should Peter and so should we.

- The lambs are the future of the flock.
- They need food but cannot find pasture for themselves.
- They cannot fend for themselves.
- They depend on others for everything.

These verses teach us **that we should feed the children and give them the spiritual food they need.** Even if we don't give them priority and first place we should at least give them equality in time, prayer and ministry.

"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones."(Matthew 18 v10a).

ALL THE FAMILY

"And when she and her HOUSEHOLD were baptized, she begged us, saying ,if you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay. So she persuaded us"(Acts 16, v15). "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and ALL HIS FAMILY were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them, and he rejoiced, having believed with ALL HIS HOUSEHOLD" (Acts 16, vs32-34).

What a thrill and joy it was for Paul to see Lydia and the Phillipian jailer trust the Lord for salvation. And how wonderful it must have been when he saw that everyone in each of these two households were baptized. Why were they all baptized? Because they all believed. They trusted in the Lord Jesus ... *"having believed with all his household."* It is, at least, possible that children were there and that they were included

- the children of Lydia, or the jailer, or the children of their servants - or all three!

"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones."(Matthew 18 v10a).

THE CHILDREN OF BELIEVERS ARE PRIVILEGED

"For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife if sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy." (1 Corinthians 7 v14)

"Then Peter said to them, repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." (Acts 2, vs.38-39).

These verses are explained in detail on pages 224 to 228

EVANGELIZE EVERYBODY

"Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to SMALL and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come; that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26, vs2-23).

Paul gives the pattern of his ministry in these two verses. He evangelized the great ("MEGAS") and the small ("MIKROS"). Was he thinking of those who were physically small and big; or those who were socially small and big - or both? The important conclusion is this **his ministry was to everyone**. That is the principle established in these verses.

"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones."(Matthew 18 v10a).

CHILDREN CAN BE SAINTS

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the SAINTS who are in Ephesus, and FAITHFUL in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 1, v1).

“CHILDREN (TEKNON), obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother which is the first commandment with promise that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth” (Ephesians 6 v1-3).

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is addressed, as we can see in the first verse, to the saints who live and worship there. And we know that the word “saint” is another name for “believer”. Every believer is a saint and every saint is a believer. It’s as if Paul starts off his letter by writing “Dear saints, dear believers.” The first section of the letter is addressed to **all** the believers at Ephesus. But in chapter 5 v22 Paul starts to speak to separate groups of those believers:

- To wives (chapter 5 v22-24).
- To husbands (chapter 5 v25-33).
- To fathers (chapter 6 v4).
- To servants (chapter 6 v5-8).
- To masters (chapter 6 v9).

We must agree that all these groups are believers because the letter is addressed directly to believers and each group is addressed directly in these verses.

But did you notice the first three verses of chapter 6? In these verses Paul addresses the children directly. He uses here and in verse 4 the word “TEKNON” which is a more general word for children; but the context in verse 4 here clearly indicates that Paul is speaking about young children – children in the church, children in the family. Therefore and logically these children must have been believers. The children Paul addressed were *“in the Lord”* – they had come to Jesus Christ and trusted Him as Saviour.

It is interesting also to see what Paul commanded these believing children to do:

- *“Obey your parents in the Lord.”*
If children learn to obey their parents they will find it easier to obey God.
- *“Honour your father and mother.”* They need to give them the respect they deserve. And the more they honour their parents the easier it will be to learn to honour and respect God.

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the SAINTS and FAITHFUL brethren in Christ who are in Colosse: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Colossians 1 v1 and 2).

“CHILDREN (TEKNON), obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord” (Colossians 3 v20).

We can learn the same lessons from these verses in Colossians as we did from the equivalent verses in Ephesians.

There must have been believing, saved children in the church at Colosse because Paul addressed them directly.

And Paul also commands them to obey their parents. This goes again to show how important parental obedience is for children and especially for saved children.

These verses in Ephesians and Colossians show us then **children can be believers**. While the apostles do not discuss child evangelism as such, it is evident that children were being taught to put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and to obey Him as part of the body of believers.

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones” (Matthew 18 v10a).

PARENTS HAVE A GREAT RESPONSIBILITY

“And you, fathers, do not provoke your CHILDREN (TEKNON) to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6 v4).

“Fathers, do not provoke your CHILDREN (TEKNON), lest they become discouraged” (Colossians 3 v21).

The best place for children to be taught the Word of God is in the home, the Christian home. Paul gives the fathers in both churches a very clear and definite twofold command.

- They were told that there was something they must not do: *“....do not provoke your children to wrath”*
They should not make their children angry unnecessarily. Children need discipline but only when it is necessary and when it will have good results in their lives.
- Paul also gives the Ephesian fathers a second more positive command to *“bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”*:
 - ✓ *“Nurture”* is an encouragement to them and means to help them grow.
 - ✓ *“Admonition”* is a warning to them and means to help them avoid things which are wrong.

But 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 Saviour.

All fathers and mothers have an awesome responsibility.

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones” (Matthew 18 v10a).

WE NEED TO START EARLY

“But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from CHILDHOOD (BREPPOS) you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3 v14 and 15).

These verses show us how important it is for children to be exposed to, to learn, understand and know the Word of God – when they are still young. And on the basis of that knowledge they can believe and be saved as Timothy was.

But it was his mother and grandmother who laid the foundation of Timothy’s knowledge and salvation by teaching him the *“holy Scriptures”* (2 Timothy 1 v5) and they did so *“from a child”*, or

“from childhood”. The word used here is BREPHOS – a babe or infant.. This also shows us that even before a child can know and understand the Scriptures he can be exposed to them and to “a Scriptural atmosphere”. No matter how young he is he should still be there when the Word of God is read. Even to see his mother and grandmother handle the Word of God reverently, and to bow their heads in prayer, will have a lasting effect on the very young.

“It is never too early or soon to start”.

Have you heard the story about the woman who came to the famous evangelist D L Moody and asked him when she should start teaching the Word of God to her child? He asked her how old her child was and when she replied five years old he said “Hurry home woman, you are already five years too late!”

These verses remind us to **start teaching the Word of God to our children as early as possible.**

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones” (Matthew 18 v10a).

CHILDREN CAN BE BELIEVERS

“If a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having FAITHFUL CHILDREN (TEKNON) not accused of dissipation or insubordination” (Titus 1 v6).

As Paul outlines the qualifications of an elder he includes one concerning his children (TEKNON). His children must not be accused of riot or unruly. If they are, he should not be an elder. He cannot “rule” the church if he cannot “rule” his family. But notice also that Paul says that his children should be “*faithful*” and this word means “believing”. His children should be believing and this shows us once again **that children can be believers.**

The elders cannot, of course, control their children when they grow up and are beyond parental control. But surely the influence and discipline of an elder’s home will also help them through adult years.

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones” (Matthew 18 v10a).

CHILDREN CAN KNOW GOD

“I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, LITTLE CHILDREN (PAIDION), because you have known the Father” (1 John 2 v13).

This is a very interesting verse. Throughout the letter the aged apostle John has addressed all believers as little children (TEKNION). For example 1 John 2 v1 and 2 v12. TEKNION is the diminutive of TEKNON and means “little children”. This is the affectionate word and term of endearment this dear old man used to express his love and concern for the many believers who would read his letter and who were much younger than him in years and Christian experience.

But in 1 John 2 v13 John uses the word PAIDION – the actual word for little children, instead of TEKNION, and it seems obvious for two reasons that he is thinking here of children:

- Because he uses the word PAIDION.
- Because of the context of the verse in which it is used. He first of all addresses the fathers and then young men and then little children. These are three distinct age groups.

A number of Bible scholars believe that John is thinking here of believers at different stages of spiritual growth.

If this is so, the words “little children” could refer to “immature ones” – still growing and under the authority of teachers and leaders. However, it is certainly possible, and even probable, that the verse should be read and understood as referring, primarily, to literal children for the two reasons I have given.

And notice how John describes the children he is writing to. He writes that they *“have known the Father”* and that is salvation. And so we see yet another Bible verse which tells us **that children can be saved - and they can know the Father.**

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones” (Matthew 18 v10a).



SECTION VII

**BIBLICAL ANSWERS
TO
QUESTIONS ABOUT
CHILDREN**

*“Even so it is not the will of your Father
who is in heaven that one of these little ones
should perish.” Matthew 18:14*

BIBLICAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ABOUT CHILDREN

Those who work with children have many questions and these questions need to be answered. Some of these questions are outlined in the introduction to this book. And we want to use the Bible to answer these questions. That is why we, first of all, studied the five main passages in the Bible, then looked at children portrayed in the Bible and lastly worked our way through many verses in the Bible about children. We are now in a position to answer these questions using, as our guide, what we have learned from the Bible.

I have selected a number of these questions and have sought to answer each one in four different ways:

- First of all by seeing if there are any **specific** Bible verses which give the answer to the question asked. These should be verses which specifically mention children.
- Secondly, by seeing if there are other verses which also deal with this question and, while not specifically mentioning children by name, **include** children in what they teach.
- Having given the Bible teaching in answer to the question it is necessary, then, to look at the answer from the point of view of experience. What can we learn from observation, experience and examination? Notice, however, that it is essential to be clear on the Bible teaching concerning any subject before looking at it in the context of experience. Exposition must always precede experience (and not the reverse). Correct experience will always be based upon, and agree with, the correct exegesis of Bible truth.
- Lastly, we will see if well-known Christian leaders of the past and present have any comments to make on the subject.

I trust that in these four ways you will find the answers to your questions.

QUESTION 1

IS IT IMPORTANT TO TEACH CHILDREN THE WORD OF GOD?

INTRODUCTION

Some people consider the task of teaching children the Word of God to be of little importance. There is also a trend in some Sunday Schools and children's work away from the actual teaching of the Word of God. This can be seen in some of the Sunday School literature being produced today.

It is important therefore to understand the biblical answer to this question.

ANSWER

There are many such verses.

➤ SPECIFIC BIBLE VERSES which refer to the importance of teaching children

✓ The Old Testament

- *"TRAIN up a **child** (NAAR) in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22 v6). "Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And TEACH THEM to **your children (BEN)** and **your grandchildren**, especially concerning the day you stood before the LORD your God in Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may **LEARN** to **FEAR** Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach **their children (BEN)**" (Deuteronomy 4 v9, 10).*
- *"You shall TEACH THEM diligently to **your children (BEN)**, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6 v7).*

- “Gather the people together, men and women and **little ones (TAPH)**, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may **HEAR** and that they may **LEARN TO FEAR** the Lord your God and carefully **OBSERVE** all the words of this law, and that their **children**, who have not known it may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess.” (Deuteronomy 31, v12-13).
- “We will not hide them from **their children (BEN)** TELLING to **the generation to come** the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should **MAKE THEM KNOWN** to **their children (BEN)**; **that the generation to come might know them, The children(BEN)** who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to **their children(BEN)**” (Psalm 78 v4-6).

Joel 1 v3 tells of God’s plans and method: “TELL your **children (BEN)** about it, let your **children** TELL their **children**, and their **children** another generation.”

✓ The New Testament

- “... **From a child** (this word **BREPHOS** means “infant”) you **HAVE KNOWN** the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise onto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3 v15).
 - “And you, fathers, do not provoke **your children (TEKNON)** to wrath, but **BRING THEM UP** in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6 v4).
 - “At that time Jesus answered and said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have **REVEALED** them to **babes(BREPHOS)**” (Matthew 11 v25).
- OTHER SCRIPTURES which include children but which do not specifically mention them:

- “Go therefore and MAKE DISCIPLES of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28 v19).
- “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and PREACH the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16 v15).
- “Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to **small** and great, SAYING no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come” (Acts 26 v22).
(The word “small” or “MIKROS” at least includes children).
- “Who desires **all** men to be saved and to come to THE KNOWLEDGE of the truth” (1 Timothy 2 v4).

Both in the Old and New Testaments children were neither neglected, nor excluded, in the preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

➤ EXPERIENCE WITH CHILDREN teaches us that it is dangerous to wait until the child is grown before teaching him the Word of God and the claims of Christ. Materialism, atheism, sects and crime are all trying to win the children and influence them for evil. They do not wait until the children are grown. Childhood is that part of life when one is most open to influence and teaching, that time of life when one learns much of all he will ever know, and that period of life when one’s basic personality and habits are formed.

One expert writes, “Childhood is the age of learning things. It is the acquisitive age. Minds are never so alert. Memories never so retentive as at this time. It has been said **that a child of seven has received three fourths of his education.** This is the time to teach eternal things, to bring that young life to the Eternal Teacher of eternal things Who alone can instruct in the way of God.”

It is therefore necessary to teach children the Word of God and seek to point them to Christ, the only sure Foundation for a life of purpose and of value, and for a life lived to the glory of God.

Children are open and ready to listen. We should teach them the Word of God now, and not wait until they are older, and harder to reach. When children are young, their life habits are being established. It is much easier to train a young sapling than an old tree.

*“Before a child has reached to seven
Teach him well the way to Heaven
Better still the work will thrive
If he learns before he’s five.”*

➤ **COMMENTS FROM CHRISTIAN LEADERS:**

- ✓ *Martin Luther said: “No one should become a father unless he is able to instruct his children in the Ten Commandments and in the Gospels, so that he might bring up true Christians. Children should be brought up in the fear of God. If the Kingdom of God is to come in power, we must begin with the children and teach them from the very cradle. See to it that you first of all have your children instructed in spiritual things.*

It is hard to make old dogs docile, yet that is what the ministry works at, and must work at, in great part in vain. Young trees, though some may break in the process, are more easily bent and trained. Therefore, let it be considered one of the greatest virtues on earth, faithfully to train the children of others, which duty but very few parents attend to themselves. I am deeply moved when I see that young boys and girls can pray, believe and speak more of God and Christ than they ever could before. We must have ordinary pastors who will teach the Gospel and Catechism to the young and to the ignorant”

- ✓ *Matthew Henry wrote: “It is of great happiness to know the Holy Scriptures from our childhood. The age of childhood is the learning age; and those who would get true learning must get it out of the Scriptures.”*

- ✓ Billy Sunday wrote, *"The only way you will ever solve the problem of the masses is by getting hold of the children."*
- ✓ Charles H. Spurgeon wrote: *"What a mercy it will be if our children are thoroughly grounded in the doctrine of redemption by Christ! If they are warned against the false gospels of this evil age, and if they are taught to rest on the eternal rock of Christ's finished work, we may hope to have a generation following us which will maintain the faith, and will be better than their fathers. Your Sunday schools are admirable; but what is their purpose if you do not teach the Gospel in them? You get children together and keep them quiet for an hour-and-a-half, and then send them home; but what is the good of it? It may bring some quiet to their fathers and mothers, and that is, perhaps, why they send them to the school; but all the real good lies in what is taught the children. The most fundamental truth should be made most prominent; and what is this but the Cross."*
And he wrote again: *"Minds in their early days are plastic. The first seven years of our being often shape all the rest. At any rate give to godly teaching the first twelve years of any child and it will be difficult to erase the writing."*
- ✓ Hudson Pope wrote: *"It is important to teach the child the Scriptures and the great doctrines of the Bible from the very cradle. This will give the Holy Spirit something on which to work and through which to reveal Christ."*
And he added, *"Never underrate the under eights."*
- ✓ Lenin, one of the founders of Communism, said: *"Give me four years to teach the children and the seed I have sown will never be uprooted."* And as a result the Communists in Eastern Europe always focused their attention and propaganda on the children.
- ✓ The Roman Catholic Church has always given children top priority. After the Reformation their plan was to *"reach out after the children – and rear a new generation of lovers of Rome."* The Jesuits based their counter

Reformation on the value and importance of reaching children.

- ✓ Francis Xavier, the Spanish Jesuit missionary to the Orient in the 16th century, is reported to have said: *“Give me a child until he is seven and you can do what you like with him afterwards”* and he gave the young and ignorant first place in his evangelism.
- ✓ The advertisers on television frequently aim at the children.

CONCLUSIONS:

- **It is important to teach the Word of God to children and ALL our ministry to them must be based solidly and completely upon the exposition of God’s Word.**

What a privilege it is to be a teacher – and especially to be a teacher of children.

What a tragedy it is that some children who come to Sunday School are not really taught the Word of God. Instead, the time is spent in activities of some kind, in the telling of extra-biblical stories, and even in games and entertainment. There is, of course, nothing wrong with such things in their proper place. But if we have children with us for only 60 minutes each week, it is essential that we make the best possible use of this time, by teaching the Word of God to them – through singing, the memorizing of Bible verses, the review of last week’s lesson, and through the Bible lesson itself. I have always found that children will listen intently, and attentively, to the teaching of the Word of God if it is thoroughly prepared and effectively presented. Let us not give them any less than this. Remember God has promise to bless HIS WORD.

“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55 v11).

➤ **It is important - indeed vital - to preach the Gospel to the children.**

Firstly, because this is the best time to evangelize them. And, secondly, because the Lord Jesus (Mark 16,v15) commands us to evangelize them. In relation to this command there are two important facts to remember.

- ✓ The world's population now stands at 5 billion. Over one third (35%) of the total population of the world consists of children. In a number of Third World countries this runs to one half. That means a total of 1,750,000,000 children under the age of 15. What a mission field!

So when the Lord Jesus tells us to evangelize "*every creature*" we need to remember that over one third of those to whom He referred are children and that they are a very substantial segment of the world's population.

- ✓ But we also need to remember that childhood is a stage in everyone's life which everybody must pass through. That means that the other two thirds who are not, at present, children have been children at some time - and at that time they were as open to the Gospel as today's children.

"And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and PREACH THE GOSPEL to EVERY creature'" (Mark 16 v15).

QUESTION 2

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR CHILDREN TO HAVE A REAL EXPERIENCE WITH GOD - FOR LITTLE CHILDREN TO BE REGENERATED?

INTRODUCTION

This is the most vital of all the questions included in this section, and one to which every Christian parent and every Christian worker among children should know the answer. It should be emphasized, again, that the answer to this question, as to all these questions, must be found in the Bible. We must not allow

subjective reasoning or human opinions to take the place of the objective teaching of the Scriptures. Most, if not all, Christians would agree with the answer to the first question – that we should teach the Word of God to children. But there are many who do not believe that little children can trust Jesus Christ and be regenerated.

In many of our churches and Sunday Schools in Europe, for example, it is commonly believed that we should teach the Word of God to children until they are in their early teens – and then later after, say, the age of 14, we should evangelize them. They believe that childhood is sowing time and teenage years reaping time. And this practice is due to a lack of faith in the possibility of a child trusting Jesus Christ and experiencing regeneration. But this is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible tells us that children can be regenerated and that we should therefore evangelize them.

But before we proceed with the answer let us make very clear the Biblical position on salvation. No one (including children) can be saved, forgiven and in the kingdom of God unless:

- ✓ He has been regenerated.

“Jesus answered and said to him” (Nicodemus) “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3,v3). “Jesus answered. most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.” (John 3,v5).

- ✓ He has been justified .

“Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified, and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” (Romans 8,v30).

Regeneration and justification are acts of God that take place simultaneously and at one moment in time when a sinner repents and put his trust in Jesus Christ. Of course it is not necessary for a Christian to know exactly when this took place (although many do). For a child growing up in a Christian home there may be a gradual awakening to the truth of the Gospel over a period of time, and a process of increasing

understanding. He may not know the actual moment of regeneration and justification, but the important thing is that God knows when it took place. The Biblical command therefore to everyone (including children) is to repent (Acts 2 v38; 3,v19)) and believe (Ephesians 2 v8; Acts 16, v31). The child who does this is regenerated and justified and begins a life of repentance and faith. There is no other way.

ANSWER

➤ SPECIFIC BIBLE VERSES which refer to children:

✓ The Old Testament

It is clearly indicated in the Old Testament that the children should not only be taught the Word of God, but that there could be A RESPONSE to the Word of God in the heart of the child.

- *“Gather the people together, men and women and **little ones** (TAPH), and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn TO FEAR the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess” (Deuteronomy 31 v12, 13).*

The children were to be gathered together with the rest of the people so that they might *“fear the Lord”*. This is in the realm of experience. It is not just that they might hear or learn, but that they might *“fear”*. *“Fear”*, in the Old Testament means a reverential trust in God, and a personal submission to Him. Learning must come first and this should be followed by experience.

(See also Psalm 103 v11, 13, 17).

- *“That they may SET THEIR HOPE in God, and not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments” (Psalm 78 v7).*

This verse refers specifically to children (See also verses 4, 5 and 6). The Word of God was to be taught to the children, so that they might set their HOPE in God. This is in the realm of experience once more. Head knowledge was not enough. Learning comes first and then experience follows.

- In Psalm 34 v11 David says to the children, *“Come, you children (BEN), listen to me; I will teach you THE FEAR of the LORD.”* He obviously believed that the children could understand what the fear of the Lord was, and that they could fear Him.
 - The story of Samuel in 1 Samuel 3 v7-19. These verses tell us three facts about Samuel:
 - He had not previously known the Lord (v7).
 - He heard and responded to the voice of the Lord (v10).
 - He grew spiritually afterwards (v19).
 - And it is recorded that Obadiah (1 Kings 18 v12) and David (Psalm 71 v5, 17) trusted and served God *“from their youth”*.
- ✓ The New Testament:
- *“But whoever causes one of these little ones (MIKROS) who BELIEVE IN ME to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea”* (Matthew 18 v6). The words *“believe in”* here (PISTEUO) is the translation of the Greek word used throughout the New Testament to describe saving faith. It means *“to trust”*, or *“place confidence in”*. It does not just mean *“credence”* or the *“believing of facts or truths”*. And this clearly shows that a little child (PAIDION) can trust Jesus Christ as Saviour.

In Acts 16 v31, for example, Paul uses the same word, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ”* in answer to the jailer’s question, *“What must I do to be*

saved?" It is also used in John 3 v16 and many other verses.

- *"Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as (LIKE) A LITTLE CHILD (PAIDION) will by no means enter it."* (Mark 10 v15). If all must become childlike to enter the kingdom of God it must be possible for a child to do so.
- *"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the SAINTS who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus"* (Ephesians 1 v1) and *"Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right"* (Ephesians 6 v1) plus *"To the SAINTS and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Colossians 1 v2) and *"Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord"* (Colossians 3 v20).

These letters are addressed to "saints". Later in the epistles Paul addresses various groups of Christians in the church. These included believing wives, husbands, fathers, servants, and CHILDREN. The word used here is "TEKNON", a more general word for children. But it is often used with reference to little children (e.g. Matthew 15 v26; Acts 21 v21; 1 Timothy 3 v4), and the command to *"obey your parents"* indicates that those referred to were relatively young. Therefore he must have believed in the possibility of children being saints (born-again believers). When Paul tells the children to *"obey in the Lord"* (Ephesians 6,v1) and to *"please the Lord"* (Colossians 3,v20) he implies a possible relationship between them and the Lord. The Greek word for Lord is "KURIOS" and means the One Who has authority and Who is the Controller. We could conclude that only those

who have the indwelling Holy Spirit are under the Lordship of Christ and are able to submit to His control.

- *“If a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having FAITHFUL children not accused of dissipation or insubordination”* (Titus 1 v6).

One of the qualifications for elders was that they should have *“faithful (believing) children (TEKNON) not accused of riot or unruly”*. This shows that it is POSSIBLE for children to be believers. Otherwise it would be for some an impossible and unattainable condition.

- Revelation 11 v18; 13 v16; 19 v5. These verses speak of those who FEAR THE LORD and calls them both *“SMALL and great”*. The Greek word translated *“small”* is MIKROS and could refer in these verses to children or people who were unimportant – or both.

➤ OTHER SCRIPTURES which include children but which do not specifically mention them:

Apart from the above verses which refer specially to children, there are many other verses in the New Testament which promise salvation to *“WHOEVER believes”* (John 3 v16), to *“EVERYONE who believes”* (Acts 13 v39), and to *“AS MANY as received him”* (John 1 v12). Every such verse teaches the possibility of a child being regenerated because HE IS INCLUDED. There is no limitation given concerning race, denomination, nationality OR AGE. The only qualification is that the person concerned must repent of his sin and believe in Christ (Acts 16 v30, 31). To add another qualification such as reaching a certain age is unscriptural! Also see Romans 10 v9; John 3 v36; Romans 10 v13.

Sometimes people feel that a person must be 13 or 14 years old before he can be converted. This is never taught or indicated in the Bible. There is nothing said about age at

all! We must never impose an age limit for conversion because the Bible does not do so.

All these "other scriptures" teach us that as soon as a child is old enough:

- to know that he has sinned against God, to be convicted of it, and be willing to turn from it,
- to know that the Lord Jesus died for him on the Cross,
- to trust Him and receive Him simply into his heart and life as Lord and Saviour -

THEN HE IS OLD ENOUGH TO BE BORN AGAIN.

There are some people who say that a child cannot possibly understand the Gospel and the way of salvation. But there are three facts which deal with this problem.

- It is true that there MUST be understanding before any person can believe. But we must not make the level of understanding too high or too complicated. I have outlined above three steps which are necessary, and they are not complicated or difficult to understand.
- Ephesians 2 v8 makes it clear that no one is saved by understanding or intellectual capacity - but rather by grace through faith - *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."*
- Truth comes by revelation *"At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes."(Matthew 11 v25).* It is not a question of our human capacities: revelation and illumination are the work of the Holy Spirit (John 16 v13). We must never underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit to illuminate and regenerate; and as a result we must never underestimate the

capacity of a little child to see and understand things which those who are more intellectual find difficult to see or understand.

- EXPERIENCE WITH CHILDREN teaches us that children can be born again.

As we present the Gospel to children we know that some really do turn from their sin and trust Christ, and we can see, through the following years, the results of a regenerated life.

And many of us trusted the Lord Jesus when we were young and know, from our own experience, that it is possible for a child to be saved.

There are also a number of Christians who believe they were saved in their older teenage years or adult years – but they can remember making some kind of decision for Christ when they were young. They don't see that as their moment of regeneration. Later on they forgot about it. But it is possible that they were actually saved at that time, then backslid and God restored them later at the time they thought was their regeneration.

Church history also reveals the fact that many were saved as children, including a number of well-known Christians:

- ✓ Matthew Henry was saved at the age of 11.
- ✓ Dr. Isaac Watts was saved at the age of 9.
- ✓ Jonathan Edwards was saved at the age of 7.
- ✓ Richard Baxter was saved at the age of 9.
- ✓ Lord Shaftesbury was saved at the age of 8.
- ✓ Leighton Ford was saved at the age of 6.
- ✓ Corrie Ten Boom was saved at the age of 5.
- ✓ Dr James Dobson was saved at the age of 3.
- ✓ Mrs. Ruth Graham was saved at the age of 5.
- ✓ Mary Slessor was saved at 7 years old.
- ✓ Amy Carmichael was saved at 9 years old.
- ✓ Jim Elliot trusted Christ when he was 6.

And the list goes on and on. 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. Many statistical surveys of the "age of conversion" have been completed with somewhat varying results. But all of them show that childhood is the age when many have put their trust in Christ. One of these surveys states, conservatively, that "as many date their arrival at personal faith to an age below twelve, as those who date it afterwards."

➤ COMMENTS FROM CHRISTIAN LEADERS

Many well-known preachers and evangelists have testified to the reality of child conversion based upon what they have seen in their own ministry:

- ✓ D. L. Moody said: *"You do not know how much infidelity there is in the church today with regard to child conversion. There are but a few who believe that children can become Christians; but thank God there is a bright day coming."* Mr Moody himself held an evangelistic meeting for children in Liverpool, England in 1875. Over 12,000 children were present with an overflow of 2,000 in another room.
- ✓ A report of one of the visits to Scotland made by Mr D.L. Moody says, *"On the Saturdays the services of the noon prayer meeting have been specially adapted for children. By the most simple presentation of Gospel truth, by illustrative incident, by the most direct appeals to the conscience and by the most fervent and winning entreaties to receive Christ now as a personal Saviour Mr. Moody has on all these occasions sought to win these young souls to Christ; and we understand with much blessing and success."*

Other comments on Mr. Moody's meetings in Scotland include the following statements:

"Parents and children are seen together in the same attitude of earnestly seeking after Jesus."

"Three girls and two boys in age ranging from eight to sixteen were weeping most bitterly and entreating the Lord to convert them."

“There has been a very manifold work of grace in the Sunday school here with large numbers of children remaining to be spoken to. Those who are saved have been holding a prayer meeting.”

“Many little children have felt the sharp arrows of the King in their hearts and have yielded to His sceptre.”

- ✓ *Dr. Armin Mauerhofer says, “Children can really understand the message of salvation in a deep way. I came to Christ when I was ten. I was so angry with all those who did not believe me. I was thankful to those who took that seriously. I am still a believer today.”*
- ✓ *George Muller said, “As far as my experience goes, it appears to me that believers generally have expected too little present fruit from their labours with children.”*
- ✓ *John Wesley obviously believed that children could trust Jesus Christ and have genuine experiences with God. He wrote in one of his journals, “In Newburgh, a small fishing town fifteen miles from Aberdeen the (Methodist) society swiftly increases – not only men and women but a considerable number of children are either rejoicing in God or panting after Him.”*
- ✓ *George Whitfield wrote: “On Thursday evening I preached to the children of the city with a congregation of near 20,000 in the park. It is remarkable that many children are under conviction, and everywhere great power and apparent success attended the word preached.”*

A letter to George Whitfield concerning his ministry states, “We now see great numbers of the young awakened to see the Lord and cry after Jesus, and still their numbers are increasing. Many very young persons were admitted to the Lord’s Table here on the first Sabbath of this month.”

Mr. Whitfield himself writes, “Three of the little boys that were converted when I was last here came to me and wept and begged me to pray for and with them.”

- ✓ *Matthew Henry, preaching in 1713 said, "Oh that we who are ministers were filled with a zeal for the spiritual welfare and eternal salvation of young people, and a concern for the rising generation; and were to do our utmost as our ability and opportunity is to fill the minds of young ones, in their early days, with the knowledge of Christ, and to fix them for Christ that the next generation may be better than this."*
- ✓ *Charles Spurgeon wrote: "A child of five, if properly instructed, can savingly believe as well as an adult. My conviction is that our converts from among children are among the best that we have. I have more confidence in the spiritual life of the children I have received into the church than I have in the adults thus received. I have usually found a clearer knowledge of the Gospel and a warmer love to Christ in the child converts than in the man converts. I have sometimes met with a deeper spiritual experience in children of 10 or 12 than I have in certain persons of 50 or 60. I should judge children to have been more numerously genuine than any other class, more constant, and in the long run, more solid."*

He also wrote: "I thank God that in our Sabbath School we believe in the salvation of children as children. How often has it 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. Pray for them that they may not run into the world and fall into the evils of outward sin, and then come back with broken bones to the Good Shepherd; but that they may by God's grace be kept from the paths of the destroyer, and grow up in the fold of Christ, first as lambs of His flock and then as sheep of His hand. I hold that children are capable of salvation. God can do all things. He can work upon children's hearts as He pleases, for all are under His control. I do love to think

that the gospel is suitable to little children. There are boys and girls in many of our Sabbath-School classes down below stairs who are as truly converted to God as any of us.

There are those who begin to doubt the truth of juvenile conversions. They say, 'They are very young, can they understand the gospel? Is it not merely an infantile emotion, a mere profession?' My brethren, you have no more right to suspect the sincerity of the young than to mistrust the grey-headed; you ought to receive them with the same open-breasted confidence with which you receive others when they profess to have found the Saviour."

✓ Apostolos Bliates told me the following:

"I was born into a home where my mother and father were devout Greek Orthodox. I went to church with them every Sunday. But living next door to me was a little old woman who was an evangelical and whenever she got the opportunity she used to speak to me about the Lord Jesus. I remember I was only six years old and I asked the Lord Jesus to come into my life. I went into my home and I said to my mother, 'Mother I have asked the Lord Jesus to come into my heart' and my parents were very angry. They told me that this was not right, and that I must forget about it, and that I should keep going to their church with them. I went to the church but I never forgot what I'd done. A number of years later I had the joy of seeing both my mother and father come to know the Lord Jesus Christ. I went to Bible College in London and graduated to become a pastor here in Greece."

This man received Christ when he was only six years old. He had no Christian background and yet at six years old he received Christ. Is it possible for a child to be born again? Some people think that for a child to be converted is exceptional. They believe that it is the usual thing for an adult to be converted but sometimes a special miracle takes place and a child receives Christ. This is not so. I personally am not surprised when children receive Christ, but I am surprised when adults receive

Christ. It amazes me when I see a 50-year-old man receive Christ but I expect children to receive Christ.

✓ Stephen Olford wrote: *"I believe in child evangelism for three reasons:*

- *because I was born again when I was only 7;*
- *because the history of general evangelism shows that by far the greatest proportion of conversions take place before 20 years of age;*
- *because the Bible makes it plain that youth is the time to turn to God (Ecclesiastes 12 v1)."*

✓ Harry Ironside wrote, *"I know child conversions are very real. I believe it is all important to seek to win the young for Christ."*

✓ Robert Murray McCheyne wrote: *"Most that are ever saved fly to Christ when young. Those that were come to years were too wise and prudent to be saved by the Blood of the Son of God, and He revealed it onto those who were younger and has less wisdom. If you are not saved in youth, it is not likely that you will be. Youth is converting time."*

It is recorded of Mr McCheyne that *"the floor of his vestry had been covered with children seeking the Saviour."* He had a real love for children, believed firmly in teaching and evangelizing them, and throughout his ministry saw many children converted to Jesus Christ.

✓ It was written that Dr. Andrew Bonar had *"meetings more especially for children and youth in his church when members at times were deeply affected even to tears."* He himself stated that most of his elders *"had children among the number of those who are rejoicing in Jesus."*

Dr Bonar also wrote, *"There is a practical error very common among God's people. Many godly people look upon child conversion as a thing to be stood in doubt of. All of them profess to believe that the Holy Spirit may convert souls at any age, and that conversion cannot take place too soon; while yet they do not look for the conversion of children with the same lively faith that they manifest in asking and expecting*

the Holy Spirit to change those who are of riper years. The same warm-hearted believers who labour for the souls of older persons, and are, in the case of such, satisfied with nothing but conversion without delay, do not practically so feel and act in dealing with the young. They do not press home the immediate, present acceptance of Christ on children as they would do on grown-up people..

There is a peculiar fitness (we might say, divine propriety) in the Gospel being blessed to the conversion of children. The same Holy Spirit in all cases uses the Gospel for saving souls; but, in applying it to children, He illustrates most notably two of its features, viz., its entire freeness (for what could a child give to God?), and its amazing simplicity, which is so humbling to the pride of self-righteous man. Children ought to be dealt with in regard to the duty of accepting Christ as closely and seriously as old people."

- ✓ *Corrie Ten Boom said, "I was five years old when I asked Jesus to come into my heart, and He came. He didn't say, 'You are too little', He just came. And He never left me, and that was seventy-five years ago. Seventy five years I have walked with the Lord Jesus and Jesus walked with me."*
- ✓ *Henry Bosch wrote: "One cannot stress enough the vital importance of directing children to the Lord when they are still very young and impressionable. Satan seeks his prey early and our children are only safe from his snares when their feet have prayerfully been guided to Him who said, "I am the way!" (See John 14 v6). Many heartaches can be prevented and much good accomplished by those who are Spirit-directed, when life is still in the bud of its freshness and promise."*

CONCLUSION:

The question of whether a child can be born again is indeed a vital one. Your conviction about the reality of the conversion of children will influence your whole approach to them.

What is your goal? Is it just to teach the Word of God to children, and to trust that one day when they become teenagers or adults, they may trust Christ as Saviour? Or do you believe that it is possible for them to be saved now when they are children? If you do, you will evangelize them.

Some Christians believe that all children are born into the kingdom of Heaven and remain in it unless, or until, they decide to leave it. As a result they do not evangelize children – especially young children.

There are others who believe that the children of believers are born into the kingdom of Heaven and remain in it unless, or until, they decide to leave it. As a result they only evangelise the children of those who are not believers.

But we believe that the Bible clearly teaches that **ALL** children are born outside the kingdom of Heaven and should be evangelized – and that children can trust Jesus Christ and be saved.

Consequently, you need to see that there are only two kinds of children – those who have trusted Christ and are saved, and those who have not trusted Christ and are not saved

All the answers given above teach clearly that it IS possible for a child, even a little child, to be regenerated. Therefore you should make this your aim and your prayer at all times.

QUESTION 3

AT WHAT AGE CAN A CHILD BE REGENERATED?

INTRODUCTION

This is a question which is closely related to the previous one, and we need to find the Biblical answer to it.

ANSWER

- **SPECIFIC BIBLE VERSES** with reference to age:

There are none!

The Bible does not give an age at which regeneration is possible. We must not put into the Bible what is not there.

It is certainly unscriptural to say that before 12, or at any other age, it is impossible for anyone to be regenerated.

➤ OTHER SCRIPTURES which shed light on the possible age of conversion:

✓ We know that LITTLE children can really believe and be born again. *“But whoever causes ONE OF THESE LITTLE ONES who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”* (Matthew 18 v6).

In Matthew 18 v1-14, the Lord Jesus emphasizes that the child about whom He was speaking was young. This can be seen from the fact that He took the child in His arms (Mark 9 v36).

Notice that in Matthew 18 v1-14, the Lord Jesus uses two words with regard to children:

- PAIDION (little child) - v2, 3, 4, 5.
- MIKROS (little one) - v6, 10, 14.

So while no age is given for children who are called believers, in verse 6 the Lord Jesus calls them “little children”.

Some might ask the question “Are little children not too young to understand the Gospel and have a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ?” In some cases the answer is “yes” they are too young. They are sometimes too young to understand what sin is and to be convicted of it - and without this understanding and conviction they are not ready, and we should never put pressure on them to be saved.

But there are many little children who are ready and able to understand all they need to do to be saved.

✓ We must preach the gospel to everyone: *“And He said to them, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to EVERY CREATURE.”* (Mark 16 v15). That means to those of every age. It would be strange if a large segment of those hearing the Gospel should be excluded from the possibility of responding to it. The Bible demands that, for anyone

to become a child of God, he must repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. He does not need to be a theologian or to understand everything. Most of his understanding will come after he trusts Jesus Christ. As soon as a child is old enough to know that he has sinned against God, to be sorry for his sin, and to be willing to turn from it, to know that Christ died for him, and to trust and receive Him as Lord and Saviour, he is old enough (according to the Bible) to be regenerated "*But AS MANY AS RECEIVED HIM, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.*"(John 1 v12).

- EXPERIENCE WITH CHILDREN teaches us that every child is different. Children differ in themselves, in their level of understanding in their home background and in their church background. You cannot lump them together and say that all children can be converted at a certain age. Each child is an individual. Some come earlier to the place of understanding than others. This is especially true of those in Christian homes.

This is one reason, surely, why the Bible does not give any specific age for trusting Christ. Some children of 5 and 6 years can have a clear understanding of spiritual things, a real conviction of sin, and be able to trust Christ. Some children of 7, 8, 9 and even older do not have this understanding and conviction, and are not yet able to trust Christ.

But I feel it is true to say that most children at the age of 8, 9 or 10 have reached an age when they can really be convicted of sin and are able to trust Jesus Christ. I have found in my own experience in evangelistic work with children that many of the children I led to Christ were between 8 and 10 years old (although a number were younger than that).

- COMMENTS FROM CHRISTIAN LEADERS

Because he was saved so young Dr. Campbell Morgan could say: "*I do not remember a time when I did not know the Saviour.*"

- ✓ Mr. Lionel Hunt wrote: *“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 Saviour 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. If a child is old enough to sin and old enough to die, it would be a strange thing if he were not old enough to be saved. 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.”*
- ✓ David Livingstone said: *“Our business is to teach children about sin and the Saviour, without even a hint about a certain age to accept Christ. The Holy Spirit will, in due time, convict them of sin. When He convicts of sin, whatever the age, who are we to dare to interfere with His work? It is at this, of all times, that we show our sympathetic interest. Any child is old enough to accept Christ when he realizes that his sin is against God and that because of that sin, he is lost without Christ.”*
- ✓ Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote: *“Many dear children are called of God so early that they cannot tell precisely when they are converted; but they were converted; they must, at some time or another, have passed from death to life. You could not have told this morning, by observation, the moment when the sun rose, but it did rise; and there was a time when it was below the horizon and another time when it had risen above it. The moment, whether we see it or not, in which a child is really saved is when he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ.
I will not say at what age children are first capable of receiving the knowledge of Christ, but it is much earlier than some fancy;*

and we have seen and known children who have given abundant evidence that they have received Christ and have believed in Him at a very early age."

- ✓ Dr. Andrew Bonar wrote: *"In the early part of the century there were Associations for Sabbath School Teaching in Edinburgh and elsewhere, consisting of warm-hearted men who delighted to show the Gospel to others. These directed their main efforts toward the conversion of children. We have heard some of these old Christians tell how they never let the classes go without drawing out the Gospel from the lesson, and seeking to carry it home by apt illustrations. They were not content with sending them away to pray; they sent them to Christ on the spot. The result was that there were many brought to Christ at an early age in the Sabbath Schools. We have heard of even startling cases occurring, such as a case of clear evidence of conversion given by a child of four years of age."*

CONCLUSION:

We need to remember two fundamental facts:

- The Bible does not give a specific age at which regeneration is possible;
- The Bible commands you and me to evangelize EVERYBODY (Mark 16 v15).

This means that we are required to evangelize all children in a thorough, biblical way – and leave the question of regeneration in the hands of God.

QUESTION 4

IS A CHILD A SINNER? WHEN DOES HE BECOME ONE?

INTRODUCTION

Christians often view children as innocent – without sin, or at least without conscious or deliberate sin. There are even Christians who believe that children are born into the world

completely innocent, without sin, and in the same position as Adam and Eve were before they sinned. They believe that these little ones remain in this state of sinlessness (as did Adam and Eve) until they choose to sin – then they become sinners.

ANSWER

But what does the Bible teach on this subject?

➤ SPECIFIC VERSES ABOUT CHILDREN

- ✓ *“Behold I was brought forth in iniquity; and in sin my mother conceive me”* (Psalm 51,v5).

The teaching of this verse is called “the doctrine of original sin”. It teaches that man is BORN with a sinful nature.

- ✓ *“The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies”* (Psalm 58 v3).

A child does not need to be taught to tell lies. Their lying comes from the fact that they have sinful hearts.

- ✓ *“Jehoiachin was **eight years** old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months and ten days. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD”* (2 Chronicles 36 v9).

According to this verse, He was eight years old and he did evil in God’s sight. So this would indicate that, it is possible for an eight-year old to be sinful and rebellious. But it should be noted that other translations have the word “eighteen” instead of “eight” and this translation is supported by 2nd Kings 24, v8 - *“Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king...”* and many Bible commentators agree that this is the correct translation.

- ✓ *“Even a **child** is known by his deeds, whether what he does is pure and right.”* (Proverbs 20 v11).

*“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a **child**; the rod of correction will drive it far from him”* (Proverbs 22 v15).

These verses certainly deny the so-called innocence of children.

- ✓ *“Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very*

large assembly of men, women, and **children (YELED)** gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly" (Ezra 10 v1): The children were included in the company of those who confessed their sin and wept very bitterly.

These verses certainly deny the so-called innocence of children and show that children are born with a sinful nature which, later in life manifests itself in sinful actions. In addition, there are a number of verses which speak of man's sinfulness "from youth" - Genesis 8 v21, Jeremiah 3 v25; 22 v21; 32 v30.

➤ OTHER SCRIPTURES WHICH INCLUDE CHILDREN

- ✓ There are many other Scriptures which teach and emphasise the universality of sin - that everyone is a sinner, without exception - and that includes children. We must always remember that the Bible does not teach a theology of childhood which is separate from, and different to, a theology of adults. The Bible gives a theology of man which includes both children and adults.
 - *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."* (Isaiah 53 v6)
 - *"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3 v23).
 - *"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned -"* (Romans 5 v12).
 - *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?"* (Jeremiah 17 v9).
- ✓ The Bible also explains the reason why everyone is born into this world in sin - as a sinner - and with a sinful nature.
 - Adam was the federal head of the human race and the representative man. All mankind therefore (including children) were in Adam when he sinned and fell.

*"...in Adam **all** die ... (1st Corinthians 15 v22).*

When Adam sinned we sinned. His sin, and the results of it, were therefore imputed – passed on – to all his posterity.

- All mankind (including children) have therefore inherited from Adam a sinful nature – and our sinful actions are the result of that sinful nature, and the outworking of it.

*"We **all** ... were (by nature) the children of wrath" (Ephesians 2,v3).*

*"For by one man's disobedience **many** were made sinners" (Romans 5, v19).*

*"All these evil things come from within and defile **man**" (Mark 7, v23).*

- ✓ The Bible also explains the results of this sinful nature and the sinful action it produces.

- The first result is – DEATH. Because of our sin we will ALL (including children) die.

"The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6, v23)

*"In Adam **all** die" (1st Corinthians 15, v22)*

*"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to **all** men, because **all** sinned – (Romans 5, v12).*

*"By one man's offence **many** died" (Romans 5 v15).*

- But we must remember that our sin has a second, more important result. Because of sin we also, by nature, are spiritually dead – and that includes children of every age.

".. you .. who were DEAD in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2, v1).

"Even when we were DEAD in trepasses"

(Ephesians 2, v5).

The born again children of whom Paul speaks in *Ephesians 6 v1* had been among those who were in this condition of spiritual death before coming to Christ.

- ✓ And there are other results
 - All mankind (including children) are spiritually blind and are not able to understand spiritual truth.
"Whose minds the god of this age has BLINDED, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them."(2 Cor 4v4)
 - All mankind (including children) are separated from God because of their sin.
"But your iniquities have SEPARATED you from God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear." (Isaiah 59,v2).
 - All mankind (including children) are outside the Kingdom of God – unless or until they are born again.
*"Jesus answered and said to him" (Nicodemus) "most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, HE CANNOT SEE the kingdom of God." (John 3, v3).
"Jesus answered, most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he CANNOT ENTER the kingdom of God." (John 3, v5).*
 - All mankind (including children) are controlled by the sin which their sinful nature produces.
"He has delivered us from the POWER OF DARKNESS and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." (Colossians 1 v13).
- ✓ But the most important result of all is that because of our sin and disobedience we are under the just condemnation of a Holy God and He must therefore punish our sin.
 - *"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the WRATH of God abides on him" (John 3, v36).*

- *“For He is coming, for He is coming to JUDGE the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with His truth.”* (Psalm 96, v13).
- *“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the JUDGMENT”* (Hebrews 9, v27).
- *“And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were JUDGED according to their works by the things which were written in the books.”*
(Revelation 20, v12).
- *The JUDGMENT was by one (Adam) unto our condemnation.* (Romans 5, v16).

We will come back to the subject of the judgment of children in our next question and answer. But we should remember, at this point, that the Bible teaches that God’s judgment on sin is directed towards those who have deliberately sinned and consciously broken His law.

- *“And this is THE CONDEMNATION, that the light has come into the world, and men LOVED DARKNESS rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”* (John 3, v19).
- *“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who DOES NOT BELIEVE the Son shall not see life, but the WRATH of God abides on him.”* (John 3, v36).

God condemns the one who “loves darkness”, whose “deeds are evil”. God’s wrath abides on them who “believe not in Him.” Children will be judged by God if they are old enough to sin deliberately and disobey Him. This judgment will be the result of their sinful actions which their sinful nature has produced. But (as we will see in a later answer) infants and little children who have no understanding and have not deliberately sinned and disobeyed God will not be condemned if they die.

We can therefore provide some answers now to our questions - Is a child a sinner? When does he become one?

- All children (including infants and little ones) have an inherited sinful nature, are spiritually dead, spiritually blind, separated from God, outside His kingdom and under the control of sin. This is the doctrine of total depravity - and original sin.
- This sinful nature will eventually display itself in sinful actions and disobedience to God.
- Children who are old enough to consciously and deliberately disobey God are condemned and are under the judgment of God - if they are not saved..
- Salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ. When children trust Him as Saviour they are saved. As we minister to children we must therefore understand that there are two groups of children.
 - Those who have trusted Christ, who are regenerated and justified - and we must help them grow spiritually.
 - Those who have not trusted Christ, who are spiritually dead and separated from God - and we need to evangelize them.

➤ EXPERIENCE WITH CHILDREN

- ✓ Conviction.

Experience shows us that children can have real conviction of sin. There is no evidence to show that childhood is the period of innocence which many adult Christians seem to think it to be. And should we tell these children that they must wait until they are teenagers before they can have their sins forgiven and have peace and security?I can

well remember in my own experience going to bed night after night as a child and when the light was turned out I started to cry. Why? Because I was afraid to die. And that went on for weeks. If only I had heard the Gospel and trusted the Lord Jesus, He would have taken this fear away.

- ✓ Disobedience.
Children can deliberately disobey God's Word. This cannot be excused as "a little mistake."
- ✓ Rejection.
We know of many children who have consciously rejected Christ on hearing the Gospel.

Children do know what sin is. My problem has never been to get children to understand what sin is but to get adults to understand!

➤ COMMENTS FROM CHRISTIAN LEADERS

- ✓ Mr Hudson Pope wrote: *"One fundamental concept must be taken into account from a spiritual point of view by every worker among the young. It is that some children are born again and some are not.. There are only two classes (John 8 v42, 44, and 1 John 3 v1). The only entry from one class to the other is through John 1 v12. Either a child is a born-again child, truly converted to God by faith in Christ Jesus and a child of light – or he is an unconverted child of Adam, wrong in heart, and, according to age and opportunity, wrong also in experience."*
- ✓ Mr Pope wrote again: *"Children might not look like sinners and lost, but God looks upon the heart. Not much has been worked out yet, but the heart is full of things (Mark 7 v21) only awaiting opportunity to proceed. If the human heart is what the Lord says it is here, and if Romans 3 v23 be correct, then we cannot begin too early to preach the Gospel – for this,*

the Lord has made no age limit. The Gospel is Good News for bad people."

- ✓ *Charles Spurgeon wrote: "In what respect are children deficient of capacity? Do they lack capacity for repentance? Assuredly not: have I not seen a girl weep herself ill because she has done wrong? A tender conscience in many a little boy has made him unutterably miserable when he has been conscious of a fault. Do not some of us recollect the keen arrows of conviction which rankled in our hearts when we were yet children? I distinctly recollect the time when I could not rest because of sin, and sought the Lord, while yet a child, with bitter anguish. Children are capable enough of repentance. God the Holy Spirit working it in them: this is no conjecture, for we ourselves are living witnesses."*
- ✓ *An experienced Christian worker wrote: "Sin is real to boys and girls of tender years. It is distressing to them. They lie awake with troublesome questions seething within them. Perhaps they cannot put it into words, but the same sense of guilt is there just the same. It can overwhelm the child of tender years. Modern psychology searches for it to bring it out into the open in later years, as a means of cure. We are told that a large part of nervous and mental disorders are due to a sense of guilt incurred in childhood, and which comes out later as worry, depression, fear, mental and emotional derangements. Christian workers might not appreciate the reality of sin in a child's life, but the psychiatrist does. He knows that childhood sin and guilt, can he know forgiveness? Would God constitute a child in His spiritual being that he may suffer under the burden of his sin, without including him in the company who may benefit from the sacrifice of Christ? Should we reserve for older age groups the forgiveness of sin, the peace, the joy, the victory over sin which the Saviour brings – or does the child also NEED the Saviour in his life, with all that He, the Saviour, brings?"*

- ✓ Mr Anthony Capon wrote: *“A child is capable of sin. He was born with a sinner’s nature. This is clear from John 3 v6,7 If a child was born with a sinner’s nature, it is not surprising that he is in danger of hell. This is a ‘hard saying’, and one against which all who love children will have a natural feeling of rebellion. But the best interests of children are not served by blinding our eyes to the fact. Christ recognized that children are in danger of hell, but in His love He came to rescue them. In Matthew 18 v11 He describes them as ‘lost’, in verse 12 as having ‘gone astray’, and in verse 14 as liable to ‘perish’. As soon as a child is capable of being ‘caused to stumble’ (that is, as soon as he is capable of conscious sin), he is in danger of God’s utter judgment.”*
- ✓ *The founder of CEF, Mr Overholzer, had a tremendous burden for children. Every time he spoke about children he wept and the tears just rolled down his cheeks. At his last Child Evangelism Fellowship Conference before he went to be with the Lord, he stood before an audience of 800 people, spoke about six words concerning children and then began to weep. The people sitting in their seats began to weep also. This went on for about 15 minutes and then Mr Overholzer sat down. He couldn’t say anything because he was so burdened for the souls of boys and girls. Is it any wonder that God used him? He knew that children were lost!*

CONCLUSION

The present question is: “Is a child a sinner?”, and deals with his position and condition before God.

“Does an infant who dies go to Heaven?” is another question which deals with his destiny. This is answered separately and specifically on pages 201-206. There will be confusion if no distinction is made between these two questions

Are children lost? Does God judge children? On what basis does He do so? These are other questions which we will deal with later.

However, we have seen for the moment in this answer, that ALL children possess a sinful nature, are spiritually dead, and that they are outside God's kingdom (unless and until they have trusted Jesus Christ).. This is as true of an infant as it is of a child of 8 or 10 or 12 years of age.

And we have seen that those who knowingly and deliberately disobey and reject the voice of God are under His judgment and if they die in that condition they will be separated from God for ever.

And this truth is our main motivation in evangelizing children. We see them as sinners and we also see the possibility of them dying and being lost forever - and that gives us a burden and concern for children and their evangelism. If we don't see this possibility we have no real motive or reason to evangelize them. The problem is, of course, that we don't know which children have reached an age of understanding and rejection, and which have not. So we evangelize all of them and leave the results in God's hands.

QUESTION 5

IS THERE AN AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY?

INTRODUCTION

We have seen that the Bible teaches us that all children are born with a sinful nature which separates them from God and His Kingdom. We have also seen that this sinful nature will eventually show itself in sinful actions and disobedience to God's commands, which would make the child guilty before God and under His condemnation.

But when does the infant and little child become guilty and condemned? Is there an "age of accountability"?

We need, first of all, to understand the meaning of the word "accountability". It comes from the word "account" and means to "be able to give an account". But what does it mean to "give an account"? It means to give a careful and detailed explanation to someone of what a person has done.

The word “account” and the phrase “give an account” are found several times in Scripture. The word “account” is a translation of the Greek word “LOGOS” which is usually translated, “word”, and refers to what is said. In the context of the several passages where it is translated “account”, it refers to a future “reckoning” or “judgment” before God when men must give to God in words, an intelligent explanation for his conduct and responsibility.

“So then each of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14 v12).

“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12 v36).

“They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead” (1 Peter 4 v5).

These passages obviously apply to those who are capable of making an intelligent and conscious reckoning – or accountability – to God. In other words, they are accountable to Him.

But it is obvious that there will be those who cannot do this. Infants and very little children have no understanding of sin, transgression, rejection of, or disobedience to God. Therefore they are not seen as accountable yet to Him.

There will come a time in a little child’s life – a time known only to God – when he will understand, when he will be able to deliberately sin, reject and disobey God – and he will then be responsible to God for his actions. He will then be accountable to God. He will have reached the age of accountability.

The age of accountability is, then, that age when a child is old enough to understand what sin is, and old enough to disobey God and deliberately reject the voice of God. This is the age when he is now accountable to God for his actions.

ANSWER

The actual phrase “age of accountability” is not used in the Bible but there are verses, and passages, and biblical truths which clearly indicate that there is one.

➤ SPECIFIC BIBLE VERSES

There are several verses which refer to an age of accountability and the possibility of a very little child not being accountable.

- “Moreover your *little ones* (TAPH) and your *children* (BEN), who you say will be victims, who today have NO KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL, they shall go in there; to them I will give it, and they shall possess it” (Deuteronomy 1 v39).

This verse establishes the principle that it is possible for little ones to have no knowledge of good and evil – who are, in other words, not accountable and will avoid the judgment received by the older ones who were disobedient to God, and held accountable and responsible for their disobedience.

- “FOR BEFORE THE CHILD (NAAR) SHALL KNOW to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings.” (Isaiah 7 v16).

This verse indicates that there is a time in one’s life when a child does not know the difference between good and evil and lacks moral awareness – when he is not accountable.

- “And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who CANNOT DISCERN between their right hand and their left; and much livestock?” (Jonah 4 v11).

This verse shows God’s grace and special love to those who are too young to know the difference between right and wrong. This love of God for infants can also be seen in Psalm 22 v 9 & 10, and Psalm 139 v 15 & 16.

These verses all clearly indicate an age of accountability.

➤ OTHER SCRIPTURES

- ✓ “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men LOVED DARKNESS rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3 v19).

Men have chosen their sinful way rather than God's way as an expression of, and result of, their sinful nature. We are born sinners, but we are condemned by our disobedience to God and our rejection of His revelation. But can it be said of a very little child *"he has loved darkness rather than light?"* Surely not. If it is the sinful nature with which we all are born which condemns us and results in God's judgment, then infants are lost, condemned and separated from God forever. But surely the Bible teaches that until a child is old enough to understand what sin is, and old enough to say "No" to God he is covered in some way by the Death and Atonement of Jesus Christ. But when he comes to an age of accountability and deliberately says "No" to God he is under the wrath of God, lost and condemned.

- ✓ *"And I saw the dead, small (MIKROS) and great, standing before God and books were opened. And another book was opened which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged ACCORDING TO THEIR WORKS by the things which were written in the books."* (Revelation 20,v12).

Their judgment will be based upon their accountability upon what they have done or not done. The NIV translates this verse: *"Each person was judged according to what he had done."* This is also taught in other places in the Bible such as Romans 2,v6 *"Who will render to every man ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS."*

- ✓ And we can see this same conclusion clearly explained in James 4 v17: *"Therefore, to him who KNOWS to do good and DOES NOT DO it, to him it is sin."* Accountability is based on knowledge.

- ✓ *"He who believes in Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already, because HE HAS NOT BELIEVED in the name of the only begotten Son of God."* (John 3,v18).

- ✓ *“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who DOES NOT BELIEVE the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”* (John 3 v36)

These verses, and many like them, clearly indicate an age of accountability. It is the person who believes not who is accountable and condemned because he consciously rejects God and His revelation. Sinners are condemned because of their rejection and unbelief – not because of their sinful nature (although it is that nature which leads to and causes their rejection).

➤ EXPERIENCE WITH CHILDREN

- ✓ We don't know when the age of accountability is. In a sense that is not our business! The age of accountability varies. Each child is different. As we talk to children, we find that those from Christian homes, or who have been taught the Word of God from an early age, often seem to come earlier to a consciousness of sin. It is possible to talk to comparatively LITTLE children who are conscious of their sin before God and who know that Jesus died for them. It is also possible to meet OLDER children who have no consciousness of sin and who are not yet ready to come to Christ.
- ✓ The age of accountability is, I believe, earlier than many believe. It is wrong to set the age of accountability at 13 or 14 years of age. Surely it is lower than that. Actually we should not specify any age. When the child is old enough to know he is a sinner and is deliberately disobeying and rejecting God, he is accountable.

➤ COMMENTS FROM CHRISTIAN LEADERS

- ✓ Mr. John Niver wrote: *“Children who die before reaching the threshold of understanding, or accountability (either because of their age or mental deficiency) are covered by Christ's atonement.”*

- ✓ William Pettingill wrote, *“I am convinced that unaccountable children are saved by the love of Christ.”*
- ✓ Lewis Chafe wrote *“It may be definitely asserted that infants who die before accountability are saved.”*
- ✓ Charles Hodge wrote *“All who are in infancy are saved ... the Scriptures nowhere exclude any class of infants, baptized or unbaptized, born in Christian or heathen lands, of believing or unbelieving parents, from the benefits of redemption in Christ.”*
- ✓ Many other reformed theologians would agree with this statement and would add *“We believe that all dying in infancy are included in the election of grace and are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit Who works when and how He pleases.”*

CONCLUSION:

There are three main facts to remember about infants and little children:

- They are born spiritually dead, separated from God, outside His kingdom and with a sinful nature.
- They are not yet accountable. As they grow older that sinful nature shows itself in sinful actions. But if they have not reached the age of real understanding they are not yet accountable.
- As they continue to grow and understand and become aware of their guilt and sinfulness before God, and deliberately reject God’s voice in whatever form it comes (through the Bible, creation or conscience), they are then accountable to God and if they die like that they will be lost, condemned and separated from God forever.

The “problem” still is that we don’t know when this age is. How should what we have outlined on the age of accountability influence our evangelism of children? Should we only evangelise those who are accountable? What does the Bible say?

- The Bible makes it clear that we should evangelize EVERYONE. The Lord Jesus gave us our guidelines for

evangelism in Mark 16 v15: “*And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel TO EVERY CREATURE.’*”

Biblical evangelism is total evangelism – the evangelism of every-body. We must not omit any group from our evangelism. If we start omitting one group from this great commission, we face the great danger of losing our desire, our motivation and our goal for the evangelism of that group. And we make ourselves the judges and arbiters of what to do and who to evangelize.

- We need to count ALL CHILDREN as accountable, lost and needing a Saviour. Some of them could well be below the age of accountability – but that is not our business. Our task is to evangelize all the children – even if some of them don’t understand and are not accountable. God knows their hearts, He knows whether they have reached the age of accountability. That is His business not ours. Ours is to evangelize – and leave the results in the Hands of the Holy Spirit. He will do what is best and right.

QUESTION 6

ARE ALL CHILDREN LOST? WHAT HAPPENS TO A CHILD WHEN HE/SHE DIES

INTRODUCTION

It is not difficult to answer these questions if we have studied and understood the answers to the previous questions. But we do need to be sure that we understand what the Bible teaches on this vital subject.

It is necessary, first of all, to understand what the word “lost” means. The Greek word used is “*APOLLUMI*”. I understand that the original and prime meaning is to lose (as in *Mark 8,v35* and *Mark 9,v41*), or loose away, or put away, or release. I find that this word is translated in three ways in the New Testament and the choice seems to be determined by the context in which it is used.

- It is translated, first of all, as “lost” with a somewhat similar meaning to that used in conversation today – something which is in the wrong place and is not where it should be. Something (or someone) which needs to be looked for, found and brought back to the right place. A child, for example, is lost. He went for a walk and could not find his way home, so we go and look for him. This use of the word in the following verses shows that those who are lost are outside, separated from God and His Kingdom. They are like the lost sheep in *Luke 15,vs4* and *6*, *Luke 19,v10*, *Matthew 10,v6*, *Matthew 15,v24*, *Matthew 18,vs.11-13*; the lost coin in *Luke 15,vs8 & 9*, and the lost son in *Luke 15,24*.
- The word is also translated in a number of places as “destroy” (*Matthew 10,v28* and *James 4,v12*), or “destruction” (*Matthew 7,v13*). This translation has the sense of judgment and condemnation, which unbelievers are under at present, and which will be fully consummated in the future. This destruction does not mean annihilation, but the loss of eternal life, the loss of well-being and the loss of relationship with God. Eternal loss!
- A third translation is “perish” (*John 3,vs15-16; 10,v28; 2nd Thessalonians 2,v10; 2nd Peter 3,v9*), and this word also means judgment, the loss of eternal life and the deprivation from all that is good.

These latter two translations clearly teach that every person who does not believe and who rejects God and His salvation is under the wrath and condemnation of God and will perish and be lost forever if he dies in that condition (*Matthew 10,v28* and *John 3,vs16,36*). What a loss! The first translation shows that every person who does not believe is “outside” and separated from God and His Kingdom.

ANSWER

I believe we can find the answer to our question if we reverse the first two headings we have been using and look firstly at

“Other Scriptures” – the general teaching of the Bible on this subject.

OTHER SCRIPTURES INCLUDING CHILDREN

The general teaching of Scripture outlines nine basic truths concerning mankind AS A WHOLE.

- All mankind are sinners by nature (*Ephesians 2,v3, Jeremiah 17,v9*).
- This sinful nature expresses itself universally in sinful actions (*Isaiah 53,v6; Romans 3,v23*).
- The result for all mankind is physical and spiritual death (*Romans 5,vs15,17; Ephesians 2,v1*).
- God is holy and cannot allow sin into His Presence (*Revelation 21,v27*).
- God is just and must punish sin (*Romans 5,v18*).
- Those who do not believe are under God’s condemnation (*John 3,v36*) and will be judged for their sin and disobedience (*Acts 17,vs30-31*).
- God loves sinners and has provided a way of salvation through the death of His Son on the cross (*Romans 5,v8*).
- Those who trust the Lord Jesus as Saviour are justified (*Romans 5,v1*) and will never be condemned (*Romans 8,v1*).
- Those who are disobedient and do not trust Jesus Christ are condemned, will be judged for their unbelief and lost forever (*John 3,vs15-17*).

SPECIFIC VERSES CONCERNING CHILDREN

We all understand the general teaching of Scripture on this subject – but how does it relate specifically to children?

First of all we need to see that the Bible specifically applies the words “lost”, “astray” and “perish” to children in *Matthew 18,vs11-14*.

- Verse 11: “For the Son of man is come to save that which was LOST.”

The word “for” links this verse with the previous one, which clearly refers to children as “little ones”, and this

shows that the Lord Jesus is applying the word “lost” (APOLLUMI) to them. The fact that this verse is not found in some Biblical manuscripts does not minimize its teaching, because that teaching continues in the following three verses.

But this verse also teaches that the Lord Jesus came to save lost children.

- Verses 12 & 13: *What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes ASTRAY, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray.*”

These two verses illustrate the truth contained in verse 11. The sheep in this story is, in the context of these verses, a child – and teaches us that the child is “astray” – that he is lost and especially emphasises that he is “outside the fold” – outside the Kingdom of God and far away from Him.

The word “astray” is a translation of the Greek word “PLANAO” which means “to wander”, “to be mistaken” and “in error”, and especially to be led astray. The same word is used by Peter (1st Peter 2,v25; 2nd Peter 2,v15), and is also used by James (James 5,vs19-20).

But these verses also show us that the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is looking for lost children and wants to find them.

- Verse 14: *“Even so, it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones (MIKROS) should PERISH.”* The Lord Jesus in this verse uses the word “perish” (APOLLUMI) with regard to children. It is the same Greek word as that translated “lost” in verse 11.

We can learn two truths concerning children from this verse.

- ✓ The word “will” used here means “wish” or “desire”, as in 1st Timothy 2, v4. God does not

want any child to perish, to be destroyed, or to be lost.

- ✓ The fact that God does not want this to happen means that it is possible.

These verses teach us that children ARE lost. ALL children are born with a sinful nature; they are ALL outside God's Kingdom and separated from God - like the lost sheep in this passage. They are ALL lost in this sense. They are ALL lost as far as their position and their relationship to God is concerned. They are ALL "outside". But we have already learned in the answers to previous questions that the Bible teaches that only those who have reached the age of understanding and accountability, who have disobeyed God's voice and rejected His salvation, are lost in the sense of judgment and condemnation. Children will not come under God's wrath and condemnation until they understand what sin is and are guilty of rejecting God. They will then become accountable and if they die in that condition they will be condemned, lost or separated from God forever.

EXPERIENCE

This is a subject to which we cannot add or submit our own experience, or that of others. We can only find our answer from Scripture. But we could add one significant statement. We must remember that the question of being saved and lost (or separated from God) go together. How can anyone be saved if they are not lost? Otherwise what is there to be saved from? Therefore if we believe in the possibility of children being saved, we must also believe in the possibility of them being lost and separated from God.

COMMENTS FROM CHRISTIAN LEADERS

- ✓ Mr. Hudson Pope wrote:
"One fundamental concept must be taken into account - from a spiritual point of view - by every worker among the young. It is that some children are born again and some are not. It is obvious that the approach to the child which loses sight of this

distinction can never be effective. The teacher who looks upon his scholars as being all children of God, apart from the new birth and the personal reception of Christ, is gravely mistaken. Scriptures and experience are both against him (read Ephesians 2 and Romans 5). By nature we are all children of wrath. There are only two classes (John 8,vs42,44 and 1st John 3,v1). The only entry from one class to the other is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1,v12). Either a child is a born-again child, truly converted to God by faith in Christ Jesus and a child of light - or he is an unconverted child of Adam, wrong in heart, and, according to age and opportunity, wrong also in experience."

✓ Mr. Anthony Capon wrote:

"A child is capable of sin. He was born with a sinner's nature. This is clear from John 3,vs6,7. If a child was born with a sinner's nature, it is not surprising that he is in danger of hell. This is a 'hard saying', and one against which all who love children will have a natural feeling of rebellion. But the best interests of children are not served by blinding our eyes to the fact. Christ recognized that children are in danger of hell, but in His love He came to rescue them. In Matthew 18,v11 he describes them as "lost"; in verse 12 as having "gone astray"; and in verse 14 as liable to "perish". As soon as a child is capable of being "caused to stumble" (that is, as soon as he is capable of conscious sin), he is in danger of God's utter judgment."

CONCLUSION

If children are lost (and we have seen that this is what the Bible teaches), then it is our responsibility to evangelize them and show them how they can be saved - how they can be found and be inside God's Kingdom instead of outside. The more we understand this truth the more burdened we will be for them and their souls, and the more we will want to reach them with the Gospel. And the good news is that if they trust Jesus Christ they will be saved forever. *"For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they*

have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace. Who bring glad tidings of good things!' So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (Romans 10,vs13-15,17).

QUESTION 7

WHEN A BABY OR A VERY YOUNG CHILD DIES DOES HE GO TO HEAVEN?

INTRODUCTION

This question has really been answered in response to the previous question. But I felt I should do so again by asking and answering it specifically, because it is one which is especially asked by parents whose infant child has died.

If there is an age of accountability – and I believe firmly and definitely that there is – then obviously those who die before that age go to Heaven because they are not accountable for their sinful nature or for their sin.

ANSWER

But let us examine the question in more detail to be sure that we have the answer from the Bible.

➤ SPECIFIC VERSES ABOUT INFANTS AND VERY LITTLE CHILDREN

✓ *“And he said, ‘While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child (YELED) may live?’ But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I SHALL GO TO HIM, BUT HE SHALL NOT RETURN TO ME” (2 Samuel 12 v22, 23).*

This is a story of a baby who died when young. It was the baby born of David and Bathsheba. David fasted and prayed for this sick baby to become well, but the child died

and David said he would not mourn because he knew his baby was safe. The Holy Spirit gave David the assurance, “*I shall go to him.*” David believed his child would go to Heaven where he knew he himself would go one day, and this gave him joy and peace.

These are interesting and helpful verses and must have been a revelation from God to His servant David. They would certainly indicate a belief that infants go to Heaven if they die.

✓ “*Moreover, you took your sons and your daughters, whom you bore to Me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your acts of harlotry a small matter, that you have slain **My children** (BEN) and offered them up to them by causing them to pass through the fire?*” (Ezekiel 16 v20,21).

These verses refer to the awful practice of sacrificing infants and little children to pagan gods – and God calls these little ones “my children.” He saw these babies as His children.

✓ We have seen in an earlier answer that there are verses which indicate that there is an age of accountability (Deuteronomy 1 v39; Isaiah 7 v16 and Jonah 4 v11). These verses clearly conclude, at the same time, that those who have not reached that age will go to Heaven.

➤ OTHER VERSES INCLUDING INFANTS AND LITTLE CHILDREN

✓ I refer you again to some of the many verses which make it clear that a person is condemned and judged – not because of his inherited sinful nature – but because of his deliberate sin, rejection of and disobedience to God which are the result of that nature (e.g. John 3 v16; 18 and 19; James 4 v17).

✓ But we also need here to add two other vital ways we can know that infants who die are not condemned:

- They are not condemned because of the goodness of the nature of GOD, and His wonderful grace.

"God is love" (1 John 4 v8, 16).

"The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works" (Psalm 145 v8, 9). Charles Spurgeon writes, "That infants perish and are lost is altogether repugnant to the idea which we have of Him Who is love. Should we believe that with such universal goodness as His, He would cast away the infant soul? It would be so contrary to all that we have ever read or believed of Him."

And I agree completely.

There are many verses in Scripture which teach us that our God is a God of love. And we can even see that love and care for infants in verses like *Psalm 22,vs9 & 10, Psalm 139,vs.15-16* and *Jonah 4,v11*. Could we, as a result, possibly believe that it is possible for Him to judge and condemn an infant or a very little child who has never consciously rejected Him? How could a God of love do such a thing?

- They cannot be condemned because the eternal condemnation of those dying in infancy would be completely inconsistent with the wonderful, loving character of our LORD JESUS CHRIST.

We picture Him in Mark 10 v16: *"And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them."*

And in Matthew 18 v14: *"Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."*

How could He ever condemn an infant or a little child who did not understand and who had not rejected or disobeyed Him?

➤ EXPERIENCE WITH AND EXAMINATION OF CHILDREN

We ourselves would find it absolutely impossible to believe or accept that infants or little children with no real understanding

of sin, and without the ability to put their trust in Christ could be condemned by God and excluded from Heaven if they died for something they had not done. Surely we would be heartless to believe otherwise.

We believe that God condemns those who have personally and consciously transgressed and rejected Him and His voice – whether through conscience (Romans 2 v15), creation (Romans 1 v19, 20) or Scripture (Romans 10 v17). We also believe that the infant is not accountable or guilty.

- ✓ Infants and very young children have not deliberately transgressed and rejected God and His voice.
- ✓ Infants and very young children are not able to put their trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Therefore if they die they will not be condemned and will go to Heaven.

➤ COMMENTS FROM CHRISTIAN LEADERS (in addition to those given in answer to the previous questions):

- ✓ Harry Ironside wrote *“Little ones who die go to be with Christ.”*
- ✓ Charles Hodge wrote: *“The common doctrine of evangelical Protestants is ... all who die in infancy are saved.”*
- ✓ Charles H. Spurgeon wrote: *“We know that infants enter the Kingdom, for we are convinced that all of our race who die in infancy are included in the election of grace and partake in the redemption wrought out by our Lord Jesus. Whatever some may think, the whole spirit and tone of the Word of God as well as the nature of God Himself, lead us to believe that all who leave this world as babies are saved ... they are raised to the Kingdom of Heaven by the free and sovereign grace of God. How are they saved, then? By works? No, for if that innocence could have admitted them to Heaven, it must also have sufficed to save them from pain and death. The dear babies live again, however, because Jesus died and rose again, and they are in Him. They perish, as far as this life is concerned, for a sin which they did not commit: but they also live eternally through a righteousness in which*

they had no hand, even the righteousness of Jesus Christ, who hath redeemed them. We know little of the matter, but we suppose them to undergo regeneration before they enter Heaven: for that which is born of flesh is flesh, and to enter the spiritual world, they must be born of the Spirit. But whatever is wrought in them it is clear that they do not enter the Kingdom by the force of intellect or will or merit, but as a matter of free grace, having no reference to anything that they have done or have felt."

- ✓ Charles Spurgeon also explained how he believed that infants and very little children could enter Heaven when they died:
 - Through their election. He believed, like many reformed theologians that *"all dying in infancy are included in the election of grace and are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Holy Spirit."*
 - Through their redemption. He believed that *"Christ's blood bought those dying in infancy and they are saved because Christ was sponsor for them and suffered in their stead."*
 - Through their regeneration. *"The new birth is the only way into Heaven and in some mysterious manner the Spirit of God regenerates these infant souls at death. The Holy Spirit can do such sovereign work even before the intellect can work. And we see an example when John the Baptist is filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (Luke 1 v15)."*

CONCLUSION

We could therefore conclude the following:

- ✓ Infants and very little children, according to Scripture, are spiritually dead and outside God's Kingdom.
- ✓ If they die before they reach the age of accountability they go to Heaven.

- ✓ We do not know how to reconcile these two statements. The Bible teaches that only those who are born again can enter Heaven (*John 3,v5*). It may be (as Charles Spurgeon believed) that such infants, when they die, are regenerated by the sovereign grace of God on the basis of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. God can work sovereignly in the hearts of infants at the moment of their death - just as He worked sovereignly in the heart of John the Baptist at his birth (*Luke 1,v15*). But we do know, and can be sure, that our God, Who is righteous and loving, will always do what is right - and we CAN trust Him.
- ✓ However, we must get on with our God-given task of evangelizing everybody (*Mark 16,v15*) - including little children.

QUESTION 8

SHOULD YOU SPEAK TO CHILDREN ABOUT GOD'S JUDGMENT?

INTRODUCTION

This question should really be easy to answer if we understand the answers to the previous questions. Surely it is obvious that if it is possible for children to be judged by God and condemned for their disobedience to Him, it is essential that they should be told of this possibility.

ANSWER

Some Christians believe that it is wrong to speak to children about God's judgment. They think one should only speak to them about the love of God. It is important, therefore, to examine this subject, carefully, and in the light of the teaching of the Word of God.

➤ **SPECIFIC BIBLE VERSES CONCERNING CHILDREN**

- ✓ *"And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book*

of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, **the little ones (TAPH)**, and the strangers who were living among them” (Joshua 8 v34-35).

The little ones were to be present when both the blessings and the cursings of the Law were to be read out. They were to hear every word (including, for example, what is written in Deuteronomy 28 v15, 20, 32).

- ✓ “Then he went up from there to Bethel; and as he was going up the road, some **youths(NAAR)** came from the city and mocked him, and said to him, ‘Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!’ So he turned around and looked at them, and pronounced a curse on them in the name of the LORD. And two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the **youths**” (YELED) (2 Kings 2, v23-24).

In these verses youths and children make fun of Elisha – and at the same time they mock God and how He had taken Elijah up to Heaven. And they were physically judged by God for their sin. (See page 115-116 for more details).

- ✓ In Jeremiah 6 v10-13 children were warned of God’s coming judgment upon them because of their sin and disobedience.

“Gather the people, Sanctify the congregation, Assemble the elders, Gather the **children (OLEL)** and **nursing babes (YANAQ)**; Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, And the bride from her dressing room. Let the priests, who minister to the LORD, Weep between the porch and the altar; Let them say, ‘Spare Your people, O LORD, And do not give Your heritage to reproach, That the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’ “ (Joel 2 v16, 17).

Children, even little children, were to be included in the display of repentance.

- ✓ Matthew 18 v7-14. When the Lord Jesus said these words He had a little child in His arms. He spoke about “*everlasting fire*” and “*hell fire*”. He described unconverted children as being “*lost*” and “*gone astray*” and there was a child there. He states in verse 14 that it is not the will of His Father that one of these little ones should perish. There IS a danger of children being lost for all eternity, and God wants them to know about it.
- OTHER SCRIPTURES CONCERNING CHILDREN
 - ✓ “*And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to **every creature**”*” (Mark 16 v15). There is only one Gospel and it is for everyone. The biblical principle is that there must be no distinction made between the message for any one group and the message for another group, although there may be variations in how it is presented. The whole Gospel is for everyone, including the children! The message of judgment is part of the Gospel message. Children cannot come to Christ for pardon unless they know they are sinners and open to the possibility of God’s judgment. To eliminate anything from our message – for any age group – is therefore contrary to the Scriptures (Romans 1 v15-18).
 - ✓ “*For I have not shunned to declare to you the **whole counsel of God**”* (Acts 20 v27). Paul was able to say concerning the Ephesian church which included children (Ephesians 6 v1) that he had declared ALL the counsel of God to them. This must have included teaching about God’s judgment.
 - ✓ “*And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others”* (Ephesians 2 v1-3). These verses were written to the

church at Ephesus which included children (Ephesians 6 v1). They were therefore to hear what is taught in these verses. This includes the fact that those who are outside of Christ are *“by nature children of wrath”*.

➤ EXPERIENCE WITH CHILDREN

While we must tell the children about God’s judgment, experience with children teaches us that we must be wise in how we do it. We must do it in love and without any overemphasis. Our task is to warn the children, not to frighten them.

It can be very effective to use Bible stories such as Adam and Eve, Cain, Samson, Saul and Jonah, to show how much God is grieved by sin; how sin displeases Him and how those who sin must suffer the consequences. That is easy for children to understand and accept.

➤ COMMENTS FROM CHRISTIAN LEADERS

✓ Mr. Anthony Capon wrote: *“Children are often capable of real conviction of sin and a deeper sense of guilt than adults. They have not learned the art of excusing themselves to themselves! Explain simply that sin is disobedience to God, and that it grieves Him and cuts us off from Him. The concept of punishment is perfectly natural to a child, and judgment is seen to be inevitable unless there is repentance. It is far easier to explain judgment to children than to adults.”*

✓ Dr. Francis Schaeffer wrote: *“Should we teach about the Fall? A thousand times YES. Take away from the Bible this historic fact, localized in time and space, and you have no solution for the problem of evil. Did God create the world as it is now? The transcendent teaching of Scripture is that God did NOT create it thus. As it is now, it is an abnormal world. This truth must be taught to our children from their earliest years, for they will be surrounded by people who have lost a sense of real guilt or any sense of guilt at all. In the Bible it is not a question of psychological guilt. It is true guilt which must be*

carefully taught to the child. Avoid frightening him with terrifying descriptions, but let us try to make him understand that he is truly guilty. Man has rebelled. He has sinned. That is not an old-fashioned theory. The child himself, as soon as he reaches the age of accountability, has already chosen personally and deliberately to sin. He must know that. Should I tell that he is guilty? Yes, I must. Otherwise why would he need a Saviour?"

QUESTION 9

ARE CHILDREN MORE OPEN TO THE GOSPEL AND SALVATION THAN ADULTS?

INTRODUCTION

We will see that the definite answer to this question is "yes". Some Christians wonder why children are more open to the claims of Christ than adults. The number of Christians converted as children is considerably greater than those converted in advanced years. Far from not having the capacity to respond to the call of the Gospel, children probably have a greater capacity to do so than adults.

Is there a reason? Are children more open? Do children have certain advantages? Of course it takes the same sovereign grace of God to save a child as an adult. Children without Christ, like adults, are dead in trespasses and sins. All need the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. But, at the same time, it is good, from our point of view, to see the advantages of evangelizing children when they are young and when they are so open.

ANSWER

The Bible makes it clear that there are such advantages and reasons why we should evangelise children. They still need divine grace to enable them to trust Christ, but there is less for

them to unlearn, less to give up, and less to cause struggles and doubts which would hinder them from trusting Christ.

➤ SPECIFIC BIBLE VERSES CONCERNING CHILDREN

- ✓ *“Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as (or like) a little child (PAIDION) will by no means enter it” (Mark 10 v15).*

The Bible teaches that in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven it is necessary to become LIKE A CHILD. The Kingdom of God consists of those who have entered with childlike faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The child has an advantage in that he has not been so much maimed and perverted as an adult by wicked unbelief; and the ground of his heart into which the good seed of the Word is cast is not as hard and resistant as that of an adult.

- ✓ *“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children (PAIDION), you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18 v3).* In the Scriptures children are not told to become like adults but rather adults are told to become like children.

We could visualize this by an object lesson using a wooden door to represent the door of salvation. This door would just be about four feet high! We would bring an adult to the door and ask him if he would like to go through. He may say, “Yes” but before he could do so, he would have to bend and become like a child!

Then we would bring a child to the door and ask him if he would like to enter. He may say “Yes”. The child has an advantage. He does not need to bend! He does not have to become like a child – he already is one. He is more open than the adult.

- ✓ *“Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth (BECHUROTH), Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’ ” (Ecclesiastes 12 v1)*

The Bible teaches that youth is the best time to turn to God, before the years come when his heart becomes

hard and resistant to God's Word. It is good when a child comes to Christ, because not only is it a soul saved, but it is also a life saved.

➤ OTHER VERSES CONCERNING CHILDREN

- ✓ *"Again He designates a certain day, saying in David, 'Today,' after such a long time, as it has been said: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.' "* (Hebrews 4 v7).

It is a basic principle that each time truth is rejected the heart becomes harder. Consequently, as a person grows older and continues to reject the truth he has heard, it becomes more difficult for him to turn to Christ. Also, pride, ambition, worldliness, superstition, etc have not as great a hold on the child as on the adult.

- ✓ *"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation"* (2 Corinthians 6 v2).

The Bible always emphasises that the time to trust Christ and be saved is NOW and not LATER.

➤ EXPERIENCE WITH CHILDREN

When we work with children we realize why adults need to become like children before they can trust Christ. There are certain characteristics common to most children which adults need to have before they can be saved. These natural traits are not saving faith, but consecrated by God, they may and should precede it. Thus children are often more open to the Gospel than adults.

- ✓ Children are **helpless**

The child is a picture of weakness and helplessness. In the ancient world they were generally regarded as relatively unimportant. So our Lord uses the child to show that, to enter the Kingdom of God, one must be, and know oneself to be, helpless, weak, and unimportant – the very opposite to what most adults feel they are.

Adults feel they are STRONG, capable and important. For adults to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, they must become as helpless and insignificant as little children

were in the ancient world, and as helpless as many little children are in today's world

✓ Children are **trustful**

Children generally believe what they are told and taught. They take offers and promises at their face value. They are not cynical and suspicious like many adults. If they are told God promises them a place in His Kingdom if they trust the Lord Jesus, they believe it and do not doubt it. Therefore we aim to guide this trust which the children have prayerfully and in the power of the Holy Spirit, towards the Lord Jesus.

On the other hand, adults are often SCEPTICAL. That is why they must become like little children. They must become trustful.

✓ Children are **humble**

Most children feel themselves to be very inferior in knowledge and strength and ability.

Most adults, on the other hand, are PROUD. That is why they must become like children. They must be humbled before they can receive Christ, but children are already humble. We therefore aim and need to guide them, prayerfully, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, to humble themselves before the Saviour.

✓ **Children are generally submissive.**

They have not reached the age when independence and autonomy rule. They are more likely to submit to the authority of Jesus Christ than adults who find it HARD TO SUBMIT to God and His Word.

✓ Children are **dependent** upon others for everything

Everything children receive - their food, their clothes, their learning - they receive from someone else for nothing. Children already are naturally dependent. We aim, and need, to guide this dependence prayerfully and in the power of the Holy Spirit so that they might depend upon the Lord Jesus for salvation.

Adults are usually INDEPENDENT and earn everything they have. They feel independent and want to work and not receive. Children are accustomed to receiving things and to receiving them for nothing. So when they hear that “*the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Romans 6 v23), they are more likely to understand this. Adults often do not understand! This is why they must become like children before they can be saved.

- ✓ A child’s heart is **tender**, and more readily conscious of sin and with their lack of years and inexperience of the world, they are less steeped in sin and less hardened against the demand for repentance.

The heart of the adult is HARD and seared by repeated sin. The hard heart of the adult must become tender like the child’s. But the child’s heart is already tender. This often manifests itself in two ways:

- A sensitivity towards sin.
- An openness to the story of Calvary both in its awfulness and its love.

As a child grows older, his heart gradually hardens more and more. Unless quickened by Christ, it may become completely hardened. It is a recognized fact that the older a person is, the more insensitive he is to sin. We should pray that the child will come to Christ before Satan’s grip is tightened.

- ✓ The child is open and **teachable** and always ready to learn things. He is more responsive to teaching and invitation. His mind is free from the accumulated clutter which years of acquired knowledge, ideas, opinions and theories build up in the minds of adults, and he does not see all the problems and objections which cloud adult minds. Truths sown in the child’s mind go deep and remain – like seed in soft, crumbling soil. (But we must remember that this also applies to false teaching and wrong influences).

The adult is ARROGANT, he thinks he "knows it all" and must become teachable like a child.

➤ COMMENTS FROM CHRISTIAN LEADERS

- ✓ R.A. Torrey wrote: *"The fact is, that with very many, if they are not converted in childhood, they will not be converted at all."*

And he wrote again, *"It is easiest to lead a child from five to ten to a definite acceptance of Christ. I rejoice in the work done by rescue missions, where we see the wrecks of manhood and womanhood changed into noble men and women. But this is not the work that produces the most satisfactory Christians. The younger we get a child to accept Christ and begin Christian training, the more beautiful the product. The overwhelming majority in our churches today were converted before 21 years of age. Whatever your church does, let it do its full duty by the children."*

- ✓ F.B. Meyer wrote: *"Children do not have to unlearn those habits of doubt and misconception which hinder so many from accepting the Saviour. There is everything in our Saviour to charm and attract children."*
- ✓ C.H. Spurgeon said: *"The capacity for believing lies more in the child than in the man. We grow less, rather than more, capable of faith. Every year, the unregenerate mind grows further from God, and becomes less capable of receiving the things of God. A child of five, if properly instructed, can savingly believe as well as an adult. The words of Jesus are so childlike and so fitted for children that they drink them in better than the words of any other man, however simple he may try to be. Children readily understand the child Jesus. The little child has no prejudices, no preconceived theories or openness it cannot give up. It believes what Jesus says." "What is this matter of capacity? What capacity is wanted? Capacity to believe? I tell you, children have more of that than grown-up persons. I am not now speaking of the spiritual part of faith, but as far as the mental faculty is concerned, there is any quantity of the capacity for faith in*

the heart of a child. His believing faculty has not yet been overloaded by superstition, or perverted by falsehood, or maimed by wicked unbelief. Only let the Holy Spirit consecrate the faculty, and there is enough of it for the production of abundant faith in God.

Minds in their early days are plastic. The first seven years of our being often shape all the rest. At any rate give to godly teaching the first twelve years of any child and it will be difficult to erase the writing."

- ✓ *Robert Murray McCheyne said, "Most that were ever saved fly to Christ when young ... Those that were come to years were too wise and prudent to be saved by the blood of the Son of God and He revealed it to those who were younger and had less wisdom ... If you ask aged Christians most of them will tell you that they were made anxious about their souls when young. Oh what a reason is here for seeking an early in bringing to Christ. If you are not saved in youth it is likely you never will be. Youth is converting time."*
- ✓ *John Cotton once said: "Young children are flexible and easily bowed. It is easier to train them up to good things now than in their youth and riper years."*

CONCLUSIONS:

If it is true (as I believe it is) that children are more open to the Gospel than adults, then several conclusions should be obvious:

- There is a real need to evangelize the children when they are still young, and not wait until they become older and more resistant to the Gospel. Our churches and missions need more, and better, child evangelism.
- There is a real need for prayer that God will raise up more men and women with a real call to evangelize children, and a God-given ability to relate to them. Specialists are also needed to train Sunday school teachers and others who work with children.
- There is a real need for our evangelism of the children to be thorough, and biblical, and that the Gospel which is taught

to them to be truly the one which is the power of God onto salvation (Mark 16 v15; Romans 1 v16; Galatians 1, v8, 9).

- At the same time there is a real need NOT to depend upon the child's openness to the Gospel and a real need not to use that openness to manipulate him into a "decision" which is not the work of the Holy Spirit. Our dependence must be upon God. No matter how open a child might be, he cannot come to Jesus Christ unless God takes the initiative and works in his heart (John 6 v44, 65).

OH THAT WE MIGHT REACH THE CHILDREN OF THE WORLD WITH THE GOSPEL OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST!

QUESTION 10

WHAT IS THE BEST AGE FOR A PERSON TO TRUST JESUS CHRIST - AND BE SAVED?

INTRODUCTION

This question, and its answer, are closely related to the previous question and answer, and to questions 2 and 3 and their answers.

This is indeed an interesting and very practical question. How we answer it will help determine our ministry - and especially our ministry to children. And the obvious answer is - the earlier the better. A child saved is a life saved.

We who evangelize children are not just interested in their souls; but also in their lives. When a child trusts Jesus Christ he has still many years, God willing, to live for him.

A lady on one occasion asked me this question:

"What is the best age to trust Jesus Christ?"

My answer was:

"The earlier the better. Sixty is a good age. Forty is better. Twenty still better. Fifteen better still. But how much more wonderful to trust Jesus Christ at the age of ten, or eight or six! Almost the whole life lies ahead!"

ANSWER

➤ SPECIFIC BIBLE VERSES

- ✓ Jeremiah writes in Lamentations 3 verse 27, “*It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth (NEURIM).*” The context relates this statement to waiting for and seeking God (verse 25), and to hoping and waiting for God’s salvation (verse 26). A yoke speaks of submission, service and partnership; and Jeremiah is emphasizing how important it is for a person to commence these when he is young rather than having to be “broken into it” later in life.
- ✓ We have already seen in Psalm 78 how important it is for the children to set their hope in God (verse 7) so that they do not become like their fathers (verse 8) - a stubborn and rebellious generation.
- ✓ Solomon emphasizes how important it is - and how good it is - for people to “*remember your Creator in the days of your youth before the difficult days come*” (Ecclesiastes 12 v1).

➤ OTHER BIBLE VERSES (and examples)

We can see in the Bible a number of people who had experiences with God or who were influenced for God when they were young and, following that, lived a life of fruitfulness and service:

- ✓ Samuel heard and responded to God’s voice when still a child. Indeed he was certainly a young child at the time (1 Samuel 3 v7, 10 & 19).
- ✓ Joseph at the age of seventeen already showed himself to be an obedient son (Genesis 37 v13-17), and that the Lord was with him (Genesis 39 v2 and 3).
- ✓ The basis of Moses’ long life of service and usefulness was laid during the years of infancy and early childhood when he was taught and influenced by his parents (Exodus 2 v1-10, Hebrews 11 v23-26).

- ✓ David first appears in Scripture as a youth (1 Samuel 16 v11 and 12), and he testifies to God's work in him and his trust in God from his youth (Psalm 71 v5, 17).
- ✓ Joash became king at seven years of age, and it is recorded that he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest (2 Chronicles 24 v1, 2).
- ✓ Josiah became king at the age of eight and did right in the eyes of the Lord. He then began to seek the Lord at the age of 16 (2 Chronicles 34 v1-3).
- ✓ Daniel was one of a selected group of children or young people (Daniel 1 v4) who took a clear stand for God in a heathen environment (Daniel 1 v8).
- ✓ Timothy came to Christ under the ministry of Paul probably as a teenager (Acts 14 v6, 7; Acts 16 v1-3; 1 Timothy 1 v2; 2 Timothy 1 v2), but it is clear that the foundations of that were laid from infancy onwards (2 Timothy 3 v15).
- ✓ Obadiah feared God from his youth (1 Kings 18 v12). While the Bible makes it clear that Samuel knew God from an early age, there is no definite reference to the time when God first started to work in the hearts of most of the others listed above. But it could well have been in childhood. Certainly the foundation of their long and fruitful lives must have been laid during their childhood years - either by parents or by others.

➤ EXPERIENCE

- ✓ Common sense tells us that it is better to experience God's salvation before hearts are hard and before sin gets too much control; and common sense also tells us that it is better for a child to be saved so that many years can be given to and lived for the Lord - rather than a few years after a conversion later in life.

An older man said to me one evening.

"I am so glad that I am saved. I trusted Christ 5 years ago at the age of 60; and I am thankful that He is my Saviour.

But my life has been wasted. I have given my best years to the world and to the devil. And I have only a few years left to give to Him. I wish with all my heart that I had trusted Him when I was young."

During one of my evangelistic campaigns I asked one of my co-workers if she would give her testimony the following evening. She hesitated and then said, "*I would rather not, I don't have a testimony like those we have heard recently, of those saved from drugs, alcohol and all kinds of sin.*" I asked her about her salvation and she replied "*I was saved at the age of five and I have never become involved in any of these things. So I don't have a great testimony like them.*" And I replied, "*Margaret, you have a much more wonderful testimony than any of them. Everyone of them would give their right arm to have a testimony like yours.*"

- ✓ It is a recognized fact that the human personality is formed, and many of life's habits created, during the early years of a person's life. It is good for a child to come to Christ so that his personality and habits can be influenced and guided by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Is this not better than his coming to Christ later in life when the personality and habits are already quite fixed, and will need **radical** change?

The time to change and redirect the growth of a sapling is when it is still young and flexible. After it becomes a tree, change is almost impossible.

The time to train an animal and teach it how to respond to your commands is when it is young. Later on it will be very very difficult.

- ✓ Many servants of God trusted Jesus Christ as their Saviour when still children, and began lives of service and fruitfulness. These include the following:
 - Richard Baxter.
 - Matthew Henry.
 - Jonathan Edwards.
 - Isaac Watts .

- Jim Elliot.
- Leighton Ford .
- Stephen Olford.
- Corrie ten Boom died at the age of 91, but she had trusted Jesus Christ when she was a child of 5. How wonderful to serve God for 86 years! Does this not make the evangelism of children worthwhile - and logical?

Also, a large number of today's missionaries, serving the Lord Jesus in many countries of the world, trusted Him as their Lord and Saviour when still young.

➤ COMMENTS

- ✓ D.L. Moody recognized the importance and potential of children. At one of his meetings in Denver, Colorado he saw a little boy crying on the steps in front of the church because there were no seats left in the meeting for him. Mr. Moody led him through the crowd onto the platform. He then told the congregation *"This boy was told that there was no place for him to sit. Well, I want him here. So I have given him a place on the platform. Pray that he will turn out to be the best boy in American."* A loud "Amen" came from the crowd.

Much impressed by Mr. Moody's love and concern the little boy listened to every word of the message. When he grew up he became a prominent and well known evangelist himself, leading thousands to Christ. His name - Paul Rader.

- ✓ Dr. Andrew Bonar wrote the following: *"There is a secret feeling on the part of many Christians that it is not so important, nor so great a service, to be the means of converting children as it is to be the means of converting adults. Such persons feel, without putting their feelings into words, that it is a more palpable and evident gain to win an intelligent adult than to win his child to Christ. They forget that young souls, brought to Christ in very infancy, will be*

exercising an influence, year by year, all life long, in all the different stages of their growth, and at length, on reaching manhood will, by God's grace, mightily move for good their circle of society – over and above the consideration of the evils escaped and the ill that was never done."

- ✓ *Gypsy Smith said, "Save an old man and you save a unit, but save a boy and you save a multiplication table."*
- ✓ *Dr R.A. Torrey wrote, after a number of children had trusted Christ in one of his meetings, "That they meant more to him than the conversion of the same number of adults. After comparing the average length of service which may be reasonably expected from a child of ten and a grown man converted at the same time he said that in his experience a Christian child did much more than more Christian men. He also said that he had never known a Christian child who 'did not get to work'."*
- ✓ *An unknown author wrote: "Supposing that Paul had been converted at seventy instead of twenty five; there would have been no Paul in history. There was a Matthew Henry because he was converted at eleven and not at seventy; a Dr. Watts because he was converted at nine and not at sixty; a Jonathan Edwards because he became a Christian at eight, rather than eighty; a Richard Baxter because he was converted at six and not at sixty. How much more a soul is worth that has a lifetime before it than a soul which has nothing! Lambs are of more worth than sheep in the realm of soul as well as in the market place."*
- ✓ *Charles Spurgeon wrote: "Will you be very angry if I say that a boy is more worth saving than a man? It is infinite mercy on God's part to save those who are seventy; for what good can they now do with the fag end of their lives? When we get to be fifty or sixty, we are almost worn out; and if we have spent all our early days with the devil, what remains for God?
But these dear boys and girls – there is something to be made out of them. If now they yield themselves to Christ they*

may have a long, happy and holy day before them in which they may serve God with their hearts."

"There is this additional matter for joy, that a great preventive work is done when the young are converted. Conversion saves a child from a multitude of sins. If God's eternal mercy shall bless your teaching to a little prattler, how happy that boy's life will be compared with what might have been if it had grown up in folly, sin, and shame, and had only been converted after many days! It is the highest wisdom and the truest prudence to pray for our children that, while they are yet young, their hearts may be given to the Saviour. To reclaim the prodigal is well, but to save him from ever being a prodigal is better. To bring back the thief and the drunkard is a praiseworthy action, but so to act that the boy shall never become a thief nor a drunkard is far better."

CONCLUSION

Is the answer to our question now so very obvious? Not only is it POSSIBLE for a child to be saved; not only is it NECESSARY for a child to be saved; not only are children OPEN to the Gospel; but it is GOOD for a child to be saved. And that answer should stimulate us to teach and evangelize the children so that they can trust Jesus Christ when they are young and have their whole lives to live for Him.

The Story of Four Candles

*Just see how short this candle is, this candle that I hold.
It represents a man, who found the Lord when he was old,
And though his light is shining now, and bright beyond a
doubt,
He hasn't much to give because his light will soon be out.*

*This candle that I have will burn much longer than the other.
I love its glowing light, don't you? It represents a mother,
Who found the Lord in middle age; her children were all grown.*

If only she had known the Lord when they were still at home.

*This candle is a longer one. It represents a youth,
Who gave his heart to God and walks the path of right and
truth.*

*His light can shine out long and bright with many trophies
won,*

*With more to give because he found the Lord when he was
young.*

*This candle is the longest one I'm sure you'll like it best,
Because you know 'twill shed its light much longer than the
rest.*

*It represents a little child who heard the call and came
With many years to serve the Lord and shine in Jesus' Name.*

(Author unknown)

QUESTION 11.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT CHILDREN BORN INTO A CHRISTIAN FAMILY? ARE THEY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER CHILDREN?

INTRODUCTION

There are those who believe and teach that children born into a Christian home are in the Kingdom of God because of their parents' faith. But we have seen that this is completely contradictory to Bible teaching.

However, the Bible does make it clear that the children of believers are different from other children – not because they are in God's Kingdom – but because they have privileges other children don't have. This is clearly taught in two Bible passages.

ANSWER

➤ **1st Corinthians 7:14:** “... otherwise your children (TEKNON) would be unclean; but now they are holy.”

This is a verse which has been used to teach several things which are, I believe, quite unscriptural. For example:

- That the children of believing parents are born again through baptism.
- That only the children of believers, but not the children of unbelievers, go to Heaven if they die before the age of accountability.

But this verse teaches neither of these things.

What does this verse really mean, and how does it relate both to the immediate context and to the general teaching of Scripture? The following points will help us to find the answer.

- The word “*holy*” here cannot, on the basis of general Bible teaching, mean salvation. Salvation is only by personal faith in Christ and does not depend upon another person. John 1:12,13 states clearly: “*who were born, not of blood*” (not through any family relationship), “*nor of the will of man, but of God.*” There are only two groups in the Bible – saved and lost. If the word “*holy*” in this verse means “*saved*”, then all children who have a Christian parent are saved. This is not true in experience. Children of Christian parents also need to be born again.
- The word “*holy*” (HAGIOS) has the same meaning, in the Greek, as the two words “*sanctified*” (HAGIAZO) in the earlier part of the verse. All three words are similar. Therefore, the child is “*holy*” because of a believing parent, in the same sense as an unbelieving husband is “*holy*”, or “*sanctified*” because of a believing wife. If the word “*holy*” is equivalent to “*saved*”, then the unbelieving husband of a believing wife is also saved. But note that *verse 16* shows clearly that the husband concerned is **not** saved through his wife’s faith. The same must also apply to the child.

- The word “*sanctified*” means “*set apart*” and does not necessarily imply “*saved*”, or “*changed*”. In *1st Timothy 4:5* we read concerning meat: “*For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.*” The word “*sanctified*” here (as in *1st Corinthians 7:14*) is used in the sense of “*legitimacy*” and not of “*salvation.*”
- The use of the word “*unclean*” (AKATHARTOS), as opposed to “*holy*”, in regard to the children, would seem to be similar to the use of the same word in *Acts 10:14*, *Acts 10:28* and *Acts 11:8*, where it is used both of things and of people. In all three cases the word is used with regard to legality and position, rather than sinfulness and uncleanness. The food there was unclean in the sense that it was not lawful to eat according to Jewish law. The Corinthians were thinking they would have to divorce their unbelieving marriage partner (*verses 12-13*), but Paul was saying here that this marriage was sanctified by the Lord and their children were lawful.
- It is important to read this verse in its context! The context has nothing to do with children as such. It is the answer to the question as to whether or not a believing wife should leave her unbelieving husband. Paul is simply pointing out that if she does leave, not only will her husband lose the privilege of having a believing wife who could be the means of leading him to Christ (*1st Corinthians 7:16*), but the children will also lose the privilege of having a Christian mother. Therefore, instead of being the participants in such a blessed position, they would be outside (or “*unclean*”). We see, by contrast, that in the Old Testament (*Ezra 10:3*), marriage to a heathen woman meant not only putting her away, but also putting away the children.
- It is true that the child of one or two believing parents has a special privilege. The unbelieving husband of a believing wife has the same privilege. It is the privilege of being in continual contact with, and under the

influence of, one in the same home who is a believer, and the privilege of being prayed for continuously by that believer. Read again care-fully *verse 16*.

The children of believing parents enjoy a special privilege – and that is all! However, this **is** a great privilege – and one for which children who enjoy it should be extremely thankful.

- In *Acts 16:31* Paul said that if the jailer would believe in the Lord Jesus Christ he would be saved, and his house. This became true, but not only because his house also believed in God, as he did (*verse 34*). They were saved – not because of the head of the household’s faith – but because of their own faith.
- It is possible for believers to have children who are not believers. This is implied in *Titus 1:6* where it is stated that the elders must have children who are believers. (Read also *1st Samuel 8:1-5* and *Ezekiel 18*).
- There is, therefore, nothing in Scripture to justify the belief that the children of a Christian parent or Christian parents have a special standing before God, which the children of unsaved parents do not have. The former are greatly privileged – but that is all.

Note

I want to underline very strongly that the Bible teaches that **no-one can be regenerated** through baptism. Regeneration and justification are linked only to repentance and faith – and these are what God demands of an unsaved person, be he adult or child!

➤ *Acts 2:39* “For the promise is to you, and to your children (TEKNON), and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

To the person who repented (*verse 38*) and believed (*verse 44*) on the Day of Pentecost, there was a two-fold promise:

- The remission of sins (*verse 38*)
- The gift of the Holy Ghost (*verse 38*).

This call to faith and this promise was for them (*"unto you"*). But it was also for their immediate family and descendants (*"and to your children"*) if they would repent and believe, and to many others far off in the future (*"and to all that are afar off"*) if they fulfilled the same conditions.

This promise would be for **all** those in whose hearts God worked, and whom He would lead to repentance and faith (*"as many as the Lord our God shall call"*). It does not teach nor imply that the children of believing parents are saved, nor will automatically be saved. There is no distinction between the children of believers and the children of unbelievers, as far as their spiritual need and their position before God are concerned. But it does show that these children do have a very special privilege.

As we look back over these last 11 questions and answers we could gather and assemble now a number of brief clear biblical truths about children which encourage us to evangelize and teach them:

- **They are by nature spiritually dead, lost and separated from God and need to be saved (Matthew 18 v11-14).**
- **They can trust Jesus Christ as their Saviour and be saved (Matthew 18 v6).**
- **They are open to the Gospel (Matthew 18 v3).**
- **If they trust Jesus Christ they have their whole lives to live for Him (Ecclesiastes 12 v1).**
- **The Lord Jesus has a special love for them (Matthew 9 v36-38).**
- **The future is in their hands (Psalm 78 v7, 8).**
- **We and the Gospel can reach into their homes and parents' hearts through them (Isaiah 11 v6).**

- Children were included in the membership of the early church (Ephesians 6 v1).
- Parents are instructed to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6 v4).
- Church leaders have a responsibility to feed the children in their churches (John 21 v15).
- All believers have a responsibility to reach out to all the children and evangelize them (Mark 16 v15).
- The future of the community, the city, the country and the church is in their hands. They are the politicians, lawyers, doctors, teachers, police, pastors, ministers and parents of tomorrow.

And for a very practical view, and one which will really influence our ministry to children, we always need to see and remember that there are two groups of children.

- Those who have repented and have believed, who are regenerated and justified and in the Kingdom of God. *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”* (John 3,16).
- Those who have not repented and have not believed are spiritually dead and open to God’s condemnation. They are outside the Kingdom of God. *“He who believes in Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”* (John 3,18).
However, those who are too young to be accountable, while they are spiritually dead and outside the Kingdom of God are not condemned until they become accountable.

QUESTION 12

WHAT EXACTLY DOES IT MEAN TO EVANGELIZE CHILDREN?

INTRODUCTION

Evangelism is the proclamation of good news to lost sinners - that Jesus Christ died for their sins, that He rose again, and that He is willing and able to save all those who repent of their sin and who put their trust in Him as Lord and Saviour (*Mark 16 v15; Luke 24 v46-48; 1 Corinthians 15 v1-4*).

The Gospel is clearly outlined in the Word of God - the Bible, and three truths are emphasized.

- ✓ There is only one gospel message. *“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”* (Galatians 1,vs8-9).
- ✓ This gospel message is powerful. *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”* (Romans 1,v16).
- ✓ This Gospel is to be preached to everyone (Mark 16 v15) - adults, young people, teenagers and children. Children need to hear this message because they are spiritually dead (Ephesians 2 v1), and if they have reached an age of understanding and accountability they are already lost and condemned. (Matthew 18 v11,14)

It is, of course, absolutely essential to know what this Gospel message is if we are going to preach it.

ANSWER

Evangelism involves the teaching of as much as possible of four areas of Bible truth.

➤ **Teach about God - the source of salvation**

We need to teach about His Character (who He is and what He is like) and His work (what He has done). An understanding of sin and the need of salvation begins with a clear understanding of God.

We need to emphasize:

- ✓ God is the Creator (Acts 17: 23-29)
Therefore the children have a responsibility towards Him.
- ✓ God has spoken to them through the Bible (1 Corinthians 15 v3, 4)
Therefore they should listen to God's Word.
- ✓ God is holy and just (Acts 17 v31)
Therefore He must judge sin.
- ✓ God is good and gracious, loving and merciful (John 3 v16)
Therefore He has provided the answer to the needs of children.

The holiness of God makes salvation necessary; the love of God makes salvation possible. We should always teach these truths in Biblical balance.

➤ **Teach about sin - the children's need of salvation**

We need to teach about the sinfulness of the human heart.

We need to explain what sin is, and that all are sinners before a holy God.

We need to teach the consequences of sin.

We need to emphasize:

- ✓ Sin is against God (Psalm 51 v4). It is the transgression of His Law (1 John 3 v4).
- ✓ All are sinners by nature (Ephesians 2 v3) and by act (Romans 3 v23).
- ✓ Sin deserves punishment and everlasting separation from God (Romans 1 v18).

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict of sin. We need to pray that He will do this work in the hearts and lives of those children whom we teach.

➤ **Teach about Jesus Christ - the way of salvation**

We need to teach about the Lord Jesus Christ; He is the One who saves.

We need to teach about His Person (Who He is), and His Work (what He did).

We need to emphasize:

- ✓ He is God the Son, the Only Saviour (Acts 9 v20).
- ✓ His death: its meaning and importance, and its sufficiency to atone for sin (Acts 2, vs23,33,38).
- ✓ His resurrection: He is a living Saviour (Acts 2 v24-32).
- ✓ His exaltation: He is Lord of all (Acts 2 v33-36).

Christ is the One Who must be believed in or trusted personally for salvation.

Teaching on His Person and His saving work should be closely linked when presenting the Gospel.

➤ **Teach about repentance and faith - the appropriation of salvation**

The invitation to come to Christ is an essential part of the Gospel (John 6 v37; Revelation 22 v17). We need to pray for an immediate, present trust in Christ.

We need to emphasize:

- ✓ Christ's invitation to come to Him (Matthew 11, v28).
- ✓ The need to have a desire to turn from sin to God (Acts 2, v38; Acts 26, v20).

- ✓ The need to trust the Lord Jesus Christ, and begin a life of obedience (Acts 16, v31; Romans 10,v9, 13).

True faith always includes repentance and both involve a three-fold response to Christ's invitation - a response of mind, heart and will (Romans 6, v17).

➤ **Teach about the results of salvation**

We need to let the children know what will happen if, and when, they trust Jesus Christ as their Saviour:

- ✓ All their sin will be forgiven. They will be justified (Acts 13 v38, 39)
- ✓ They will receive eternal life (John 3, v16)
- ✓ They will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2, v38)
- ✓ They will be regenerated and receive a new nature (John 3, v3-8), and God will expect to see a real change in their lives (Acts 26, v20).

It is, in addition, essential to understand, and practise, the methods of evangelism which we can see portrayed in the ministry of evangelists in the New Testament.

Their ministry involved:

- **Proclamation** of the great Gospel truths - especially the central truth of "Christ crucified" , and the complementary truth of His resurrection (1st Corinthians 15 v 3&4). But the good news concerning the Cross can only be understood in the light of the bad news concerning our sin, and our sin can only be understood in the light of the character of God. So they included these truths as well.
- **Explanation** of the great Gospel truths (Acts 2 v22 - 36; Acts 3 v13 - 26). Today's children have little or no Biblical background. So statements of the Gospel are inadequate if they are not properly explained and taught (Matthew 28 v19,20). Our children need a teaching evangelism - not just teaching, not just evangelism but a combination of both.
- **Invitation** to respond to these great Gospel truths. The Gospel demands a response - a heart response; and the

apostles always challenged their unsaved hearers to respond to what they had heard (Acts 2 v38; Acts 13 v39; Acts 16 v31). This is not a physical response but a response of the heart to God the Holy Spirit as He convicts and points to Jesus Christ.

- **Clarification** of what is involved when a sinner trusts Jesus Christ and what becoming and being a Christian will mean for them (Acts 3, v26; Acts 14, v15; 2nd Corinthians 5, v17; 1st Thessalonians 1, v9).



SECTION VIII

BIBLICAL ANSWERS

TO QUESTIONS

ABOUT A MINISTRY

TO CHILDREN

“Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.” Acts 26:22 & 23

BIBLICAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ABOUT A MINISTRY TO CHILDREN

Most Christians accept the validity of a ministry to children. But, at the same time, many of them have questions about such a ministry.

- Some, for example, do not see the need for full-time children's workers. I have often found in my visits to Bible schools that the vast majority of the students are thinking about, aiming for, and preparing for a ministry to adults (with a lesser number hoping to work with young people and teenagers). But few are preparing for a ministry to children.
- It would also seem that in the minds of many pastors and church leaders the most important ministry of all is a ministry to adults – and children's ministries are seen as well down the scale of priorities. One would almost feel that there is a conscious or unconscious feeling in the minds of many that if a person has real gifts and abilities he should become a pastor; if he is not so gifted he should work with young people, but if he is at or near the bottom of the ability ladder he should work with children! - at least until he improves and develops his abilities and is able to move up the ladder!
- At the same time we recognize that there are many pastors, parents and believers who do see the validity and importance of reaching children, but they are not sure how to do this.

Consequently we need to examine Scripture and find the answers to questions and doubts about the validity and

importance of a ministry to children, and give some thought as to how this ministry can best be exercised.

QUESTION 1

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR A MINISTRY TO CHILDREN - ESPECIALLY IN OUR CHURCHES

Dr Martha Wright writes “The greatest hindrances in the church today to children coming to know Christ as their personal Saviour are the unsound philosophies that have infiltrated many children’s ministries, the misunderstanding regarding the Biblical view of child conversion and the lack of practical training in effective methods of child evangelism. To change this situation several things need to happen:

- Adults must first reject the erroneous philosophies about child conversion and become convinced that children are lost and need to be saved. They need to understand Jesus’ teaching and the Biblical imperative for leading children to Christ.
- Adults must be convinced of the power of the gospel to change children’s lives: “...it is the power” (dynamite) “of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.” (Romans 1,v16).
- Adults need to be trained in how to present the gospel message in an age-appropriate manner, even to young children. They also need to learn how to give children an opportunity to respond to the gospel and to be sensitive to the direction of the Holy Spirit. Further, they need to know how to counsel children regarding assurance of salvation, confession of sin, first steps of spiritual growth and other truths regarding the Christian life. This will help them to be wise counsellors and to avoid faulty decisions.
- Adults must remember, while teaching children, that salvation is by simple faith, not by reason or intellectual

development. In addition, it must be remembered that the first step in spiritual formation is salvation. *“If you doubt the child’s ability to communicate with God, don’t doubt God’s ability to communicate with the child.”*

- Adults should present the gospel in every class session and children should be given an opportunity to respond to the Holy Spirit’s work in their lives. Children’s workers should be trained to counsel by asking questions to determine the child’s understanding and to guide him in his decision.
- Adults should be trained to carefully lead children in a systematic process of spiritual growth as new believers.

When these crucial principles are put into practice the ministry of child evangelism in the local church will be transformed.

Christian educators, children’s ministry workers and the church in general need to re-examine their theological, philosophical and practical ministry approach to childhood conversion. In light of the Scriptural and other compelling evidence, it is more than clear that young children can make a true decision to trust Christ as their Saviour and be born into God’s kingdom as the Holy Spirit works. Over one-third of the world’s population consists of children under the age of 15. There is no doubt that as the church strategizes to fulfill the Great Commission for world evangelization in the 21st century and beyond, child evangelism must become a major thrust. When Jesus’ disciples were sending the little children away He adamantly declared *“... anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it”* (Mark 10,v15). Let us not be guilty of continuing to hinder children from coming to Jesus. There could not be a higher calling for ALL evangelism as child evangelism!”

QUESTION 2

WHY DID THE PREACHERS IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES NOT EVANGELIZE CHILDREN?

ANSWER

- I would agree that child evangelism AS SUCH is not specifically mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, but I would immediately add:
- ✓ This does NOT mean that children were not evangelized.
 - ✓ It does NOT mean that the aim was only to evangelize adults.
 - ✓ The pattern of evangelism in the Acts of the Apostles was in obedience to Mark 16 v15 - the evangelism of every possible person without segregation or distinction. This is what Paul means in Acts 26 v22. That verse says he evangelized both "*small and great.*" The Greek word for "small" is MIKROS and could refer to children or unimportant people - or both.

It would seem that the social structure, and the places where the evangelists went, made it more likely for them to come into contact with adults. But we have every reason to believe that there were children there also - even though they are not specifically mentioned (see Acts 2 v39; 11 v14; 16 v15; 16 v31-34).

The same reasoning would also apply to the evangelism of young people. Surely it can be taken for granted and is obvious that ALL were, and are, included without exception. There is no Scripture to prove otherwise.

- I would acknowledge that the Acts of the Apostles are certainly THE BASIS upon which we build all our work and witness, and from which we obtain the principles to determine our evangelistic work.

But we must remember that today we are engaged in many features and aspects of evangelism, apart from child evangelism, which are not mentioned specifically in the Acts of the Apostles. These include Sunday schools, Bible schools, interdenominational missionary societies, youth groups, youth evangelism and ministries to special groups such as prisoners, old people, orphans etc. But the fact that these are not mentioned in the Bible does not mean that they should not exist.

- I would emphasize:
 - ✓ The attitude of the Lord Jesus towards children as expressed in Matthew 18 v1-14; Mark 10 v13-16 and Matthew 21 v15,16.
 - ✓ The importance of children in the early church as illustrated in Ephesians 6 v1-4; Colossians 3 v20,21 and Titus 1 v6. These churches, which were begun under the ministry of Paul, included born-again children.
 - ✓ The book of Acts is, in fact, an account of what Christ continued to do through His apostles: *"The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach."* (Acts 1 v1). Christ ministered to children; He taught the children in those crowds which came to hear Him, and He taught His disciples concerning the importance of children. Certainly the apostles must have followed his example and precepts concerning children in their ministry.

CONCLUSION

The preachers and evangelists of the early church practiced the Scriptural method of TOTAL evangelism. There is no mention at all of specialization or concentration on child evangelism or any other single branch of evangelism. The reason some of us concentrate on child evangelism is because the children so often have been, or are being, omitted from total evangelism. Our aim is to help meet this deficiency and thus make evangelism total and Scriptural.

QUESTION 3

WHERE IS THE SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR SPECIALIZING IN WORK AMONG CHILDREN?

ANSWER

It is true that the Bible does not speak about specialization in children's work but we do so because:

- Children are often neglected in the evangelistic outreach of the church.
- The Scriptures teach total evangelism, and we specialize in the evangelism of children to help fulfill the concept of total evangelism.
- Children need a specialized approach and those who work among them need special training.
- No one person can do everything. God leads each one to a particular part of His vineyard to work. He leads, and we obey. God's place of service for some Christians is in work among the children.

Dr Francis Schaeffer once said in a conference on children's work: *"There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit lays a particular burden for child evangelism upon certain people, that they will teach them at this period of their life. We all have a responsibility towards children, but certain people have been entrusted with a special ministry among them."*

QUESTION 4

IS IT NOT BETTER TO EVANGELIZE THE PARENTS RATHER THAN THE CHILDREN. THEN THE PARENTS, WHEN SAVED, CAN EVANGELIZE THE CHILDREN MUCH BETTER THAN WE CAN? THIS ALSO MEANS THAT THE CHILDREN WILL BE LED TO CHRIST IN THE CONTEXT OF A CHRISTIAN HOME, AND WILL RECEIVE THE NECESSARY HELP AND ENCOURAGEMENT.

ANSWER

The Scriptures clearly indicate that the ideal situation IS a Christian home with Christian parents leading their children to Christ, and bringing them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

But unfortunately, in the world today, a Christian home is the exception rather than the rule. What a shame, then, if only

those children who have Christian parents should be evangelized! This would mean that well over 95% of the world's boys and girls would never have the opportunity of hearing the Gospel until they themselves were grown up (and probably, in many cases, no longer interested in hearing it).

This question implies two things:

- That we should evangelize parents rather than children.
- That we should evangelize the children through the parents.

I do not agree with the two above implications:

- I do not feel it is right to evangelize parents and exclude children because:
 - ✓ This is not scriptural. Scriptural evangelism is total evangelism, according to Mark 16 v15, *“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.’ “* This means reaching EVERYONE within reach, and not one group at the expense of the other.
 - ✓ Statistics show us that most people are converted before they become adults or parents. Therefore it is unscriptural and unwise not to evangelize, at all, the group which is shown to be the most open to the Gospel.
 - ✓ Children can often be the means of leading their parents to Christ.
- I do not agree with the concept of evangelizing children ONLY through the parents. This would give only the children whose parents had received Christ an opportunity to hear the Gospel and receive Christ themselves. It is not only unscriptural but also very unfair, to make the possibility of one person's hearing the Gospel dependent upon another person's salvation.

It seems to me that behind a question such as this is a real doubt as to whether God the Holy Spirit can save, and keep, a child in a home where his parents are not believers!

It IS essential to see and understand the importance of the family concept in Scripture and, where possible, children should be evangelized as part of the family. But where this is not possible (and this is very frequent) we should still evangelize the children

according to Mark 16 v15: even if it might, at a later date, lead to a spiritual division within that family (Matthew 10 v34-39). Of course we should always seek to inform the parents about what we are doing - if possible.

QUESTION 5

IS IT GOOD, OR RIGHT, TO EVANGELIZE A CHILD IF WE CANNOT FOLLOW HIM UP AFTERWARDS? I AM THINKING ESPECIALLY OF A CHILD FROM A GODLESS HOME OR FROM AN ANTI-CHRISTIAN CULTURE, WHERE HE WILL RECEIVE NO SPIRITUAL HELP AND MIGHT EVEN SUFFER OPPOSITION AND PERSECUTION.

ANSWER

- I believe that such an implication is wrong because:
 - ✓ It disagrees with Mark 16 v15 and the scriptural command to evangelize everyone.
 - ✓ It doubts the power of the Holy Spirit to save and keep a child from a godless home or an anti-Christian culture.
 - ✓ It denies the testimonies of many who have grown up in such conditions after their salvation e.g. Moses and Naaman's maid.
 - ✓ It decries the simple faith and ready response of a child, no matter what kind of a home from which he comes.
- Obviously it is better for a child to live in a Christian home or in a culture which is sympathetic to the Gospel. But the vast majority of the world's children do not have this privilege and we must reach THEM with the Gospel. God loves ALL children, whether from Christian or atheistic homes, and He wants them to be saved (Matthew 18 v14). We wrote earlier in the book about Apostolos Bliates, who is a well-known pastor in Greece. He was born into a devout Greek Orthodox family. He describes how an evangelical neighbour presented the Gospel to him when he was still a

young child; and testifies that, at the age of six, he personally trusted Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. He told his parents what he had done, and incurred their wrath and opposition; but he never wavered from his new-found faith, and had the joy, years later, of seeing both his parents put their trust in Jesus Christ.

Byeng Kato, the secretary of the African Evangelical Fellowship, and one of Africa's outstanding spiritual leaders until his death several years ago, came to the Lord at the age of 12 through the witness of a missionary of the Sudan Interior Mission. His parents were devout idol worshippers and opposed him bitterly; but he also saw his parents and his whole family come to Christ.

- We all agree in the importance of, and absolute necessity for, follow-up work. It is not enough just to lead children to Christ. We must also seek to teach them, and feed them, so that they might grow in their faith. It is as important to follow up the children as it is to evangelize them, and we must never neglect this important side of our work.

But what if such follow-up work is absolutely impossible, and if we know this beforehand?

Let me use an illustration. Imagine a man walking along a riverbank when he sees, in the river, a child who is obviously in great difficulty and on the point of drowning. The child cries for help! Does the man stop and ask himself the questions:

"Do I have enough dry clothes at home for this child?"

"Do I have food in the house?"

"Is the house warm?"

If the answer to these three questions is "no", does he then decide not to rescue the child, and sadly proceed on his way, leaving the child to drown?

I am sure this would never happen? When a child is seen to be in great danger, the first aim is to rescue him. If we have dry clothes, a warm house and plenty of food – all the better! We should help him as much as possible AFTER we pull

him out. But he should not be left to drown, just because there are not adequate facilities to take care of him afterwards.

Similarly, even if follow-up work is known to be impossible, we should not hesitate to evangelize. Our goal must be TO WIN the lost children for Christ.

Remember, also, that one of the most important parts of follow-up work is prayer, and that is always possible!

QUESTION 6

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR A CHILD WHO HAS MADE A DECISION REALLY TO GO ON WITH THE LORD AND REMAIN FAITHFUL?

ANSWER

If it is just a human decision he has made, the answer is “no”! A child, who makes a decision one way, can just as easily make it the other way.

BUT IF THE CHILD HAS REALLY TRUSTED JESUS CHRIST AS HIS SAVIOUR, a number of things have happened to him (exactly the same as those which happen to any adult who has truly believed):

- He is born again by the Spirit of God.
- He is indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
- He has been sealed by the Holy Spirit.
- He has been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ.
- He has been made a member of the family of God.
- He has received eternal life.

When we see the greatness of OUR salvation and all that happens the moment we receive Christ as Saviour, we can then understand, more fully, what happens to a child when HE receives Christ.

Although human responsibility IS involved, salvation itself is not something which is human. It is DIVINE.

The question then should read:

“CAN GOD KEEP a child when he receives Christ, even in the most unfavourable circumstances?”

Surely the answer is “YES”.

QUESTION 7

YES, I AGREE THAT A CHILD CAN “MAKE A DECISION FOR CHRIST” BUT DOES HE REALLY UNDERSTAND AND WILL HE NEED TO CONFIRM IT WHEN HE REACHES HIS TEENAGE YEARS?

ANSWER

I do not agree with such an implication because:

- I believe that a child, even a little child, can really understand all that is needed for him to trust Christ. How much understanding is necessary?

He needs to understand that he has sinned against God, to be sorry for his sin, and to be willing to turn from it; and he needs to understand that the Lord Jesus died for him, and he needs to trust and receive Him. On this simple basis, he can be saved in exactly the same way as anyone else.

It is important to remember that, although a certain amount of understanding is necessary before salvation, no one is saved by understanding, but by faith “*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God*” (Ephesians 2 v8).

- There is no doubt that in the case of a little child, as in the case of many other people, further understanding and further steps of faith and obedience will come later. But this does not affect, in any way, his regeneration. This further understanding is part of his growth, and it has nothing to do with his birth.

“At that time Jesus answered and said, ‘I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes’ “ (Matthew 11 v25).

- It is true that often a child, or a young person, or an adult, will make a later dedication of his life to the Lord, and later decisions of one kind or another. These, however, are not a confirmation of regeneration. They are the outcome of it.
- There is no Scripture to teach the need of any later confirmation of regeneration, whether it be in a child or an adult. On a human level, a person’s position in a family is determined by his birth into that family, and does not depend upon his making a decision at a later date. This is also true in the spiritual realm: a child who trusts Christ has his position as a child of God at that very moment, through the New Birth.

Like many other questions this question is based on a doubt as to whether a child can genuinely receive Christ and be born again. Scripture teaches:

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (John 1 v12).

Of course it should be recognized that there ARE children who make a profession which is not genuine. Perhaps there was a lack of understanding, or the profession was the result of pressure or emotionalism on the part of the evangelist. Obviously such a profession will not and cannot last – and if the child “makes a genuine decision” later in his life, THAT becomes his conversion experience.

A number of Christians, looking back over their lives, are not sure as to exactly when they were regenerated. They will only know the answer when they get to glory.

QUESTION 8
SHOULD WE USE VISUAL AIDS WHEN TEACHING THE WORD OF GOD TO CHILDREN?

ANSWER

The obvious answer is yes.

- Visual aids were used often by the Lord Jesus in His teaching ministry to all kinds of people.
Examples: the coin, the lilies, the fowls of the air, the sower, the shepherd, etc. He even used a child as a visual aid on at least two occasions (Matthew 18 v1; Mark 10 v15).
- On at least three occasions instructions were given to the Israelites to use visual aids in the teaching of their children:
 - ✓ Exodus 12 v26 - the Passover (which portrays for us the truth of salvation).
 - ✓ Exodus 13 v14 - the Redemption of the first born (which portrays for us the truth of dedication).
 - ✓ Joshua 4 v6 - the Memorial of Stones on the banks of the Jordan (which portrays for us the truth of identification).

QUESTION 9
I AM THE PASTOR OF A BAPTIST CHURCH. IF A CHILD IN MY CHURCH PROFESSES TO BE SAVED AND WANTS TO BE BAPTIZED AND PARTICIPATE IN THE LORD'S SUPPER, SHOULD I ALLOW THIS TO HAPPEN?

ANSWER

If you believe, as I am sure you do, that baptism is for believers, that only believers should participate in the Lord's Supper, and if you believe that the child's profession of faith is genuine, how can you possibly deny his request? Should you not praise God for such a request and give him all the encouragement you can. The required qualification is faith in Christ - not age.



SECTION IX

**BIBLICAL OUTLINES WHICH
CAN BE USED
TO CHALLENGE BELIEVERS
TO MINISTER TO CHILDREN**

*“Go into all the world
and preach the Gospel
to every creature.” Mark 16:15*

BIBLICAL OUTLINES WHICH CAN BE USED TO CHALLENGE BELIEVERS TO MINISTER TO CHILDREN

We have examined in detail what the Bible teaches about children and have asked and answered from the Bible a number of questions about children and a ministry to children.

In this section of the book I would like to include a number of outlines about children based upon the Bible teaching which we have already seen and studied.

I have two purposes in the inclusion of these outlines:

- To help you yourself to understand more fully what the Bible teaches about children and what God wants you to do to help them.
- **Mainly to give you outlines which you could use when you are preaching and challenging others to become involved in a ministry to children.**

I trust that both my goals will be reached and that you will find these outlines a real help.

It is of special importance that, if you are a full-time children's worker, or pastor, or a person in a leadership position, you not only understand what the Bible teaches about children – but that you are able to teach these truths to others and challenge them to get involved in a ministry to children by praying for you and your ministry, by supporting your ministry financially, or by themselves getting involved in a direct ministry to children. Consequently, you will look for, and pray for, opportunities to speak in churches and to Christian groups. So it is important that you know how to make a good and biblical presentation.

You need, therefore, to know how to prepare a message, based on what the Bible teaches, and then present it in a way which will not only inform but challenge. It is most important that you use the Word of God in your presentation, and base all you say on it. God speaks through His Word – not only to the unsaved with regard to salvation, but also to Christians with regard to their service and involvement in ministry.

Earlier in the book I wrote about speaking to a group of women in the early days of my ministry with CEF. I was presenting the challenge of Good News Clubs and I was praying that God would call some of them to open their homes for a weekly meeting for the children of the neighbourhood. I spent some time explaining Matthew 18 v5: *“Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.”*

I pointed out, on the basis of this verse, that if we receive or welcome children into our home in the name of Jesus Christ, and teach them about Him, it is just as if we were receiving or welcoming Jesus Christ into our home. And I asked the women if they would not like to welcome the Lord Jesus into their homes in this way.

God spoke to one of these women through that verse. She told me afterwards that she could not remember anything else I had said, but she remembered this verse from God’s Word and, on the basis of that verse, she opened her home for a weekly meeting for the children of the neighbourhood – and she herself taught it for many years.

Yes, God speaks through His Word.

Therefore, when you are promoting your ministry, presenting your work and bringing the challenge of reaching children with the Gospel, make sure you base it firmly and squarely on the Word of God.

It is also important that you present your message in a clear, simple, reasoned and logical way - building up your presentation step by step. If you are going to introduce teaching which you know may be controversial and difficult for your listeners to accept - build up to it gradually and logically. In such a case it

is better to enter the water at the shallow end of the swimming pool and move step by step into the deeper water - rather than jumping into the deeper water at the beginning!!!

And it is always vital to include a challenge to your listeners, encouraging them to ask God to guide them concerning what they could do to help the children.

There are five ways in which you can use the Word of God to teach and challenge your hearers concerning children and their needs.

1) THE EXPOSITION OF A PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE - VERSE BY VERSE.

You will find a number of outlines which you could use in the earlier pages of this book. These are all based on the simple exposition and explanation of a passage of Scripture - and that is generally the best kind of presentation. And be sure to use them to present the needs of the children and the challenge of reaching them with the Gospel.

Here are five different examples and ways to do this.

- The challenge of Deuteronomy 6, v3-7 (see pages 33-37)!
 - ✓ God's initial command
 - ✓ God's two-fold promise
 - ✓ God's three-fold command
 - Love the Saviour
 - Love the Scriptures
 - Labour for the souls of children
- The goals of a children's worker as outlined in Deuteronomy 31 v12-13 (see pages 39-43)!
 - ✓ Go to the children
 - ✓ Get them to listen
 - ✓ Help them to understand
 - ✓ Pray they will trust the Lord
 - ✓ Encourage them to be obedient to Him
 - ✓ Show them how to witness to others.
- The challenge of Psalm 78, v1-8 (see pages 44-50)!
 - ✓ Our privilege

- ✓ Our promise
- ✓ God's precept
- ✓ God's plan
- ✓ God's purpose
- ✓ A possibility
- An exposition of Matthew 18, v1-14 (as, for example, on page 75)
 - ✓ Children are humble - imitate them
 - ✓ Christ identifies Himself with children - receive them
 - ✓ Children can be saved - do not offend them
 - ✓ Children are precious - do not despise them
 - ✓ Children are lost - leave, go, seek and find them
- An exposition of Mark 10 v13-16 (as, for example, on page 79-85)
 - ✓ The faithful friends who brought the children to the Lord Jesus. You can do so.
 - ✓ The consenting children who came to Him. You can see this happen.
 - ✓ The disobedient disciples who tried to stop them. Don't be like them.
 - ✓ The loving Lord Jesus who rebuked the disciples and received the children. And He has not changed.

2) THE EXPOSITION OF A BIBLE VERSE AND ITS APPLICATION.

This method involves the choice of one verse on which you will base your presentation and your application. Here is one example.

- Matthew 21 v28b "*Son go work today in my vineyard*".
 - ✓ "*Son*" - **our relationship**. We are the sons and daughters of God and everything we say and do is based upon this relationship.
 - ✓ "*Go work*" - **our responsibility**. As His children we are required and commanded to be busy for Him - and one way we can obey Him is by reaching children with the Gospel. (Mark 16, v15)

- ✓ *“Today”* – **our restriction**. God has not told us to do something tomorrow or next week. He calls us and restricts us. Work NOW – TODAY. Is there something God wants you to do to reach today’s children with the gospel?
- ✓ *“In my vineyard”* – **our resources**. He is the Lord of the vineyard and He will, therefore, supply us with the strength, ability and help we need for our work.
- ✓ And then there must be – **our response**. There are three possibilities:
 - Yes and don’t do it (verse 30)
 - No and then do it (verse 29). That is better
 - Yes and do it. That is best.

3) AN OUTLINE WHICH ANSWERS A QUESTION

Or you could choose as your subject a basic question about children and in your outline answer that question from the Word of God – as outlined in the earlier part of this book. Here are six examples:

- Is it important to teach children the Word of God? (see page 155)
- Is it possible for children to believe and be saved? (see page 161).
- Does a child need to be saved? (see page 195).
- Should you speak to children about God’s judgment? (see page 206)
- Are children more open to the Gospel than adults? (see page 210)
- When is the best age to trust Jesus Christ and be saved? (See page 217)

4) AN OUTLINE BASED ON A THEME OR SUBJECT

Or you choose a subject or theme which will, firstly, inform your listeners, or your child, about children and what the Bible teaches concerning them and which will, secondly, challenge them to do something to help children.

In the pages which follow (256-299) - I have given a number of such outlines.

Outline 1 - Children need Jesus Christ

Outline 2 - The message our unsaved children need to hear

Outline 3 - The book without words which tells a story

Outline 4 - How to evangelize children through a Bible lesson (*)

Outline 5 - Salvation by Grace - the children's gospel

Outline 6 - Why should we evangelize children? (*)

Outline 7 - 4-2-4 - the wonderful formula (*)

Outline 8 - Reach the children

Outline 9 - Men are needed

Outline 10 - A great ministry

Outline 11 - What is your grade?

Outline 12 - What do the world's children need? (*)

Most of the outlines I have included could be used anywhere - when speaking in a church, a youth group, a Bible school, a conference or a training class. But several which I have marked with an asterisk (*) are better suited to a teaching or training ministry and would be most helpful to those who are actually teachers working with children. These are usually somewhat longer than the more general presentations.

5) AN OUTLINE BASED ON A BIBLE STORY

This can be a very helpful and interesting way to present your message. Your listeners will find it easy to follow the narrative of your story and hopefully, at the same time, understand and respond to the application you make from the narrative.

On pages 300 - 325 I have given a number of such outlines.

Outline 13 - Go back to the source (2nd Kings 2,vs19-22)

Outline 14 - Paul - an example to follow (Acts 16,vs1-10)

Outline 15 - Delivering the lunatic child (Luke 9,vs.37-42)

Outline 16 - Elisha and the dead child (2nd Kings 4,vs.8-37)

Outline 17 - Success and failure in a ministry to children (2nd Kings 4, vs.25-37.

Outline 18 - Jairus and the Lord Jesus (Mark 5, vs.22-43)

Outline 19 – God hears the prayers of children (Genesis 21, vs.14-20)

I trust you will be able to use some of the outlines I have included - whether you base them on a Bible passage, Bible verse, a question, a theme or a Bible story. I have personally used all of these outlines in my preaching and teaching ministry and found them helpful. I also believe that God blessed them.

OUTLINES BASED ON A THEME

OUTLINE 1 CHILDREN NEED JESUS CHRIST

How can we, as Christians, help our children?

God has provided us with a Gospel message which He will use in the lives of the children when we present it and teach it to them.

But we need to understand first of all the needs of the children we are teaching. We cannot give solutions unless we know the problems.

And we can understand these needs primarily by studying the Word of God – backed up by experience and observation.

- Children are sinners – they are born with a sinful nature: (Psalm 51 v5; Psalm 58 v3; Isaiah 53 v6; Romans 3 v23).
 - ✓ They need forgiveness – how can they be forgiven?
 - ✓ They need help to overcome sin in their lives – how can they have this help?
- Children are spiritually dead (Ephesians 2 v1).
 - ✓ They have no understanding or desire for spiritual things.
 - ✓ They need life and with that life comes a desire for food and growth.
- Children are outside God’s Kingdom and God’s family (Matthew 18 v11-14).

- ✓ They need to be born again and that new birth brings them into God's Kingdom
- ✓ The only way into God's Kingdom is through a new birth (John 3 v5). And this will bring them salvation, security and joy.
- Children are under pressure and subject to many temptations – as we can see from observation and experience.
 - ✓ They need the power and help of the indwelling Holy Spirit Who will come to live in them when they trust Christ.
 - ✓ The only way that these needs can be met is by the child putting his faith in Jesus Christ and trusting Him as his Saviour and Lord. He will give the child forgiveness, life, entrance into God's Kingdom and power to overcome sin.

Consequently, we need to understand that there are two kinds of children:

- Those who have trusted Christ
 - ✓ They are forgiven
 - ✓ They are spiritually alive
 - ✓ They are inside God's Kingdom and family
 - ✓ They have strength
- Those who have not trusted Christ:
 - ✓ They are not forgiven
 - ✓ They are spiritually dead
 - ✓ They are outside the Kingdom
- They are controlled by sin

The children in all our classes are divided into those two groups and every child is in one or other of them.

Our responsibility is to minister to both groups. They have different needs:

- We need to FEED those who have trusted Jesus Christ.
- We need to FISH or evangelize those who have not trusted Jesus Christ.

We are to be both shepherds and fishermen.

How can we especially help the children who have not trusted Christ? How can we evangelize them?

- BY PRAYER – that God will work in their hearts.
- BY PRESENTATION – of the Gospel message.
 - ✓ We are commanded to do so (Mark 16 v15).
 - ✓ This message has power (Romans 1 v16)
 - ✓ Children are saved through this message (Romans 10 v17).

As we present and teach the message we pray that the Holy Spirit will do His work of conviction and regeneration. Are you burdened for the needs of the children? Do you want to see them saved and growing in their faith? Are you willing to pray for them and bring the Gospel message to them?

DESCRIPTION OF UNSAVED CHILDREN	NEED OF UNSAVED CHILDREN	SALVATION	RESULTS FOR SAVED CHILDREN
Sinners	Forgiveness	THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST	Their sin is forgiven
Dead	Life		They have new life
Outside the Kingdom	Security		They are in God's Kingdom
Helpless	Strength		They have power to overcome sin

OUTLINE 2

THE MESSAGE OUR UNSAVED CHILDREN NEED TO HEAR

Children need Jesus Christ; they need to be saved. But they cannot trust Jesus Christ as their Saviour unless and until they hear and believe the message of the gospel.

- What is the gospel message?
- What should we teach?
- What is the message which God blesses?

The Wordless book helps us to understand the Gospel message. (Show it). Each of the four colours of the Wordless book symbolizes one area of truth.

- **Red page** (Show it)

This page reminds us of the central teaching of the Gospel message which concerns Jesus Christ:

- ✓ Who He is -
 - He is God - (John 20, v28 & 29)
 - He is perfect Man - (1st Peter 2 v22)
- ✓ What He did for us:
 - His Death - (1st Peter 3 v18)
 - His Resurrection - (1st Corinthians 15 v14)
 - His Lordship - (Philippians 2 v9-11)

Because of His work on the Cross He can save children from sin.

- ✓ He can forgive their sins - (Acts 13 v38)
- ✓ He can help them live the right way - (Philippians 2 v13)

- **Dark page** (Show it)

The dark page reminds us of sin. But what is sin?

- ✓ Sin is breaking God's laws - that's what it is - (1st John 3 v4)
- ✓ Sin separates from God - that's what it does - (Isaiah 57 v2)

- ✓ Sin is universal – that’s who it affects – (Romans 3 v23)
- **Gold page** (Show it)
The gold page reminds us of God Who is pure and lives in Heaven.
 - ✓ It reminds us that He is the Creator (Ecclesiastes 12,v1)
 - ✓ It reminds us of His holiness and His justice – (Isaiah 6 v3)
 - ✓ And it reminds of His love – (John 3 v16).
- **White page** (Show it)
The white page stands for justification and the way God sees all who are “in Christ” – including the children who have trusted the Lord Jesus.
What does the child need to do to be saved?
 - ✓ He should repent – want to be different and to turn from his sin – (2nd Peter 3 v9)
 - ✓ He should trust Jesus Christ as His Saviour – (Acts 16 v31)And the result will be forgiveness, new life, the Holy Spirit inside, and strength to live the right way.
Are you willing to bring this simple, but life-changing message, to the boys and girls? You can even use a little wordless book, like this one, to do so. And God will bless and use your presentation – and you may even see children trusting the Lord Jesus.

(It is interesting to know that Charles Spurgeon was one of the first to use a Wordless book, as can be seen by the following quote:

On January 11, 1866, Spurgeon preached a sermon entitled, “The Wordless Book”, his text being:

“Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (Psalm 51 v7). This is how he began: “I dare say most of you have heard of a little book which an old divine used constantly to study, and when his friends wondered what there was in the book, he told them that he hoped they would all know and understand it, but that there was not a single word in it. When they looked at it, they found that it consisted

of only three leaves: the first was black, the second red, and the third was pure white. The old minister used to gaze upon the black leaf to remind himself of his sinful state by nature, upon the red leaf to call to his remembrance the precious blood of Christ, and upon the white leaf to picture to him the perfect righteousness which God has given to believers through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ His Son. I want you, dear friends, to read this book this evening, and I desire to read it myself. May God the Holy Spirit graciously help us to do so to our profit!"

This early Wordless book had but three pages; the gold page for Heaven was missing, and so was the green cover for growth. Still, Spurgeon proceeded to preach for his customary 50 minutes to an hour on the three pages – black, red and white. There were probably some 200 of his orphanage boys and girls present, and maybe some found the Saviour as the prince of preachers spoke, in all simplicity, on the Wordless book.)

OUTLINE 3

THE BOOK WITHOUT WORDS WHICH TELLS A STORY

This outline is very similar to the previous one. It also uses the wordless book, but gives more detail and actually outlines what to say when presenting it.

Have you ever seen a book without words? Of course you have. But have you ever seen a book without words which you can read?

I have one here today (show it). No words! Just five coloured pages. But they have a story to tell - the story about Jesus Christ and salvation.

The Gold Page

Do you believe there is a God? Of course you do. When you look around and see all the wonder and beauties of nature you know that they did not just happen. Someone made them and that Someone is God.

Do you know what God is like? The Bible is God's Word and it tells us what God is like. The most important truth about God is that He is holy. What does that mean? He is completely pure and completely without sin. When I look at this gold page I think of the metal gold. Gold is not just a very precious metal; it is also very pure. It has been heated and heated until all that is not pure has been removed from it. So, in a little way, this gold page reminds us of God who is pure, holy and without sin. The Bible says "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts*" (Isaiah 6 v3). The gold page also reminds us of Heaven where God lives, and where there is no sin. The Bible says that the heavenly city, and the street of that city, are "*pure gold as it were transparent glass.*"

But God is also just. This means that He is fair and that He must punish sin. He cannot close His eyes to it nor turn His back on it.

The Dark Page

This second page is a picture, not of God, but of ourselves. We were all born with dark sinful hearts, and because of that we find it so easy to do things which are wrong. The Bible says that "*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3 v23). God in His Word has given us a number of commands such as "*honour and obey your father and mother*"; "*do not steal*"; "*do not tell lies*"; "*do not worship anyone else or anything else except God.*" But as we read these commands we know that we have broken them or disobeyed them - or at least some of them. That means we have sinned. God is holy. There is no sin in His Presence. Therefore we cannot go to Heaven to be with Him when we die, unless our sin is forgiven.

God is also just and fair. This means that He must punish our sin - unless someone else takes our place and takes our punishment instead of us.

The Red Page

This red page reminds me of someone who did take our place and who did take the punishment for our sin. That someone is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God. He loved us so

much that He came to this earth almost 2000 years ago to live for 33 years and then to die on the Cross for us and for our sin. That is why this page is red. On the Cross the Lord Jesus Christ was punished by God the Father – not for His sin (because He never sinned) but for our sin – so that we would not be punished for it. He poured out His precious blood for us. The Bible says that *“while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”* (Romans 5 v8). Oh how much He must have loved us.

But He did not stay dead. After three days He rose from the dead and He is alive for evermore. Forty days later He went back to heaven and today He is the King of kings and Lord of lords; and He wants to be your Saviour and your Lord.

The White Page

Isn't that a nice page? It is very different from the dark page, isn't it? The Lord Jesus died for you and He wants to save you so that you won't be punished for your sins, and so that you will be changed and begin a new life. But there is something you need to do to be saved.

Do you know right down in your heart that you have sinned? Do you really want to be saved? The Bible says *“Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”* (Romans 10 v13).

Let me tell you a story. Bobby was on holiday. He loved the beach, he loved the ocean and he loved to swim. While his daddy sat and nodded sleepily on the beach Bobby went for a swim. But he went out too far, the water got deeper and deeper and his feet could not touch the bottom. He became afraid and felt he was going to drown.

What do you think he did? What would you have done? He called to his father *“Daddy save me”*. And his father rushed in to the water and saved his son from drowning.

The Bible says that a child who knows he is a sinner and wants to be saved should call to the Lord Jesus and ask Him to save him. He will save you – not from drowning – but from sin, so that you will not be separated from God. If you want to be saved and want to start living a life which pleases God you can

call today in your heart to the Lord Jesus and ask Him to save you and change you. The Bible promises that He will do so - immediately!

If you would like to be saved but are still not sure how to be, I would be glad to talk with you and show you more clearly what you need to do. When the meeting is over just remain seated and I will come over and speak with you.

Do you really want to be saved? Do you want to have your sins forgiven? Do you want to be changed and start living a life which pleases God? If so, why not speak to the Lord Jesus in your heart, even as you sit there. You do not need to speak out loud. Just call to Him and ask Him to save you, and He will. He has promised that *"whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"* - and He always keep His promises!

If you do that God will see you as clean and as pure as the Lord Jesus Himself. You will be like this white page in God's sight. All your sin will be forgiven forever. You will start a new life and be sure of going to heaven when you die. Don't wait - do it today.

You could use a little book like this to explain the way of salvation to children (you can purchase it from any CEF office). They will find it easy to understand - and you will find it easy to use! Why not do so as soon as you have the opportunity?

The Green Page

As we look at the green grass, flowers and trees we think of growth. They all grow. So should children who are saved.

This page can also be used, now or later, to show the saved child how he can grow (1st Peter 2 v2) and how he can become more and more like the Lord Jesus:

- *by reading and obeying His Bible*
- *by talking to God on a regular basis*

- *by telling others that he has trusted the Lord Jesus*
- *by confessing his sin to God if he has done something wrong. He does not need to be saved again*
- *by meeting regularly with other Christians and by attending a good church.*

OUTLINE 4

HOW TO TEACH A BIBLE LESSON TO CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

You should have two goals when teaching a Bible lesson.

- Evangelize the unsaved children
- Help the saved children to grow

And the two key words in your presentation should be – TEACH and APPLY. Don't do one without the other.

TEACH TRUTH TO ALL THE CHILDREN

There are several basic steps to follow:

- Teach truth – and don't just tell a story.
- Teach the central truth in the passage your lesson is based on.
- Teach that central truth thoroughly
 - ✓ First of all FIND IT
 - It may be a truth like – God is holy
 - Or - sin always has consequences
 - Or - Jesus Christ is God
 - Or - Salvation is by faith
 - ✓ Then simplify it
 - ✓ Then teach it – throughout the lesson and throughout your story.
 - ✓ You can mention other truths which help you teach the central truth.
 - ✓ But don't forget to apply the central truth to your children.

APPLY THE TRUTH TO BOTH GROUPS OF CHILDREN

We have seen that our responsibility is not only to tell a Bible story but to teach one Bible truth – along with the mention of other truths.

The next step is to apply the truth which we have taught to the children.

This means that we show them what they need to do because of this truth.

There are two kinds of children.

- The unsaved children should know that they **NEED** to be saved because of sin, that they **CAN** be saved because of what Jesus Christ has done for them and they **WILL BE** saved if they trust Him.
- The saved children should know how they can grow and live for the Lord Jesus and serve Him.

Therefore we will try to apply the central truth in two ways. We will apply it to the children who are not saved and we will apply it to the children who are saved. For example:

TRUTH	TWO APPLICATIONS
God is holy and just	a) He will judge and punish your sin (unsaved) b) He wants you to be holy (saved)
Sin always has consequences	a) It will bring judgment to you (unsaved) b) It will take away your joy (saved)
Jesus Christ is God	a) He can save you (unsaved) b) He can help you live for Him (saved)
Salvation is by faith	a) Trust Christ (unsaved) b) Tell your friends how they can be saved (saved)

OUTLINE 5

SALVATION BY GRACE - THE CHILDREN'S GOSPEL

The Bible teaches us that the Gospel of the grace of God is especially suitable for and directed towards children. I will explain what I mean by asking and answering two questions.

WHAT DOES SALVATION BY GRACE MEAN ?

- SALVATION is the great inclusive word of the Gospel. *“So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household’ ”* (Acts 16 v31). *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God”* (Ephesians 2 v8).

Primarily salvation means deliverance - deliverance on the one hand from sin and hell and deliverance on the other hand to God and His life.

- GRACE is the unearned, undeserved favour of God through Jesus Christ:

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8 v9).

“Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith” (Romans 3 v24 &25a)

He and he alone, by Himself has taken the punishment for our sins; and we are saved by Jesus Christ and His grace - plus nothing.

- SALVATION BY GRACE

The grace of God is available for our salvation:

- ✓ For the salvation of our past - for our justification
“...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith ...” (Romans 3 v24-25).

We have been saved by grace from the **penalty** of sin.

- ✓ For the salvation of our present - for our sanctification

“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work” (2 Corinthians 9 v8).

We are being saved by grace from the **power** of sin.

- ✓ For the salvation of our future – for our glorification.

“That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2 v7).

We will be saved by grace from the **presence** of sin.

*“Nothing in my hand I bring
Simply to Thyself I cling.”*

HOW DO WE KNOW THAT SALVATION BY GRACE IS THE CHILDREN’S GOSPEL?

➤ **This is revealed and clearly shown in Scripture:**

- ✓ Adults must become like children before they can be saved. So the Gospel of Grace is directed towards children and those who will become like children.

“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18 v3).

“But Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’ “ (Matthew 19 v14).

- ✓ The Gospel is revealed to children (and those who become like children).

“At that time Jesus answered and said, ‘I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes’ “(Matthew 11 v25).

➤ **This is obvious on examination.**

What are the conditions of entry into a state of grace?

- ✓ Humility

Only those who are truly humble can understand the Gospel and trust Jesus Christ:

- Children are small and helpless – and they know they are. They are therefore naturally humble: *“Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 18 v4).
 - Adults are big and think highly of themselves. They are naturally proud. That’s why they must become as children.
- ✓ Trustfulness
- Children are naturally trustful and they easily and readily believe what they are told.
 - Adults are naturally skeptical. They like to reason, argue and doubt. That’s why they must become like children before they can be saved.
- ✓ Dependence
- Only those who are willing to depend upon Jesus Christ can be saved:
- Children naturally depend on others for everything. They have really nothing. They depend upon their parents and upon their teachers and others – for everything. This means that they already understand the concept of grace – receiving what they have not earned or deserved.
 - Adults are naturally independent. They want to stand on their own feet and be independent at all times. This is the opposite of grace. That’s why they need to become dependent like children before they can be saved.
- ✓ An understanding of grace
- Children understand the concept of grace readily and easily. This is how they live. They don’t earn anything.
 - Adults want to earn everything including salvation. They don’t like to depend on, or

accept, from others. They want to stand upon their own feet. They need to become like children.

Children are naturally humble, dependent, trustful and used to the concept of grace. Therefore the Gospel of grace is more understandable to them than it is to adults.

If salvation depended upon works or wisdom or strength or intellect it would be an adult's Gospel.

➤ **This can be seen and proved in practice.**

It is a recognized fact that children respond more readily to the Gospel than adults. Statistics and experience prove this beyond doubt. Because the Gospel is the children's Gospel it is easy for children to understand and difficult for adults to understand. Salvation is, of course, the work of the Holy Spirit; but it seems that He works especially in the hearts and lives of children because they are naturally humble, trustful, dependent, and used to the concept of grace. We sometimes hear people say that "even a child can be saved". Perhaps we should rephrase this and say "even an adult can be saved."

This is why you and I need to bring the Gospel of God's grace to the children and give them an opportunity to accept it. We need to evangelize them when they are open to the gospel - not wait until their hearts are closed.

OUTLINE 6

***WHY SHOULD WE EVANGELIZE CHILDREN ?**

(This is a longer outline - and you could either shorten it by omitting some of the illustrations or details - or divide it up into several outlines)

Everyone who works with children - be they parents, teachers or pastors need to ask themselves these two vital and important questions:

- Should I evangelize children?
- Why should I do so?

I would like to give you a simple logical and rather extended outline which will answer your question - in seven different but closely related ways.

➤ **We should evangelize children because the Lord Jesus has commanded us to.**

This is really the only answer we need. If He commands us we obey. We do not need any other reason or motive.

The Lord Jesus told us in Mark 16 v15:

“Go you into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature” **“Every creature”** includes boys and girls. There are no exceptions, we are to evangelize everyone. Indeed over one third of the **“every creature”** are children.

So the reason we evangelize children and preach this wonderful Gospel message to them is because the Lord Jesus has told us, has commanded us, to do so.

➤ **We should evangelize children because they need to be saved.**

The Bible says that children who have not trusted the Lord Jesus are spiritually dead, lost and separated from God.

“Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish” (Matthew 18 v14).

This is a truth which is missed by many Christians. When we realize that children without Christ are lost and outside God’s Kingdom, and we see the necessity for them to trust Christ our whole approach to children will be transformed and we will want to evangelize them.

Remember we are not talking about infants here. Infants and very young children who have not yet rejected God’s voice and are not yet accountable are spiritually dead and separated from God - but if they die they will not be condemned and lost forever. However, that situation will change as they get older.

➤ **We evangelize children because they can trust Jesus Christ and be saved.**

The Bible teaches clearly that it is possible for children - yes little children - to believe on the Lord Jesus (Matthew 18

v6), fear God (Deuteronomy 31 v12) and set their hope in God (Psalm 78 v7). They can respond savingly to the Gospel when it is preached and be born again – and this truth obviously encourages us to evangelize them. If there was no possibility of this response we would engage purely in a teaching ministry and not in an evangelistic ministry.

➤ **We evangelize children because they are so open to the Gospel.**

The Bible teaches us that adults must become like children before they can be saved (Matthew 18 v3; Mark 10 v15). But children are already children. They are already humble, trustful and dependent. They just need to be guided in the power of the Holy Spirit to be humble before the Lord Jesus, trustful in Him and dependent on Him. Consequently, they are much more open to the Gospel than adults and, although spiritually dead, more likely to respond to the Gospel.

If I were to make an object lesson to illustrate what I am saying, I would make a wooden door about one meter high. Across this door I would print the word “salvation”. Then I would ask an adult to come up to the platform. I would ask him if he would like to go through this door. He would say “yes”. Is it possible for him to do so? Yes – but he must bend his back and **become like a child**. And that is not easy for him!

I would then bring a child onto the platform and ask him if he would like to go through the door. And he says “yes”. It is obviously simpler for him to go through the door than an adult. He does not have to bend! He needs to go through the door but he does not have many of the problems which prevent adults from doing so.

Experience and statistics show us clearly that more people come to Christ when they are young. The older a person is the less likely he is to come to Christ.

Does it not make sense to evangelize people when they are open to our message, rather than waiting until they are old

and don't want to listen or respond? Does it not make sense to evangelize the children?

- **We evangelize children because it is good to be saved when young - and have many years to live for the Lord Jesus.**

What is the best age for a person to trust Jesus Christ? The answer is simple "as early as possible."

Is it better for a person to trust Christ at the age of 60 when the life is almost gone, his best years are past, his family are grown up, and so little time is left to live for Jesus Christ? Or is it better to be saved at 7 years of age with a whole life to live for Jesus Christ, with most of life's decisions still in the future, and with his personality and habits not completely formed?

We praise God for older people who trust Christ. But so often many of them say, "If only I had heard this message when I was young and had trusted Jesus Christ then."

An older person saved is a soul saved; a child saved is a life saved and a soul saved.

It was D.L. Moody who, returning one evening from a meeting, was asked - "How many people were saved in the meeting tonight?" He replied, "Two and a half." The person said, "Oh, you mean two adults and a child." "No" replied D. L. Moody, "I mean two children and an adult."

Does it not make sense to evangelize children?

- **We evangelize children because the future is in their hands.**

The evangelism of children is an investment in the future.

The children of today are the church of tomorrow and the country of tomorrow. And we need to prepare for tomorrow by reaching our children with the Gospel today.

Dr Armin Maurerhofer was for years pastor in Langenthal of one of the largest free churches in Switzerland. When the church was still small he saw the great potential in the children of Langenthal, and decided to build for the future. He and his church planned and built up two types of

ministry to the children of the town and its surrounding area:

- ✓ A Sunday school for the children of the church members.
- ✓ A number of week day Bible clubs conducted in homes for the children outside the church.

These two large groups of children were kept quite separate and distinct until they reached teenage years when they were then united into a church based youth ministry.

Doctor Maurerhofer says that his church was built upon this evangelistic ministry to the children; and that many of those in the church today were reached and saved through the week day Bible clubs.

He saw that the future of the church was in the hands of the children and he invested in them. That investment was eventually to prove a very fruitful one.

He says that, in his capacity today as a professor at the Free Evangelical Seminary in Basel, Switzerland, he wants his seminary students to understand that their most important ministry will be to lead children to Christ and to reach the lost children in their neighbourhood. He continually emphasizes that believing children are tomorrow's missionaries, tomorrow's pastors and tomorrow's leaders. "We need", he repeats, "to be aware that it **is** worthwhile to invest, in the children." Consequently, some of his students in the seminary have told him "One day we will be pastors and then we will have children's work in our churches."

Every worker among children needs to have spiritual bifocals. He evangelizes children because he sees their present need for Jesus Christ and His salvation. But he also evangelizes children because he sees their potential for the future, and he is investing in that future.

The evangelism of children is an investment - a good investment in the future.

Louis Pasteur said, *“When I approach a child he inspires in me two sentiments. Tenderness for what he is and respect for what he may become.”*

A boy was asked the question, “What do you plan to be when you grow up?”

He replied, “Maybe a missionary; maybe a gangster.”

“What do you mean? His enquirer asked.

“It all depends on who gets me first” the boy replied.

That is why Moses emphasized to the children of Israel when they were preparing to enter the Promised Land that their future in that land depended upon their attitude and approach to their children (Deuteronomy 4 v9; 6 v3-7; 11 v19-21; 31 v12, 13). If they would teach their children diligently it would be *“well with them and they would increase mightily in their new land.”*

And the same applies to us.

➤ **We evangelize children because the Lord Jesus has a special love for them and wants them to come to Him.**

✓ We can see His love for the children in Matthew 18 vs1-14, where he identifies Himself with them (verse 5), feels strongly about them being offended (verse 6) or despised (verse 10) and where He especially emphasizes that He does not want one of them to be lost (Matthew 18 v14) and is looking for them (verses 11-13).

✓ We can see His love for the children in Mark 10 vs13-16 where He rebukes His disciples for turning them away, and where He instead receives them and blesses them.

✓ We can see His love for the children when He specifically commands Peter in John 21 v15 to *“feed my lambs”*.

➤ **We evangelize children because we can often reach into their homes and families through them.**

So often an adult is influenced by, or even led by, a child – and especially a child with whom he has a close family relationship. The hardened hearts of adults were often open to the influences of their own children.

The Bible says that “A little child shall lead them” (Isaiah 11 v6) in a future millennial kingdom – but little children can also influence and lead adults today.

So when we evangelize children and they trust Christ, they can be the means of reaching adults we could not otherwise reach. And we can see, for example, in the Bible how God used a little girl to bring both healing and blessing to Naaman (2 Kings 5 v2, 3; 14-19).

Of course this is not the main reason we evangelize children. It is very much a subsidiary reason. We evangelize children because of their needs and possibilities. But it is a good reason.

Does it make sense to evangelize children? The above eight answers and reasons tell us it does.

Dr Maurerhofer writes again ...

“It is worth leading children to Christ because when they are saved they can live their whole lives for Jesus.

When many children accept this salvation, it can lead to many parents, and indeed families, being saved through their changed lives. Later, when these children grow up, Jesus can use them, whether it be as preachers, elders or missionaries, to built His church. Their lives with Jesus will have a positive effect on many aspects of society and in politics. They influence the community with their biblical values and their way of doing things. Children who have accepted Jesus as their Saviour and have lived with His help will finally be with Him in heaven.

Yes, it is worth evangelizing children. Every believer and every church who strive to reach children with the Gospel message will experience a special blessing from God.”

Are you evangelizing your children? If not, start today!

OUTLINE 7

*4 - 2 - 4

(This is a longer outline which is more suitable for a training course or seminar where more time is available)

Those of us who work with children and help them spiritually should follow a simple 4-2-4 formula:

➤ **FOUR THINGS TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT CHILDREN**

✓ **Children need to be saved**

The Bible teaches five truths about the need of everyone born into this world (including children).

- All are born with a sinful nature (Psalm 51 v5).
- All are sinners (Isaiah 53 v6).
- All are born spiritually dead (Ephesians 2 v3, 4).
- All are born outside God's Kingdom (John 3 v3).
- All are lost and separated from God (Matthew 18 v11-14).

Children need to be forgiven, regenerated, saved and receive life and the only way is through faith in Jesus Christ (Act 16 v31). And He loves them (John 3 v16), wants them to come to Him (Mark 10 v15), and does not want them to perish (Matthew 18 v14).

✓ **Children can be saved**

The Bible teaches that it is possible for a child, a little child, to trust Jesus Christ:

- Specific verses tell us children can believe:
*"But whoever causes one of these little ones **who believe in Me** to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea"* (Matthew 18 v6).
- General verses tell us that anyone can be saved - including children:
*"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes in Him** should not perish but have everlasting life"* (John 3 v16).
- And experience shows us that children can be saved.

✓ **Children are open to the Gospel**

The Bible teaches that adults must become like children before they can be saved:

*“And said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and **become as little children**, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven’ “(Matthew 18 v3).*

*“Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God **as a little child** will by no means enter it” (Mark 10 v15).*

But children are children. They are already humble, trustful and dependent. They are more open to the Gospel and salvation than adults are.

That’s why the Bible encourages people to trust God when they are young:

“Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, ‘I have no pleasure in them.’ “ (Ecclesiastes 12 v1).

And experience always shows us that more people trust Christ when they are young. The older they are the less likely they are to be saved:

✓ **It is good for children to be saved**

It is better to be saved when young, when most of life lies ahead and can be lived for Christ – than to trust Christ later in life when few years remain for His service. That’s why the Psalmist wanted the children to set their hope in God when they were young and before they would become stubborn and rebellious like adults.

*“That the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that **they may set their hope in God**, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments; and **may not be like their fathers**, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God” (Psalm 78 v6-8).*

And Jeremiah underlines this truth in Lamentations 3 v27:

"It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth."

➤ TWO GROUPS OF CHILDREN TO MINISTER TO

It is clear from what we have learnt so far that all children fall into one of two groups:

✓ Children who have not trusted Jesus Christ

They are spiritually dead, blind, lost and outside God's Kingdom. Our responsibility is to EVANGELIZE them.

God calls us to be fishermen for these children:

"Then He said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.' " (Matthew 4 v19).

✓ Children who have trusted Jesus Christ

They are spiritually alive, able to see, saved and in God's Kingdom. God calls us to be shepherds for these children:

"So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Feed My lambs.' "

(John 21 v15).

➤ FOUR THINGS TO DO WITH CHILDREN

✓ **Evangelize them**

Preach the Gospel message to them:

- Teach about God - especially about His holiness and love, and that He is the Creator.
- Teach about sin - what it is and what it does.
- Teach about Jesus Christ - Who He is and what He came to do
- Teach them the way of salvation through repentance and faith

✓ **Make yourself available to them**

Let the children know that if they are not saved and would like to be - and are not sure how they can be saved - that you are willing to speak with them after the meeting and show them how they can trust Jesus

Christ. Tell them where they should be if they want to talk with you – but with no pressure.

- ✓ **Counsel those who wait behind for personal help** and show them simply how they can trust Jesus Christ.
- ✓ **Follow them up** and help them to grow by teaching them the Word of God, by helping them personally and by encouraging them to attend a local evangelical church – and by praying for them. In these ways you can help these saved children to eat, to walk, to talk and to obey.

OUTLINE 8 REACH THE CHILDREN

(A longer outline which should be divided into 2 or 3 presentations. The first part of the outline would be included in all three presentations and the second part would be determined by the group you are speaking to)

Our children need Jesus Christ. They need to be saved. Each one of us needs to ask ourselves the question – “Am I reaching children with the Gospel?”

- WHY should you get involved?
 - ✓ The WILL of God the Father is that boys and girls be saved – and not lost:
“Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish” (Matthew 18 v14).
 - ✓ The WORDS of God the Son tell us to evangelize the children:
“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature’ (Mark 16 v15).
Children are included in the “*every creature*” of this verse. They make up one third of the world’s population. In some countries they make up 50% of the population and they are the ones most open to the Gospel.
 - ✓ The WORK of God the Holy Spirit encourages us to evangelize the children. He is the One Who calls us and

lays it upon our hearts that we should do something to reach them. And when He calls us to this ministry He gives us the strength and ability we need for it:

"He who calls you is faithful, Who also will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5, v24).

- ✓ The WILLINGNESS of children to listen and the readiness of many of them to trust the Lord Jesus when they hear the Gospel is an incentive and reason why we should reach them. They are open to our message now but they won't be later:
"Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them" (Ecclesiastes 12 v1). "And may not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God" (Psalm 78 v8).
- ✓ The only WAY for children to be saved is through the preaching and teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ – and God is looking for those who will bring this wonderful message to them:
"For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10 v13, 14).
Will you be that person?
- HOW can you get involved? (You can now, and depending on the make-up of your congregation, choose one of the following three groups and concentrate on that group).
 - ✓ AS A PARENT OR GRANDPARENT YOU CAN EVANGELIZE AND TEACH CHILDREN THE WORD OF GOD IN YOUR OWN HOME.
 - THREE MISTAKES TO AVOID:
 - **You need to remember** that your children are not saved or in God's Kingdom because

you are. They need themselves to trust Jesus Christ.

- **You need to reject** completely the idea which is so prevalent in Christian circles that children cannot be saved until they grow up and until they are at least teenagers.
- **You need to avoid** the misconception that it is the church which will look after your children and teach them. Not so! It is your responsibility:

“And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6 v4).

- **FOUR THINGS TO DO:**

- **You need to pray** for your children that they will trust Jesus Christ early in life, and that they will then grow spiritually:

“For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him” (1 Samuel 1 v27).

“And begged Him earnestly, saying, ‘My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live’ “ (Mark 5 v23).

- **You need to be a good example** to them:

“You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time” (Deuteronomy 4 v40)

“The righteous man walks in his integrity; his children are blessed after him” (Proverbs 20 v7).

“Let your light so shine before men (children), that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5 v16).

- **You need to teach them** the Word of God faithfully and regularly:

"You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6 v7).

The best way to do this is by having a daily "family altar" right after the meal when all your family is present. It should last for about 20 minutes and should consist of a short Bible reading with helpful comments and answers to questions, and a time of prayer allowing several to take part.

- **You need to evangelize** your unsaved children.

The "every creature" of Mark 16 v15 includes your children! *And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."*

You should explain the Gospel message to them, and show them how to be saved and tell them that if they ever want to talk with you about it, you are available. But there should be no pressure.

Charles Spurgeon writes to parents:

"Perhaps it is your thought that your children cannot be converted while they are children Expect your children to know the Lord from the beginning mingle the name of Jesus with their A, B, Cs"

- ✓ AS A PASTOR OR SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER YOU CAN EVANGELIZE THE CHILDREN IN YOUR CHURCH OR CLASS.

Charles Spurgeon writes:

"He is no preacher who does not care for the children. There should be at least a part of every sermon and service that will suit the little ones. It is an error which permits us to forget them."

- TWO MISTAKES TO AVOID:
 - **You must not see** your ministry to children just as a “sowing ministry”. Many in our churches feel that their responsibility to the children is just to teach the Word of God and sow it in their hearts with the trust and prayer that it will bear fruit later in teenage and adult years. It is, of course, true that we must sow and teach God’s Word, but we should be praying for fruit and results now when the children are most open and ready for salvation.

Charles Spurgeon writes again:

“The conversion of children is not expected in our churches and congregations. The theory is that if we can impress youthful minds with principles which may in after years prove useful to them we have done a great deal – but to convert children as children is regarded as absurd. We expect to see children converted and we do see it. I thank God that in our Sabbath school we believe in the salvation of children as children. It has been my joy to see many boys and girls come forward to confess their faith in Christ.”

- **You must avoid** the two-fold mistake made by many in our churches:
 - ✓ That children do not need to be saved – that because they are in a Christian home, or because they have been baptized, they are already in some way in God’s family or Kingdom. If they have not trusted Jesus Christ, they are not.
 - ✓ That it is not possible for children, little children, to trust Jesus Christ and be saved. The Bible makes it clear that they can (Matthew 18 v6; Psalm 78 v7; John 3 v16).

Many years ago a little five year old boy responded to an invitation given at the end of a sermon. The pastor counseled the three adults that responded, but overlooked the child. He sat there on the front pew alone. After everyone had left, the caretaker looked over and saw the boy. When he asked the child why he was still sitting there, the boy replied, "Because I want to ask Jesus into my heart." The caretaker said, "You're too young. You go home now." The boy never darkened the door of the church again. He is now an elderly man, without God, without hope. He is the brother of the former CEF President, Rieder Kalland.

- FOUR THINGS TO DO:
 - **Realise** that all the children in your church fall into one of two groups:
 - ✓ If they have trusted Jesus Christ they are saved.
 - ✓ If they have not trusted Jesus Christ they are not saved.
 - **Teach** the Word of God to the children in your church. Pastors could, for example, give a short 10 minute Bible talk for them in their morning service each Sunday. The CEF Specialized Book Ministry would be glad to send you a book with almost 200 of such talks - which you could use.
 - **Evangelize** the unsaved children. Don't just tell Bible stories. Take every opportunity you can to present the Gospel to them and show them how they can be saved.
 - **Help** the saved children to grow spiritually by teaching them the Word of God and applying it to answer the problems they face in their Christian lives.
Saved children have many questions to which they need answers:
 - How can I know I am saved?
 - How do I know what is right and wrong?

- How can I win over sin in my life?
- If I sin do I need to be saved again?
- Is the Bible true? How do you know?
- Why go to church?
- How and when should I have a Quiet Time?
- How can I pray?
- How can I study the Bible?
- How can I witness?
- How can I serve God?
- What happened to me when I was saved?
- What is worship?
- How should I react to my parents?
- How should I relate to the opposite sex.

✓ AS A BELIEVER YOU NEED TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT ALL CHILDREN

But what about the children outside Christian homes and evangelical churches?

As a believer you need to be concerned about ALL children. The vast majority of our children don't live in a Christian home and don't attend an evangelical church.

Is there something God wants you to do to reach them?

- ✓ You could open your home and have a weekly Good News Club for the children of your neighbourhood.
- ✓ You could organize small open-air meetings for children in the summertime.
- ✓ You could distribute attractive evangelistic tracts to children.
- ✓ You could invite children to come to your church and Sunday School.

If you would like to help reach these unreached children you should contact the local office of our Mission – Child Evangelism Fellowship. Our main goal is to reach unreached boys and girls and your help and involvement in this ministry would be greatly appreciated. We can teach you how to do this and we can provide you with the materials you will need.

Even if you can only help one child it will be well worthwhile. You never know what God could do through that child. An old man was given the charge of a small church in the Highlands of Scotland. One Sunday evening there was just himself, his wife, the church caretaker and a little boy at the service. Afterwards the minister said to his wife, "Is it worth it, just for us three?" He had forgotten to include the little boy, but the boy overheard him and said, "But sir, don't I count?" That little boy was Robert Moffett. He later went out as a pioneer missionary to Africa. He came to Christ early in life and as a boy he said, "But sir, don't I count?"

Building for Eternity

*A builder builded a temple
He wrought it with grace and skill
Pillars and groins and arches
All fashioned to work his will.
Men said as they saw its beauty
"It shall never know decay
Great is thy skill, oh builder
Thy fame shall endure for aye"*

*A teacher builded a temple
With loving and infinite care
Planning each arch with patience
Laying each stone with prayer
None praised her unceasing efforts
None knew of the wondrous plan
For the temple the teacher builded
Was unseen by the eyes of man.*

*Gone is the builder's temple
Crumbled into the dust
Low lies each stately pillar
Food for consuming rust
But the temple the teacher builded
Will last while the ages roll
For that beautiful unseen temple
Is a child's immortal soul.*

Author unknown

OUTLINE 9 MEN ARE NEEDED

How can we best reach our children with the Gospel, especially the boys?

➤ THE FACT

It is common knowledge that most of children's work is carried on by women. There are comparatively few men engaged in a ministry to children - and very few men in a full-time children's ministry.

Is this true in your church? Are most of your Sunday school teachers women - and are they often in their late teens or unmarried? What about the smaller children in your church? Who teaches them? Are these little ones (who are so important) put into the hands and under the care of the youngest and least experienced teachers?

I know that I have, in my experience, found this to be a true and valid fact. Most of those who attend teacher training classes are women; and most of the students at our Children's Ministry Leadership Courses are also women. And when I have visited Bible Colleges I find very few men (if any) who are interested in or aiming for a full-time ministry to children.

I don't want in any way to decry the ministry of women to children. They are doing a great job. The women often seem to be "the best men for the job".

But where, oh where, are the men?

➤ THE REASONS

Why are so few men involved in a ministry to children?

- ✓ There is, of course, a good and valid reason. God calls many men to another ministry - and they obey that call. Children make up only one third of the population. And God calls many men to minister to the other two thirds. But should we not expect one third of those who minister to carry on the ministry to that one third? We should not expect any more than that (or any less).

- ✓ There are also, I believe, several reasons which are not so good:
 - Some men see a ministry to children as an inferior kind of work, a ministry which is not as important as other ministries, and one which needs fewer gifts and abilities.
 - Some men do not see a ministry to children as really necessary because they do not see the possibilities of children being lost. They feel they should concentrate on those who are lost.
 - Some men do not believe it is possible for children to be saved – so why evangelise them? They see them as too young for salvation.
 - A few might even feel that a ministry to children would not bring the results which would most benefit the work of the church e.g. financial support.
 - Some just feel that a ministry to children should traditionally be conducted by women – especially because they might feel that women are limited with regard to other aspects of ministry.

➤ THE RESULTS

I believe that the lack of men in a ministry to children has a number of important results:

- ✓ We lose many of our boys. From their earliest days they have been taught by women, and they come, more and more, to see Christianity as basically feminine; and this turns a number of them off.
Could this be a contributory factor to the fact that we generally have more women in our churches than men?
- ✓ Women sometimes find it more difficult to handle serious discipline problems involving older boys.
- ✓ There is usually a greater turnover with female teachers. Those who are married find it more difficult to continue their ministry without interruption because of the claims of motherhood.

- ✓ An absence of men from a ministry to children could also mean that the leadership of the churches, which is usually male, is out of touch with that ministry.

➤ THE CHALLENGE

The Bible makes it clear that men should be involved in the evangelism of children:

- ✓ The emphasis in Scripture with regard to the teaching of children is continually placed upon men and their responsibility:

“For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our FATHERS, that they should make them known to their children.” (Psalm 78, v5).

“And you, FATHERS, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6 v4).

“FATHERS, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.” (Colossians 3 v21).

- ✓ The biblical emphasis in evangelism is usually on men. All the apostles were men and most of the evangelism portrayed in the Bible was carried on by men. How sad that in the area of an evangelistic ministry to children many men have abdicated their responsibility and left it to the women.

“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful MEN who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2 v2).

- ✓ When the Lord Jesus gave the command *“Feed my lambs”* He gave it to a man - Simon Peter (John 21 v15). He also commanded him twice to feed the sheep - but only after that first command to feed the lambs.

And is it coincidence that one third of the population consists of *“lambs”* - the boys and girls.

God is looking for men *“to stand in the gap.”* Will you be one of those men?

OUR APPRECIATION

But we could not close without expressing our appreciation for the multitude of women whom God has used so wonderfully in their ministries to children. Thank you ladies! You are an inspiration and challenge to all of us men.

OUTLINE 10 A GREAT MINISTRY

When children suffer we suffer. When we read in our newspapers of children being abused or hurt in any way our hearts are deeply touched and tears come to our eyes.

What is our reaction as we think of the spiritual needs and the eternal destiny of millions of our boys and girls? Are our hearts touched? Are we ready and willing to do what we can to help meet those needs? Are we willing to be involved in a really GREAT work. One of the early leaders of Child Evangelism Fellowship used to pray, "Dear God, give us tears for the children of the world." What does God want us to do?

- We need to see the GREAT NEED of the children (Matthew 18 v14). Boys and girls are lost, spiritually dead and outside God's Kingdom. This is worse than any physical or mental problems that they have. What can we do to help them?
- We need then to hear the GREAT COMMISSION. "*Go you into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature*" (Mark 16 v15). The answer to the children's needs is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it is applied to their hearts by the Holy Spirit and we are commanded to bring that gospel to the children.
- And we need to be aware of the GREAT OPPORTUNITIES which lie before us for the evangelism of children. Doors are wide open everywhere (Revelation

3 v8; 1 Corinthians 16 v9). There are unlimited possibilities on all sides to reach the world's children.

➤ We can then visualize the GREAT RESULTS which could materialize as we go through these doors to evangelise children and hopefully to see a number trust Christ (Matthew 18 v6).

➤ Above all we need to understand the GREAT RESPONSIBILITY we have to reach out and help these children.

"How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10 v14).

➤ It is a special encouragement to us to realise the GREAT PRIVILEGE enjoyed by the one who sees the great need, hears the great commission, is willing to make use of the great opportunities available; and understands the great responsibility God has given to him:

✓ The privilege of welcoming Jesus Christ as we welcome children in His Name (Matthew 18 v5; Mark 9 v37)

✓ The privilege of being co-workers with God (1st Corinthians 3 v9; 2nd Corinthians 6 v1)

✓ The privilege of being gifted and used by the Holy Spirit in the lives of children (Ephesians 4 v11 and 12).

✓ The privilege of seeing children come to Christ (Matthew 18 v6).

✓ The privilege of building the future of the Church and the country (Deuteronomy 6 v3-7; Psalm 78 v7, 8).

➤ As a result of all these "greats", we need now to face the GREAT CHALLENGE before us as we would hear God say to us *"Whom shall I send and who will go for us"* (Isaiah 6 v8a).

Will our response be *"Here am I; send me"*? (Isaiah 6 v8b).

*“Lord use me. Here am I, use me.
I want to be greatly used by Thee.
Across the street, or across the sea.
Lord, here am I, use me.”*

MAY IT BE SO.

OUTLINE 11 WHAT IS YOUR GRADE?

Do you remember when you were at school and you were asked a series of questions in an examination. The teacher then gave you a grade or mark out of 100. And what a shock it would have been to receive an ‘O’ (*Show ‘O’ on a card*).

If the Lord Jesus were to set us an examination on the subject of children and our ministry to them what would our grade be? Is it possible that we could receive an ‘O’ (*Show O*).

I can see in the Bible several commands the Lord Jesus has given us about children – and, if we don’t obey them, we will receive a big ‘O’ (*Show O*).

➤ In Mark 16,v15 the Lord Jesus commands us to evangelize everyone:

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.’ “

That includes the children. So we must not OMIT them from our evangelism. If we OMIT them we receive ‘O’ as our grade (*show O*).

And it is interesting that the Shepherd in Matthew 18, v11-14 went out to look for the ONE (*show O*) little sheep in need – and found it. He certainly did not OMIT it.

Are we including the children in our evangelistic ministries?

➤ In Matthew 18, v5 the Lord Jesus told His disciples to receive or welcome the little children:

“Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.”

Yet in the very next chapter we read that the disciples would not let the little children come to the Lord Jesus:

“Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them” (Matthew 19, v13).

Instead of welcoming them they OBSTRUCTED (show O) them and tried to keep them away from the Lord Jesus.

Many children will still come to the Lord Jesus if they have the opportunity. You and I must be careful not to OBSTRUCT them and put all kinds of obstacles in their way. If we do we will get an ‘O’. (show O).

Do not OMIT them; do not OBSTRUCT them. I hope you don’t get either of these ‘O’s.

- It is wonderful when children trust the Lord Jesus as their Saviour, and the Lord Jesus gives us a solemn command concerning these dear believing children. He told His disciples and He tells us that we must not OFFEND (show O) them:

“But whoever offends or causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18 v6).

We must not cause them to stumble by a wrong example, a wrong attitude or wrong teaching.

This is one of the worst and most serious ‘O’s of all (show O) - and can have serious consequences both for the children and ourselves.

Do not OMIT them, do not OBSTRUCT them and do not OFFEND them.

- But one of the dangers we often fall into is to think that the children especially the believing children - are not important - and definitely not as important as the adults. That is why the Lord Jesus gives us another solemn warning in Matthew 18 v10:

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 18 v10).

He does not want us to despise them. We are not to OVERLOOK (show O) them at the expense of others. Some say that the children of today are the children of tomorrow. That is only partly true. They are also part of the Church today.

I hope we are not guilty of overlooking or despising them - and that we don't receive that big 'O' (show O).

- And then there are those people, sometimes even believers, who have really no time or sympathy for believing children and who continually try to find fault with them and their testimony.

The Pharisees were like that in Matthew 21 v15:

“But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ they were indignant.”

They OPPOSED (show O) the children and what they were saying and the Lord Jesus rebuked them:

“And said to Him, ‘Do You hear what these are saying?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Yes. Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise?’” (Matthew 21, v16).

Are we ever guilty of this attitude? Do we ever OPPOSE the children and criticize them? What is our grade? Do we get an 'O' here? (show O).

Five tests. Five examinations about children and our ministry to them. Do not OMIT, do not OBSTRUCT, do not OFFEND, do not OVERLOOK and do not OPPOSE.

I trust we will all get 100% in each of these tests and never receive an 'O'

OUTLINE 12

*WHAT DO THE WORLD'S CHILDREN NEED ?

(This is a longer outline more suited to a training course or seminar where more time is available)

➤ THE WORLD'S CHILDREN NEED A MESSAGE WHICH IS SCRIPTURAL.

In Mark 16 v15 the Lord Jesus commanded us to *“Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.”* Scriptural evangelism is preaching every part of the Gospel, everywhere, to everybody.

Again, in Matthew 28 v19, the Lord Jesus said, *“Go you therefore and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”*

Scriptural evangelism is based upon an authoritative message from God as revealed in His Word; a message which we have been commanded to teach.

What is this message?

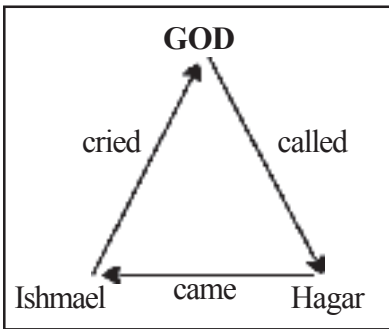
- ✓ It concerns God – the Omnipotent, Sovereign God Who created the Heavens and the earth; the God Who is infinitely holy; and yet is personally interested in, and loves the sinner.
- ✓ It concerns Jesus Christ – God the Son; His pre-existence, birth, life, atoning death, resurrection, ascension, intercession and coming again.
- ✓ It concerns man and his sinfulness. We are sinners, and rebels; guilty before a holy God. We do not need experiences, happiness, “a spiritual trip;” we need the forgiveness of our sin and of our rebellion against God.
- ✓ It concerns salvation; salvation which comes not through signing a card or raising a hand; but through heart repentance, a willingness to turn from sin, and through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

This is the message, and we dare not go with any other. It must not be changed or “watered down” in any way. Paul

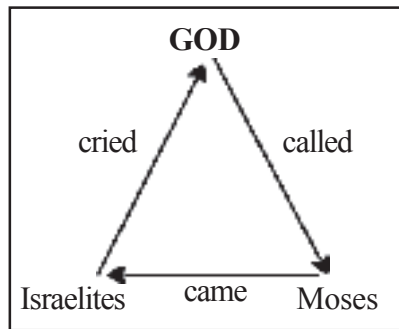
wrote in Galatians 1 v9, "If anyone preaches any other Gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed!" It is through this message that the Spirit of God works in the hearts of children. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 1 v5: "Our Gospel came not unto you in word only but also in power and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."

➤ THE WORLD'S CHILDREN NEED A MESSENGER WHO IS SENT.

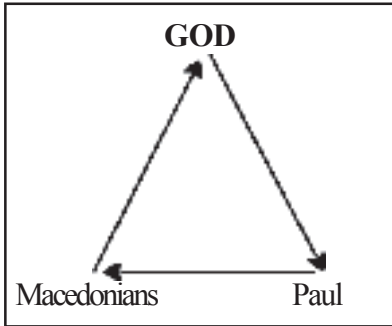
The message cannot go on its own. The message needs a messenger. "How shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach except they be sent?" (Romans 10 v14, 15). Have you heard of God's triangle?



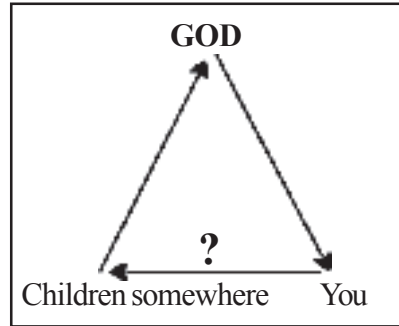
In Genesis 21 v17 God heard the voice of the lad, Ishmael. He could have met the boy's need directly. But instead He spoke to Hagar and told her to go. The lad **cried**, "God **called** and Hagar **came**. Hagar completed the triangle.



In Exodus 2, 23-24 we read that God heard the **cry** of the Israelites. God **called** Moses in Exodus 3,v4 and, after much hesitation, Moses **came** to Egypt. In Exodus 5,v1 He completes the triangle



The people of Macedonia had a great spiritual need. God saw that need, and in Acts 16 v9 He called Paul. In verse 10, Paul completed the triangle, *“Immediately we endeavoured to go to Macedonia assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us to preach the Gospel unto them.”*



Messengers are needed to take the Gospel to the world’s children. As God sees the spiritual need of the world’s children, and speaks to your heart, and asks you to go, are you willing to complete the triangle?

➤ THE WORLD’S CHILDREN NEED METHODS WHICH ARE SOUND.

As we go forth as messengers with a message for the world’s children, there are four basic methods, which we should adopt and follow:

- ✓ We should preach the Gospel in all its fullness to the children. God has promised to bless **His Word**. Do not give the children a diet of irrelevancies, illustrations and entertainment.
- ✓ We should make ourselves available to children who want to trust Christ and don’t know how to do so. Do not use any kind of pressure or over emotionalism. Simply make yourself available to give help, advice, counsel and guidance.

- ✓ We should counsel the concerned child who comes to us for help as thoroughly as possible. Do not do a brief, hasty or shallow work. Only lead him as far as he is ready to go. Forget your statistics.
- ✓ We should follow up the saved child. This is as much your responsibility as evangelism is. It must not be omitted or avoided. And, don't forget the importance of getting the child into a Bible-believing church, wherever possible.
- THE WORLD'S CHILDREN NEED MINISTRIES WHICH ARE STRATEGIC.
There are four ministries which need to be developed, systematically, if we are to reach the world's children effectively:
 - ✓ The ministry of direct child evangelism preferably by those who are of the same nationality as the children.
 - ✓ The ministry of teacher training - training others, especially national workers, to reach and teach their own children.
 - ✓ The ministry of literature - supplying attractive teaching materials and visual aids.
 - ✓ The ministry of prayer - because this is the key to all our work.
- THE WORLD'S CHILDREN NEED A "ME" WHO IS SURE
 - ✓ I need to be sure of my message.
 - ✓ I need to be sure that I am His messenger.
 - ✓ I need to be sure of my ministries and my methods.

"Lord, what will You have me to do?" (Acts 9 v6).

"Here am I, send me" (Isaiah 6 v8).

OUTLINES BASED ON A BIBLE STORY

**OUTLINE 13
GO BACK TO THE SOURCE**

“Then the men of the city said to Elisha, ‘Please notice, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees; but the water is bad, and the ground barren.’ And he said, ‘Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it.’ So they brought it to him. Then he went out to the source of the water and cast in the salt there, and said, “Thus says the LORD: ‘I have healed this water; from it there shall be no more death or barrenness.’ So the water remains healed to this day, according to the word of Elisha which he spoke” (2 Kings 2 v19-22).

These verses give us an interesting picture of the city of Jericho in Elisha’s days – and something important which took place in that city which was to greatly affect its future.

The Problem

The city was pleasant or well situated but it had a very serious problem. The water in the city, coming presumably from the river which flowed through it, was “naught” or “bad”. And as a result of that the land through which it flowed was barren or unproductive – fruit wouldn’t grow there. It is not recorded whether this had been a long term problem or one which had just arisen but it was very serious.

Can we not see here a picture of our problem – a much greater problem? In our city, or country, there is a river of sin which flows through it and, because of that sin, our city, or country, is spiritually barren. Instead of producing fruit for our Creator it has become a spiritual desert.

The Solution

The men of the city came to Elisha, God’s prophet, and asked him if he could do something about the problem. And Elisha started to deal with it. He took four steps.

Is there something we can learn from the four steps Elisha took and which solved the problem?

STEP 1 - Elisha asked for a NEW CRUSE (or bowl) and they brought it to him. If the problem was going to be solved God would use a cruse but not any old cruse. It had to be a new one.

And if God is going to solve the problem of sin in our city or country He will use someone, a vessel, to do this - but it will have to be a new vessel. God uses and works through those who have been born again and made "*new creatures in Christ Jesus*" (Matthew 9, v16-17; 2nd Corinthians 5, v17).

STEP 2 - Elisha asked the man to put SALT into the new cruse. The cruse on its own could not do anything; it was the salt - the contents of the cruse which God would use to purify the water. When God saves us and makes us new creatures, He wants to use us to bring salvation and purity to where we live and work. But He wants us to have salt in our cruses. And the salt, according to Matthew 5 v13, is the life we live and the influence our godly life and light impart to those around us - "*You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.*"

STEP 3 - Elisha went now with the cruse and the salt to the SOURCE of the river. He did not throw the salt into the river which was flowing through Jericho because that would not have solved the problem. After he would have done so, more poisonous water would have flowed down to take the place of the purified water. Instead he went back to where it all began. If he could purify the source he would purify the whole river. That makes sense doesn't it?

And it makes sense equally well for us and the problems we face. If we want to see the river of sin purified in our city or country we need to go back to where it all began and purify the source. If we can do that the whole river will be purified. If we just work with the river in full flow in front of us we may see it purified but then we have to start all over again with the water

which takes its place. It makes more sense, surely, to go to the start of the river, to the children – where it all begins. If we can purify the source we will purify the whole stream.

STEP 4 – He THREW the salt into the source. This was no half-hearted measure. It was all thrown into the source – every bit of it. And the water was healed or purified, the river was healed and purified and the land became productive from that moment on.

As we throw all we have into the source through our ministry with the children, and as we pray for salvation, and healing and purity in their lives, we will solve the problem where it starts, and see it solved more permanently later on.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

(1st Corinthians 15 v58).

Are you ready to follow in Elisha’s footsteps and help meet the spiritual need in your city or country?

OUTLINE 14

PAUL – AN EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW

(Acts 16 v1-10)

The apostle Paul is a good example of how we should live and also how we should serve the Lord Jesus. The Bible tells us that we should model ourselves upon him (1st Corinthians 11,v1; 1st Corinthians 4,v16; and Philippians 3,v17). How can we do this? Let us look at what this story tells us about him.

- ✓ He was OCCUPIED WITH THE WORK OF GOD (vs1-5)
 - ENLISTING a Timothy (v3)
 - ENCOURAGING the local churches (vs4&5)

This two-fold work and ministry was based on and followed through two previous ministries in those same cities.

 - EVANGELISING these cities (Acts 14 v21)
 - ESTABLISHING churches there (Acts 14 v22)
- ✓ He was OPEN to the WORD of God (vs. 6-9)

- When God said NO (vs.6&7)
- When God said GO (v 9)
- ✓ He was OBEDIENT to the WILL of God (v 10)
 - His obedience was IMMEDIATE (he did not hesitate)
 - His obedience was IMPARTED (others joined him)
 - His obedience was IMPORTANT (the Gospel came to Europe and it became the main centre for the future of Christianity).

Are we occupied with a God given ministry to children?

Are we open to God's Word as He guides and directs us in that ministry?

Are we obedient to God's will as reflected in Matthew 18 v14?
"Even so, it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

OUTLINE 15

DELIVERING THE LUNATIC CHILD

(Matthew 17: 14-21; Mark 9: 14-29; Luke 9 : 37-42)

INTRODUCTION

This outline is based upon Luke's account in Luke 9,vs.37-42, and it would seem that the key sentence to the miracle is in the first part of verse 43. The child's deliverance was the result of a mighty demonstration of the power of God, and quite naturally everyone was amazed at what happened, as we would be today if we witnessed a similar working of the Lord. What happened?

OUTLINE

➤ THE PLIGHT OF THE CHILD

In Matthew 17 v15 it is said that the father called his boy "*an epileptic*", and verse 18 tells us that Jesus delivered the child by rebuking "*the demon*". Mark 9 v17 tells us that the boy was possessed by "*a mute spirit*". Clearly this was a case of demon-possession, and the description given of this boy's condition also reminds us of the way in which the Word of God describes the

condition and plight of unsaved boys and girls (Ephesians 2 v2, 3). They are spiritually dead and need salvation.

- ✓ This demon “*seizes him*” (v18) This gives us the idea of captivity – look up 2 Timothy 2 v26.
- ✓ He “*convulsed (tears) him*”. (v20) Look up 1 Peter 5 v8.
- ✓ He tried to “*destroy him*”. (v22) Compare John 10 v10.
- ✓ He “*throws him often into the fire*”. (v22) There was no rest from his cruel attacks.

➤ THE PLEA OF THE PARENT

“*Suddenly a man from the multitude cried out, saying, Teacher, I implore You, look on my son, for he is my only child.*” (Luke 9 v38). This verse tells us of the plea of the parent, a plea that was sincere, definite, urgent and pathetic, for he was pleading for his “*only son*”. Have we this same deep concern for the spiritual welfare of our children and of our nation’s children who are growing up in an age where Christ is rejected, where God’s holy laws are disregarded, and where the devil is gaining ground on every hand? Above all, do we (as did this parent) pray for God’s power to be manifested in the hearts and lives of the children whom God has entrusted to our care?

➤ THE PREDICAMENT OF THE DISCIPLES

“*So I implored Your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.*” (Luke 9 v40). What sad reading this is and how true these words are in the experience of so many of God’s servants! The whole verse speaks of failure – “*they could not*” – in spite of Luke 9 v1. Why were they so powerless? How was it they failed in this moment of opportunity and challenge? It seems that there were three reasons:

✓ **There was lack of faith**

“*Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.*” (Luke 9 v41) . They were faithless. Somehow or other they had not the faith to believe that the Lord would work through them and grant His

deliverance in this needy case. Is it not true that we frequently fail for the same reason?

✓ **There was lack of prayer**

"However, this kind does not go out except by prayer" (Matthew 17 v21a). How challenging these words are to our own hearts and to our own ministry, which, as a consequence, is often powerless and fruitless!

✓ **There was lack of fasting**

"However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." (Matthew 17 v21). These are the words of the Lord Jesus. Fasting means that we are willing to put aside even legitimate things in order that we may seek the face of God and secure His blessing. Fasting means to deny ourselves of secular and secondary things in order that spiritual power may be released. How far are we willing to make a voluntary denial of things that ordinarily, and in themselves, are quite lawful and legitimate in order that the face of God may be sought in earnest, persistent prayer?

➤ **THE POWER OF THE SAVIOUR**

We see this in Luke 9, v41-42 - *"Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here. And as he was still coming, the demon threw him down and convulsed him. Then Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the child, and gave him back to his father."* The Lord Jesus demonstrated His power by healing the child.

The glorious fact is that His power is just the same today. Has the Lord Jesus altered? Is the Holy Spirit less powerful? Is the Word of God less effective? He can meet the needs of our boys and girls as He met the needs of this boy. But are we willing to believe, pray and sacrifice?

OUTLINE 16 ELISHA AND THE DEAD CHILD

INTRODUCTION

God has saved us that we might serve Him. That is the reason He has left us here on earth after our salvation. Otherwise if He had wanted us just to be happy or just to worship and praise Him, He would have taken us home immediately.

God wants us to serve Him and He shows us what He wants us to do. How does He show us? He starts at the top and works down! That is difficult to understand, isn't it? In the business world and work place we start at the bottom and work up. But God reverses the procedure and works from the top down.

Let me explain what I mean by turning to a very interesting story in 2 Kings chapter 4. This is a story about Elisha, God's prophet, and how God led him to do something. I believe that God leads us in the same way.

THE PROBLEM

There was a woman who lived in Shunem, and whenever Elisha came to that city she insisted on him staying in her home (2nd Kings 4 v8). Indeed she and her husband built a special guest room just for him. She and her husband had a problem. They had no children. When Elisha heard this he told them that they would have a son and that is exactly what happened (2nd Kings 4 v17).

But some years later the boy who was so precious to them died. It seems that he had severe sunstroke while he was helping his father who was working in one of his fields. The boy died on his mother's knees. Immediately she laid the boy's body on the bed in the guest room in Elisha's room and she went to look for Elisha (2nd Kings 4 v22). She was sure that he was the only one who could help with this serious problem. Eventually she came to where he was to tell Him what had happened.

THE SOLUTION

Now notice the four steps that God led Elisha to take to meet the specific need of that boy and, of course, his mother. This was something God wanted Elisha to do and He led him to do it. He leads us to serve Him in the same way and to meet the need of our children.

1) THE FIRST STEP WAS COMPREHENSION - TO UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM

When Elisha saw the woman coming towards him he said to his servant Gehazi "Go and ask her what is wrong." It was obvious that something was wrong but Elisha did not know what it was. In the next verse Elisha said, "*the LORD has hidden it from me, and has not told me.*" (2nd Kings 4 v27).

He did not understand the woman's need. And it was obvious to him that he couldn't help her when he didn't know what was wrong.

It is also difficult for us to meet the needs of our children when we don't know what those needs are. Our first step in serving God in this world is to know and understand what the needs of the children are.

And then the woman spoke to Elisha and asked him two questions, "Did I ask you for a son?" and "Didn't I tell you 'don't raise my hopes.'" In other words, she was saying in her own way, "I have lost my son", "My son is dead." And now Elisha understood her problem. All was now clear.

God's call to service starts with understanding. God starts with the HEAD and He wants us to understand the great need of today's children:

- We need to understand what the Word says about our children:
 - ✓ They are spiritually dead (Ephesians 2 v1).
 - ✓ They are outside the kingdom of God (John 3, v3).
 - ✓ They are lost (Matthew 18 v11-14).
- We need to understand what the world is doing to our children - the pressures, the influences, temptations and the teaching.

- ✓ The influence of materialism.
- ✓ The influence of television and DVDs.
- ✓ The humanistic teaching in schools.
- ✓ The propagation of the evolutionary theory everywhere.
- ✓ The breakdown in authority.
- ✓ The increase in the use of alcohol and drugs.
- ✓ The break-up of marriages

What was Elisha's response? First of all he sent Gehazi his servant to where the child was (2nd Kings 4 v29). But that did not satisfy the child's mother. It was Elisha she wanted to go and she insisted on him going. And we read that "*he arose and followed her.*" (2nd Kings 4 v30).

I ask the question - why did he do so? Why did he go?

He was a very busy man. He was a spiritual leader. He had many responsibilities. He was an important person. Why should he go to one child who was dead?

I believe there is only one answer and it is this answer that will motivate us to go to the children who are spiritually dead and minister to them.

2) HE HAD COMPASSION ON THE CHILD AND HIS MOTHER

His heart was touched by the need which he had seen and which he now understood. His understanding dropped 18 inches downwards into his HEART. I feel that our greatest need in God's service is not for understanding. We understand very well the needs of the children. We don't usually need more understanding. But we do need more compassion. Our hearts need to be touched. There is so often a barrier just here at our throat which prevents what we understand from getting down to and touching our hearts.

We read concerning the Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter 9 v36 that when He saw the multitudes He was "*moved with compassion*". He saw and understood their needs but His heart was touched and moved by those needs and He had compassion on them.

We can see that same compassion in the heart of the Apostle Paul when he writes in Romans chapter 9 verses 2 and 3:

"That I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh."

At the same time we need to realize that compassion is not just, nor is it always, a question of tears and feelings. Many feel or display emotions less than others. Compassion is measured not by words or by tears but by action.

And so God starts at the top and works downwards. First of all COMPREHENSION IN THE HEAD and then, as He works, COMPASSION IN THE HEART.

But we return to Elisha again.

Elisha came to the woman's house and entered the room where the body of the dead boy lay on his bed. What was he going to do now? How did he feel? Did he feel inadequate and helpless? I don't know what your reaction is to the children's needs - both when you understand them and when your heart is touched by them. I know what my initial reaction is - a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness. What can I do? I am so weak and inadequate. Without confidence in God we would give up. Do you feel the same way? Perhaps Elisha did also. In one sense he could do nothing for the dead boy; but, in another sense, he could do something - something vital and essential.

3) THE THIRD STEP WAS TO PRAY - AND TO CRY TO GOD

This was something Elisha had learned from his master, Elijah, who when faced with the same problem in 1 Kings 17 v20, 21 and 22, had prayed for a dead child. We don't know the words Elisha used. Perhaps he cried out to the Lord, "Dear God, I feel so helpless. I can do nothing for this dead child. But, oh God, you can - and I pray and ask you to touch this dead child and raise him up to life again." Elisha saw the need and knew he could not meet it. But he knew that God could and so he prayed. He prayed earnestly for the child.

This is something we can all do. Prayer is not a sideline or a last resort. In many ways prayer is the most important part of our ministry; and the wonderful fact is that everyone can pray. Only some can actually reach the children; but we can all pray. And the question is – do we? Are we willing to make a new commitment to pray for the souls and salvation of children? What had started in Elisha's HEAD and then touched his HEART had now driven him to his KNEES. God starts at the top and works downward!

But what then?

There was one more step for Elisha to take.

As he prayed God laid it upon his heart to do something. Another 18 inches below his knees were one (or two) of the most important parts of his body – his FEET.

4) THE FOURTH STEP WAS TO GO TO THE ONE IN NEED - TO USE HIS FEET AND ACTUALLY MAKE CONTACT WITH THE CHILD

Paul reminds us in Romans 10, v17: *“faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God”* and in v14: *“how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard and how shall they hear without a preacher?”* And then he adds in v15: *“How beautiful are THE FEET of them that preach the Gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things.”*

There is a need for some, at least, or even many, to go and make contact with those children who have such a great spiritual need. This is a call to action.

And that is what Elisha did. Having prayed for the child He went to him and stretched himself upon him. He really made contact with him and we read that he went back again and made contact with him again. He did not give up. And what happened?

The child opened his eyes!

That is what we want to see happen. We want to see dead children come to life. We want to see boys and girls born again by the Spirit of God. But this can only happen if these four steps take place in our lives and ministry:

- If we **UNDERSTAND** and **COMPREHEND** the needs of the children.
- If we **FEEL** and have **COMPASSION** for the children in need.
- If we **PRAY** and **CRY** out to God for the children.
- If we **GO** and make **CONTACT** with the children who are spiritually dead.

In other words God starts at the top and works downwards:
COMPREHENSION → COMPASSION → CRY → CONTACT

- Our **heads** are informed. "Oh God, help us to understand the need of the children."
- Our **hearts** are touched. "Oh God, help us have compassion for the children."
- Our **knees** are bent in prayer, "Oh God, burden our hearts so that we will really pray for the children."
- Our **feet** are used to take the message to the lost. "Oh God, help us to go to the children and bring your Word to them."

HEADS → HEARTS → KNEES → FEET

Are your head, heart, feet and knees functioning? If so I believe that many children will be reached and saved.

OUTLINE 17

SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN A MINISTRY TO CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

Elisha raised a dead child to life in 2 Kings 4 v29-37. It is interesting to note that another record of a dead person being raised to life in the Old Testament is recorded in 1 Kings 17 and the one raised then was also a child – the son of the widow woman; and the person through whom God did the miracle was Elijah – Elisha’s master. We could easily conclude that Elisha had learned from his master how he could meet the need of the widow’s dead son.

It is interesting to see that both Elijah and Elisha went alone into the room where the dead child lay. They both prayed first before doing anything else (Elijah's prayer is recorded for us in 1st Kings 17 vs 20,21 – but not Elisha's). They both stretched themselves upon the child. They both persevered and saw the child come to life.

We could make five simple statements about each of these men:

- Each had a concern for a child.
- Each prayed for that child.
- Each went to that child.
- Each made contact with that child.
- Each persevered with that child until he lived.

And these are five statements which could and should also be true of you and me.

But, as we return to the story of Elisha, it is interesting and helpful to compare and contrast Elisha's ministry to the child with that of his servant Gehazi and see what lessons we can learn for our ministry. Both of them went to the dead child and "ministered" to him. Elisha was successful but Gehazi was a failure. Why? Because there were five differences between the two men and their ministry to the child.

ELISHA

We can see below these five key truths about this wonderful man and his ministry to this child:

- HIS CONCERN (verses 27, 30) for the child when he heard that he was dead. He was so concerned that he was ready and willing to leave what he was doing and go to the child.
- HIS CRY for the child (verse 33). When he got to the child he first of all, and before doing anything, prayed and cried out to the Lord that He would raise the child to life.
- HIS CONTACT WITH AND CLOSENESS TO THE CHILD (verse 34). And now he stretched himself upon the child. This was not easy for a full-grown man to do but he did it – so he could get as close to the child as possible.
- HIS CONTINUANCE (or perseverance) with the child (verse 35)

And when the child did not, at first, show any sign of life he went back again and stretched himself again on the child and stayed like that until the child sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

And what a thrill it was for him to see the CHANGE in the child (verse 35) and then to have the privilege to COMMIT him to his mother (verse 36).

But there is another major point about Elisha which played a major part in what happened.

➤ HIS CHARACTER

It is recorded in Scripture that he was A HOLY MAN OF GOD (verse 9).

The Shunammite woman saw him passing by her home each day and she invited him into her home for meals. And then she and her husband built a special room where he could stay when he was in that area. And inside the room they placed a bed (to sleep on), a table (to eat from), a stool (to sit on) and a candlestick (to give light) – all he needed to SLEEP, SUP, SIT AND STUDY!

Why did she do this? Because she saw him to be a holy man of God. And we can learn from verses 9 and 10 three facts about his character and his holiness:

- ✓ It was a **visible** holiness – “*Look now, I know that this is a holy man of God*”. It was some-thing she saw. It was not something Elisha claimed or boasted about.
- ✓ It was a **continuous** holiness – “*passes by us regularly*”. She had many opportunities to see this holiness. He was not holy on special days or on special occasions.; he was continually holy.
- ✓ It was an **attractive** holiness. That’s why they wanted him to live with him.

And we need to realize that one of the major reasons Elisha was used by God to raise the child was because he was a holy man of God – and God was pleased with his character. And it is equally true in our situation that God is more concerned with who we are rather than what we do and

that God always blesses and uses the person who walks closely with Him

GEHAZI

But when we look at Gehazi we see someone who was completely different from Elisha both in who he was and what he did – and we see these differences portrayed in all of the five features listed concerning Elisha.

- **NO CONCERN** (verse 29)
Gehazi went to the child but only because he was commanded to do so by his master Elisha. He showed no concern for the child but acted under instructions.
- **NO CRY** (verse 31)
Gehazi arrived at the child's home and entered the room where his body lay and "went to work". But he did not pray beforehand. It was all a very mechanical process.
- **NO CONTACT** or **CLOSENESS** (verse 31)
He did not touch the child or have any contact with him at all. He just briefly and quickly laid his staff, his cold lifeless staff, on the child's face and nothing happened. This was what Elisha had suggested he do but surely he could have displayed more initiative, more warmth, more concern and more effort.
- **NO CONTINUANCE** or **PERSEVERANCE** (verse 31)
Nothing happened when he laid his staff on the child and he immediately left and returned to Elisha and told him nothing had happened. He did not try again. He gave up. So there was **NO CHANGE** in the child
- But, above all, there was a serious problem as far as Gehazi's **CHARACTER** was concerned. He was certainly not a holy man of God.
 - ✓ Later in chapter 5 we discover that he was a deceiver. He told Naaman that Elisha wanted silver and garments (when he didn't) (2nd Kings 5 v22).

- ✓ He was covetous and greedy and wanted these things for himself (2nd Kings 5 v24).
- ✓ He was a liar and told Elisha he had not followed Naaman (2nd Kings 5 v25).

And as a result he became a leper (2nd Kings 5 v27).

And it was primarily these problems in his character and in his deliberate sinning which resulted in his lack of success and lack of blessing. And his ministry ended in tragedy.

And as we look back over this story and the parts played in it by Elisha and Gehazi we need to ask ourselves five questions:

- Are we concerned for the spiritual needs of the children?
- Do we pray for them the way we should?
- Are we getting into contact with the children to share the Gospel with them?
- Are we persevering in our ministry to children or do we quit easily?

And above all:

- Are we living lives which are pleasing to God?

If the answer to these questions is “Yes” we can expect God to bless our ministries to the children.

Am I an Elisha or a Gehazi?

DESCRIPTION	ELISHA - THE SUCCESSFUL	GEHAZI - THE UNSUCCESSFUL	ME
His Character	A holy man of God 2nd Kings 4v9,22	Unholy 2nd Kings 5v20-27	?
His Concern	Yes - 2nd Kings 4v9, v27, 30	No - 2nd Kings 4v27, v31	?
His Cry	Yes - 2nd Kings 4v9, v33	No - 2nd Kings 4v9, v31	?
His Closeness	Yes - 2nd Kings 4v9, v34	No - 2nd Kings 4v9, v31	?
His Continuence	Yes - 2nd Kings 4v9, v35	No - 2 nd Kings 4v9, v31	?

P.S. You can see exactly the same characteristics demonstrated by Elijah in his successful ministry to another dead child in 1st Kings 17, v19-26.

OUTLINE 18

JAIRUS AND THE LORD JESUS

INTRODUCTION

Mark chapter 5 is one of my favourite chapters in the Bible. Why?

- First of all because it shows the power of the Lord Jesus in three ways:
 - ✓ His power over **demons** with regard to the maniac of Gadara (Mark 5 v13).
 - ✓ His power over **disease** with regard to the woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5 v29).
 - ✓ His power over **death** with regard to Jairus' daughter (Mark 5 v42).
- Secondly because it shows that Jesus Christ can meet everyone's needs:
 - ✓ The need of a **man** - the maniac
 - ✓ The need of a **woman** - the woman with the issue of blood
 - ✓ The need of a **child** - Jairus' daughter.

I would like to concentrate our thoughts on the third of these stories as recorded in the latter part of this chapter (Mark 5 v21-24 and v35-43).

OUTLINE

This story concerns a man called Jairus, one of the rulers of the synagogue whose daughter was ill, and later died. I would like to draw some lessons from this man and what he did to meet his child's need, and I trust that this will help us to see what we can do to meet the needs of our children.

- First of all **HE UNDERSTOOD** his child's need. He saw how sick she was and how near to death. He saw the problem, and he knew what was wrong and what needed to be done - "*My little daughter lies at the point of death*", he cried (Mark 5 v23).

Jairus understood the need. So must we. We need to see the needs of our children. We do not need to be intellectuals, or

theologians, or experts, to understand this. The Bible tells us about these needs and we can also observe them for ourselves. But it is not enough to understand. That is only the first step. It is in many ways the easiest step.

Jairus knew what was wrong. He understood the problem. Did he leave it there? Certainly not.

His head was fully informed. But that information dropped 18 inches and touched his heart.

➤ Secondly, **HE FELT** compassion. His emotions were touched. How do we know?

✓ We see it in his actions:

- He came to Jesus Christ - he probably ran (Mark 5,v22). This was important. This was urgent. Action was needed.
- He fell at the feet of Jesus Christ (Mark 5 v22). He did not care what people thought or what they saw. He was concerned for his child and nothing else mattered.

✓ We can see it in his words:

"He besought Jesus Christ greatly", we read (Mark 5 v23).
The NIV reads *"He pleaded earnestly with Him."*

Jairus had compassion. His heart was touched by the child's need.

I believe that this is what we need more than anything else. We don't really need more information. Our heads are well informed. We need hearts which are touched by that information and which feel compassion.

Of course we realize that compassion is not measured by tears or by words. It is measured by what we do and we can see a demonstration of compassion here in this man and what he did.

➤ Then, thirdly, he did three things.

✓ **HE CAME**

It is not enough to understand and to feel. The next step is so vital - **TO ACT, TO GET BUSY, TO DO SOMETHING.**

The mind has been informed, the emotions have been touched and now the will has moved.

The first thing he did was come to the Lord Jesus. (verse 22) He left what he was doing and took action to solve the problem. It is interesting to see that it was a **man** who had compassion and did something.

(Oh for more men like this in a ministry to children). It is also interesting to observe that he was an **important man** - he was a ruler of the synagogue, but not too important to respond to a child's need. And it is interesting to see that he was a **busy man**, but not too busy to get involved. He did something because he cared.

How much do we care for the needs of the children? We can measure our care by how we have reacted (and will continue to react) to what we know of the children's needs, and what we will do to meet those needs. And the first thing we need to do is to come to the Lord Jesus expecting Him to do His work in our children.

✓ HE PRAYED

"And begged Him earnestly, saying, 'My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live.'" (verse 23).

- It was an **earnest** prayer - *"he begged Him earnestly"*
- It was an **exact** prayer - *"come and lay your hand on her"*
- It was an **expectant** prayer - *"and she will live"*

This is what God wants us to do - to come to Him in prayer - earnestly, exactly and expectantly - and especially to pray for our children. But there was one more step to take.

✓ HE WENT

Having come to the Lord Jesus and prayed to Him, he now went with the Lord Jesus to the child. *"So Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him."* (Verse 24).

Having prayed he went to the child. But this time we read that the Lord Jesus went with him. They went together, and that is what makes the difference! When He calls us to go to the children He assures us of His Presence with us. We do not go alone.

I can almost imagine the Lord Jesus saying to Jairus
“Come Jairus, let’s go – just you and I together.”

Is God speaking to you about some step of faith he wants you to take to reach boys and girls with the Gospel? If so, He assures you that He will go with you. You do not need to be afraid.

Of course it is not easy. It was not easy for Jairus and the Lord Jesus to go to this child in need. We can see at least three problems or barriers which tried to stop them – and you may well experience the same problems as you take the step God wants you to take to reach children.

- THE THRONG in verse 24 tried to stop them:

“A great multitude followed Him and thronged Him.”

“We need you”, they probably cried, “You are needed here.”

“Why leave us – just because of one child in need?”

And so often when you start to move towards a needy child whom God has placed on your heart, there will be a throng of people who say “don’t go, we need you.”

But when God gives a vision of children in need – go! And don’t let the throng stop you.

- UNBELIEF in verse 35 tried to stop them.

“The girl is dead “unbelief cried”. There is nothing you can do. It is impossible. You are wasting your time.”

Does it sound familiar?

“What can you do? You are not a great preacher! You are only one person.”

Don’t let unbelief stop you. It didn’t stop the Lord Jesus and Jairus, and it shouldn’t stop you.

- SCORN in verse 40 was probably the most difficult obstacle
 - *"They ridiculed Him."*

They laughed at the Lord Jesus. They made fun of Him. And sometimes there are those who mock and scorn us when we seek to take steps of faith to meet the needs of the children.

But don't give up. The Lord Jesus didn't. In fact He put the critics out and they did not see what happened next. (Mark 5 v40). This is usually the fate of the critics - they talk so much and see so little.

And so as we look back over these verses we see that Jairus understood the problem, his heart was touched, and he acted in three ways.

- ✓ He came to the Lord Jesus
- ✓ He prayed to Him
- ✓ He went with the Lord Jesus to the child in need

➤ THEN THIRDLY WE SEE CLEARLY THE RESULT

And what happened? Jairus could not do anything more. He could only watch as the Lord Jesus raised the child to life.

What a thrill for the parents! What a testimony to Peter, James and John who were also there.

And what a challenge to us:

- Do we see the needs of the children?
- Are our hearts touched by those needs?
- Are we ready and willing to do something about those needs as God guides us?
 - ✓ To come to the Lord Jesus
 - ✓ To pray to Him
 - ✓ To go with Him.

Then it will be our privilege to watch the Lord working, and to see dead children become alive and all their needs met.

OUTLINE 19
GOD HEARS THE PRAYERS OF CHILDREN
(Genesis 21 v14-20)

INTRODUCTION

God had promised Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son. But as years passed by they became impatient and Sarah asked Abraham to provide a child through a union with her servant Hagar. And Abraham did that and Ishmael was born. But fourteen years later their own child Isaac was born. Before long there were problems in Abraham's household - especially because Ishmael was making fun of the baby Isaac - and Sarah demanded that Hagar and her son Ishmael be put out of the camp. They went into the nearby wilderness and what followed gives us three interesting and challenging pictures.

OUTLINE

➤ **A THREE-FOLD PICTURE OF A CHILD**

Ishmael at this time was a teenager - but was probably less developed physically and emotionally than today's teenagers - and could well be seen as "an older child":

- ✓ A CHILD LYING (verse 15) *"And the water in the skin was used up and she placed the boy under one of the shrubs."*
We see here the picture of a child unable to help himself. And is this not a picture of many children today who are "Crying helplessly in the wilderness of the world" with no spiritual help?
- ✓ A CHILD DYING (verse 16) *"Then she went and sat down across from him at a distance of about a bowshot: for she said to herself, 'Let me not see the death of the boy.' So she sat opposite him and lifted her voice and wept."* She knew her child was going to die, she moved away so she would not see him and wept bitterly.

Our children are not dying, but if they are not saved they are spiritually dead. And when we realize this our hearts should, like Hagar, be deeply touched and affected.

- ✓ A CHILD CRYING (verse 17) *“And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, ‘What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is.’”*

The Bible tells us that God *“heard the voice of the lad.”* There, under the bush, Ishmael cried out to God. We don’t know what he said. Perhaps he prayed and asked God to give him water; perhaps he just wept and cried out of fear; perhaps he reminded God about His promise that a nation would come from him (Genesis 21 v13).

And so many of our children are crying out, in their hearts, with a real sense of need. What they wish is usually not verbalized – but their needs are genuine and they are very aware of them.

➤ **A THREE-FOLD PICTURE OF GOD**

God was interested in what was happening and was deeply concerned and involved.

- ✓ GOD HEARD the voice of the child (v17): *“And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, ‘What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is.’”*

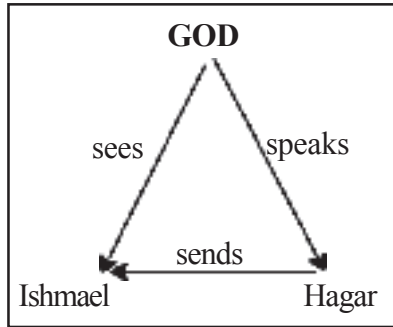
Isn’t it wonderful that, as the child Ishmael lay under the bush and cried, God heard him. God was not indifferent to the child and his needs.

And I believe that God still hears the voice of children today – whether vocalized or not – and is aware of their needs.

- ✓ GOD CALLED the adult Hagar (v17): *“Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, ‘What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is.’”*

God wanted to meet the child’s need and provide him with water. How did He do so? He Himself could have given the child water and quenched his thirst. But that is not the way God usually works. God usually meets needs by means of a triangle.

Do you know what I mean?



First of all God sees a need, then He speaks to a person and tells him He wants him to meet that need; and then He sends him to meet it.

So God now speaks to Hagar and tells her to go to Ishmael and give him a drink.

And today God sees the spiritual need of children and is speaking to many men and women to go and meet that need and bring to the children the water of life. Is He speaking to you?

But how can Hagar do this? She doesn't have any water?

- ✓ **GOD OPENED** the eyes of the adult (v19): *"Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad a drink."*

The water had been there all the time but she hadn't seen it. Now she saw it and knew that right at her hand was the solution to the child's problem.

And when God sees the needs of children today and when He speaks to us and tells us to go to them He, at the same time opens our eyes and enables us to see that He has provided salvation and the water of life for children. He shows us that they can be saved and wants us to evangelize them.

➤ **A THREE-FOLD PICTURE OF AN ADULT**

How did Hagar react? What did she do?

- ✓ THE ADULT WENT (v19): *".....and she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad to drink."*

Hagar obeyed God and she went! But she did not go first of all to the child; she went to the well. That was where she found the solution.

And before we go to the needs of the children we need to be prepared. We need to go "to the well." We need to be sure that we know the message of salvation – the message which will, through the work of the Holy Spirit, bring the water of life to the children and quench their thirst.

- ✓ The adult FILLED (v19): *".....and she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad to drink."*

Hagar filled her bottle with water – she needed something in which to hold the water and carry it to the child. It didn't have to be a pretty bottle or even a big bottle. The water, not the bottle, was important; the bottle only carried the water!

And we need to fill our bottles with the Gospel, the message of salvation which brings eternal life. But we are only bottles . The appearance, the ability and the size doesn't matter. It's what's in the bottle which is important.

- ✓ The adult GAVE (v19): *".....and she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad to drink."*

So Hagar brought her bottle of water to Ishmael and gave him to drink. And he did so and was restored to health, strength and life.

And you and I have this same privilege. We are the bottles which take the water of life to needy and thirsty children – and as we do so many of them will trust the Lord Jesus, drink the water we bring to them and be saved and have eternal life.

Are you willing to be that right-hand corner of God's triangle – to hear Him speak to you about the needs of children and to obey His command as He sends you to meet their needs?

SOME HELPFUL ILLUSTRATIONS AND EXAMPLES TO USE IN YOUR PRESENTATIONS

It helps your presentation when you can include short, relevant stories or illustrations which back up what you are saying. You will find more on the earlier pages of this book: Here are three more.

- An old Scottish elder was deeply concerned about the rather stern preacher who had recently come to their church. The minister was a good man, very straight in regard to the doctrines of the Word, but he never addressed himself to the little ones. He concentrated his efforts on the adults only. One day he invited the pastor to visit his farm on the outskirts of the city. Following afternoon tea he took the minister to see his large flock of sheep as they were being brought in for the night. When they arrived at the sheepfold, the elder took his stand at the entrance. He allowed the full grown animals to enter, but as the little lambs came up he pushed them back with a heavy stick. Finally the pastor became very indignant. "What are you doing to the lambs?" he exclaimed, "they need the shelter far more than the sheep!" "The same thing you're doing to the children of the church", replied the elder. The object lesson had its effect and never again did the pastor neglect the children. Instead he urged them to receive Christ at an early age.
How concerned are you about the salvation of precious little ones?

- James Chalmers, that great missionary to New Guinea, said that when he was a boy of 14 years of age he was deeply moved about the heathen. He wrote, "I remember it well. Our Sunday school teacher finished the lesson and then read a letter from a missionary in Fiji. The letter spoke of cannibalism and the power of the gospel. When the teacher finished reading he looked over his glasses and said, "I wonder if there is a boy here this afternoon who will yet become a missionary and bring the gospel to these cannibals?" The response of my heart was "Yes God helping me I will go." I was so impressed that on my way home, as I reached the bridge over the Aray River, I went over the wall attached to the bridge and kneeling down there prayed that God would make me a missionary to the heathen."

Years later James Chalmers went to New Guinea where he was used of God to lead many to Christ. He was finally clubbed to death and eaten by the cannibals.

- In Scotland many years ago a minister was approached by one of his deacons, who seemed to be under a great burden. "I came early to meet you", he said, "I have something I feel I should tell you. There must be something wrong with your preaching because there has only been one person added to the church in a whole year, and he is only a boy."

After the congregation had gone the minister stayed on in the church to pray. He had worked hard for years only to be told at last that his work was no longer blessed. As he prayed he became conscious that he was not alone and looking around he noticed that it was "only a boy."

"Well Robert", said the minister, "What is it?"

"Do you think that if I were willing to work hard for an education I could ever become a preacher or perhaps a missionary?"

That boy was Robert Moffat. Yes, he was "only a boy" but he became the great African missionary.

In later years his daughter married David Livingstone.

CONCLUSION

All around us is a great mission field – **THE CHILDREN**. They represent one-third of the population of the world. They are the future leaders – the men and women of tomorrow.

God's Word plainly teaches our responsibility, as Christians, towards "*the little ones.*" God wants us to pray for them and care for them. He wants us to evangelize them and to teach them the Word of God that they may put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.

After the children receive the Lord Jesus Christ, our privilege and duty is to teach these saved boys and girls that they may "*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*" (2nd Peter 3,18). Our own lives should be examples for the children to follow.

As you think of the challenge of this generation of children may your prayer be ...

"Lord, what do you want ME to do?" (Acts 9,6).



APPENDIX

Brief details of each Christian leader mentioned in the book in order of appearance

Augustine (354-430) was one of the most important figures and influences in the early church. He was Bishop of Hippo in North Africa for many years and wrote over 100 books - mostly on doctrine - and Bible commentaries which have greatly influenced the lives and ministry of many over the years.

Herman Van Brummelen - retired missionary to Holland's children and was, for many years, National Director of Child Evangelism Fellowship in Holland. He has also written a number of books and Bible studies about children.

Gypsy Smith (1860-1947) was born in England in a gypsy tent. He trusted Christ when he was 15 and became an evangelist preaching to crowds from 100 to 1500 in the USA and the United Kingdom for over 70 years.

Billy Sunday (1862-1935) was an American base-ball player who became the most celebrated and influential American evangelist during the early decades of the 20th century.

John Knox (1514-1572) was one of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century and the founder of the Presbyterian denomination in Scotland. He was an outstanding Bible scholar and gifted preacher.

John Chrysostom (347-407) was Archbishop of Constantinople and an important and very influential Church Father in the early Christian church. He was especially renowned for his eloquence in preaching. His name means "*golden mouthed.*"

John Wesley (1703-1791) was an Anglican minister and gifted theologian who, along with his brother Charles, founded the Methodist church and was the president and leader of the denomination for many years.

Dr F.B. Meyer (1847-1929) was a Baptist pastor and evangelist in England whose preaching and writing ministry were greatly used by God in England and throughout the world. He authored more than 40 books.

Dr Martha Wright was for many years Vice-President of Child Evangelism Fellowship Inc., and Director of its worldwide educational and training programs. She is now Director of CEF in the state of Maryland.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) was one of the greatest pastors and preachers of all time and was mightily used by God in England during the latter half of the nineteenth century. He was pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London for many years and had congregations every Sunday morning and evening numbering between 5,000 and 6,000. He also founded a College to train pastors, and a large orphanage. In addition, he had a very extensive writing ministry and millions of his Sunday sermons were printed and distributed around the world.

Harry Ironside (1876-1951) was an American Bible teacher, pastor and renowned author of more than 60 books. He belonged to the Christian Brethren but pastored the famous Moody Memorial Church in Chicago for 18 years.

Matthew Henry (1662-1714) was a pastor for many years in “non-conformist churches” in England. But he was, and is, better known as the author of a massive six-volume “*Exposition of the Old and New Testament*” which has been a wonderful help and blessing to many Bible students and pastors for over 300 years.

Dr Andrew Bonar (1810-1892) was a minister in the Free Church of Scotland whose preaching was greatly used by God. He also wrote many books, the best known of which is “*The Biography of Robert Murray McCheyne*.”

Mr. Anthony Capon was an evangelist who worked with Children's Special Service Mission (CSSM) and Scripture Union in England for many years. He also authored a number of short, but very helpful, books on a teaching ministry to children.

Andrew Murray (1828-1917) was a South African pastor, writer and teacher who considered missions the chief end of the church. He was also one of the founders of the South African General Mission. He authored more than 240 books which had a great influence worldwide.

Richard B.H. Lenski (1864-1936), German born, was an outstanding theologian. He was educated and ordained in the USA and eventually became Professor and Seminary Dean at Capital University. He authored commentaries on many books of the Bible which are reckoned to be among the best available.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a German pastor and Professor of Theology who initiated the Protestant Reformation, founded the Lutheran church, and became one of the most outstanding, influential figures in church history. His translation of the Bible into German had a great impact on the church in his day.

Hudson Pope (1879-1967) was a children's evangelist in England with Children's Special Service Mission (CSSM) - now Scripture Union. He was one of the wisest, most skilful and most effective children's workers of modern times, and widely used as a children's evangelist. He also authored several very helpful books on a ministry to children.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) was a preacher, pastor and poet, but is especially recognized as the "*Father of English Hymnody*", being the first popular and prolific English hymnwriter. Many of his hymns are still sung today.

Richard Baxter (1615-1691) was an English Puritan leader, pastor, poet, hymn-writer and theologian. He was known as the "*Chief of English Protestant Schoolmen*" and was one of the most influential leaders of the "non-conformists." He is especially remembered for his many theological publications.

Polycarp (69-155) was a second-century Christian and Bishop of Smyrna. He was a “father” of the Christian church and a combatant against “Christian” heresies. He died as a martyr for the truth which he loved and defended.

Lord Shaftesbury (1801-1885) was an English politician, philanthropist and outstanding evangelical Christian who felt led by God to improve the living conditions of the English working class, especially factory workers and the poor, neglected children.

Dr James Dobson (1936 -) is an American evangelical Christian author, psychologist and founder of the influential “*Focus on the Family*” radio and TV programs. He has written many books and publications and has been called “*The nation’s most influential evangelical leader.*”

Leighton Ford is a brother-in-law of Billy Graham and served as an evangelist in many countries for 31 years with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. He has also authored a number of books.

Corrie Ten Boom (1892-1983) was a Dutch Christian who survived the Nazi Ravensbruck concentration camp. She and her family helped many Jews escape the Nazis during the Second World War. After the war she travelled the world as a public speaker and also wrote many books. She was highly rewarded and decorated by the Queen of Holland for her work.

Mrs. Ruth Graham (1920-2007) was the wife of the famous evangelist Billy Graham. They met at Wheaton College and were married in 1943. They had five children, all of whom are actively involved in Christian ministry.

Mary Slessor (1848-1915) was a Scottish missionary who for 40 years carried on a pioneer ministry to the people of the Calabar in West Africa, where God mightily blessed her ministry.

Amy Carmichael (1867-1950) was an Irish missionary in India who opened an orphanage and founded a mission in Dohnavar giving sanctuary to many hundreds of needy and neglected children. She served in India for 55 years and wrote many books there.

Jim Elliot (1927-1956) was a missionary to Ecuador who, along with four others, was killed in their attempt to evangelize the unreached Auca Indians. It was Jim who said *“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”*

Dr Armin Maurhofer (1946-) was for many years pastor of the Evangelical Free Church in Lagenthal, Switzerland. Today he is a teacher within the Union of Evangelical Free churches and a professor and lecturer in Theology at the seminary in Basel.

George Muller (1805-1898) was an evangelist in England. During his long life He founded five orphanages in Bristol which cared for over 10,000 children. He lived entirely by faith, trusting God for all the financial needs. He also established 117 schools giving Christian education to over 100,000 children.

George Whitfield (1714-1770) was an Anglican minister and evangelist in England who was greatly used by God in a spiritual revival in Britain and especially North America. He was the best known preacher in Britain and America in the 18th century and a widely recognized public figure in America.

Apostolos Bliates (1931-) is a well-known evangelical leader in Greece. He was pastor of the Second Greek Evangelical Church in Athens for 14 years.

Stephen Olford (1918-2004) was a well-known evangelical preacher, broadcaster and leader in Britain. He later pastored the famous Calvary Baptist Church in New York City for 16 years. Billy Graham said *“He was the man who most influenced my ministry.”*

Robert Murray McCheyne (1813-1843) was minister of St Peter’s Church, Dundee, Scotland. He was a godly evangelical pastor and evangelist with a great love for souls. His ministry was greatly blessed of God even though he only lived until he was 30.

Henry Bosch (1914-1995) was the Founder of Our Daily Bread – monthly booklets of devotional readings which were produced by The Radio Bible Class and distributed around the world.

Dr Campbell Morgan (1863-1945) was one of the greatest preachers in England during the first half of the 19th century. He was the Minister of Westminster Chapel London from 1904 to 1917 and later from 1933-1943. He also wrote many books.

Lionel Hunt was a Canadian evangelist and children's worker who authored several books, his main one being "*Handbook on Children's Evangelism.*"

David Livingston (1813-1873) was a Scottish pioneer missionary in Africa for many years. He was also renowned as a fearless explorer. He was one of the most popular national heroes of the late 19th century in Victorian Britain.

J. Irvin Overholtzer (1877-1955) founded our Mission - Child Evangelism Fellowship in California, USA in 1937. Since then the mission has grown into a worldwide ministry operating in over 160 countries and reaching millions of children.

John Niver was a pastor in Canada.

William Pettingill (1886-1950) was a well-known American pastor, educator and lecturer who also authored many books. He was the co-founder of the Philadelphia College of the Bible.

Lewis Chafer (1871-1952) was an American theologian who founded and served as the first President of Dallas Theological Seminary. He was also a well-known conference speaker and authored many books. His eight-volume "*Systematic Theology*" has been a great blessing to many.

Charles Hodge (1797-1878) was the Principal of Princeton Theological Seminary in USA for 27 years. He also wrote many Biblical and theological books, his main one being three volumes on Systematic Theology numbering in total 2260 pages!

Dr Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984) was an American evangelical theologian, philosopher and Presbyterian pastor who founded the L'Abri Community in Switzerland to encourage and help intellectuals in their Christian lives. He also wrote many books which had a wide influence worldwide.

Dr R.A. Torrey (1856-1928) was a renowned evangelist in the USA and around the world, who later became the Director of the Moody Bible Institute and The Bible Institute of Los Angeles. He also pastored two of America's largest churches and wrote more than 40 books.

John Cotton (1585-1652) was one of the leading Puritan pastors in New England in the early years of America. He wrote many books including a shorter catechism for children which is considered to be the first children's book written by an American.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) was an American preacher, author and theologian and, later, a missionary to native Americans. He is widely acknowledged to be America's most important and original theologian and one of their greatest intellectuals. God used him mightily in the First Great Awakening.

SECTION X

TEST YOURSELF WITH THE QUESTIONS WHICH FOLLOW

Give the references of the following verses:

A verse in the Old Testament which shows we should teach the Word of God to children

A verse in the New Testament which shows we should teach the Word of God to children

A verse in the New Testament which clearly states God's Will concerning children

A verse in the Old Testament which shows that a child can fear the Lord

A verse in the Old Testament which shows that a child can set his hope in God

A verse in the New Testament which shows that a child can believe in (trust) Jesus Christ

A verse in the New Testament which shows that anyone (including children) can be saved – if they believe in Jesus Christ

Two more verses in the New Testament which show that a little child can be saved

A chapter in the Old Testament which shows that a little child can hear and respond to the voice of God.

A verse in the New Testament which shows that the Lord Jesus loves children and wants them to come to Him

A verse in the New Testament which shows that we should receive or welcome children in the name of the Lord Jesus

A verse in the Old Testament which shows that everyone (including children) are sinners.

A verse in the New Testament which shows that children are lost.

A verse in the New Testament which clearly shows that it is those who reject and disobey God who are condemned.

A verse in the Old Testament which indicates that a baby who dies goes to Heaven

A verse in the Old Testament which indicates that there is an age of accountability

A verse in the New Testament which indicates that a child is more open to the Gospel than an adult

A verse in the New Testament which shows that believing children have guardian angels

A verse in the New Testament which commands us to evangelize children

A verse in the New Testament which shows that children born into a Christian home have a great privilege

A verse in the New Testament which shows the responsibility which parents have to their children

A verse in the New Testament which shows that the Lord Jesus appreciated the praise of children

A verse in the Old Testament which shows that we should tell children about God's judgment

A story in the Old Testament which shows that a little child can do what is right in the sight of the Lord.

Give four passages in Deuteronomy which speak about children and our responsibility to them.

Give a verse which warns against causing a believing child to stumble

Give a verse in the Old Testament which shows that a baby is born with a sinful nature

Give a verse in the Old Testament which indicates that it is best to remember God, our Creator, when young

Give a verse in the Old Testament which shows that a visual can be used to help children to understand something God has done

Give two verses in the New Testament which show that adults need to become like children before, or at, conversion.

Give a verse in the Old Testament which encourages us to evangelize and teach children before they become hardened and resistant adults

Give an example of two children – one in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament who were taught the Word of God from infancy – and became outstanding men of God

Give a verse which commands us to “feed the lambs”

Publications available for children's workers who will make good use of them in a Biblical ministry to children

- **A series of devotional books for children's workers:**
 - "The Problems of a Children's Worker - and God's Solution"*
 - "Obedience to the Heavenly Vision"*
 - "Smooth Sailing in Personal Relationships and Leadership"*
 - "A Life Worth Living"*
 - "Salvation by Faith Alone"*
 - "Truths for Teachers"*
 - "God's Word for God's Workers Vol 1"*
 - "God's Word for God's Workers Vol 2"*
- **A series of training manuals for children's workers:**
 - "First Steps"*
 - "How to Teach Bible Doctrines to Children"*
 - "Why Evangelize Children?"*
 - "The Principles of Teaching"*
 - "100 Questions and Answers Concerning a Ministry to Children"*
 - "Bible Talks for Children Vol 1"*
 - "Bible Talks for Children Vol 2"*
 - "Now I See It"*
 - "U-can Know God's Plan for Children"*
 - "U-can Evangelize Children"*
 - "U-can Teach a Bible Lesson"*
 - "U-can Lead Children to Christ"*
 - "U-can Help Christian Children to Grow"*
 - "U-can Counsel a Christian Child"*
 - "CHILDREN - A Biblical Perspective"*
- **A series of visualized lessons to teach Bible doctrines to children:**
 - "Questions Children Ask" (5 lessons)*
 - "Who Is God? (10 lessons)*
 - "What Is God Like?" (10 lessons)*
 - "The Bible" (5 lessons)*
 - "The Lord Jesus Christ" (5 lessons)*
 - "What Is Wrong With the World?" (5 lessons)*
 - "Salvation - The Gift of God - Part I" (10 lessons)*
 - "Salvation - The Gift of God - Part II" (10 lessons)*
 - "Growth - The Plan of God" (20 lessons in two parts)*
 - "The Holy Spirit" (10 Lessons)*
 - "God Listens to His Children" (11 Lessons)*
 - "Creation and Evolution" (10 Lessons)*

For information on the availability of these publications please contact -

CEF Specialized Book Ministry,
PO Box 308, Lisburn, BT28 2YS, N Ireland, UK
or online - www.cefbookministry.com

Child Evangelism Fellowship®

The CEF Specialized Book Ministry is an integral part of the worldwide ministry of Child Evangelism Fellowship. CEF is the world's largest mission dedicated to the evangelism of children. CEF trained workers are to be found in over 170 countries and each year more than ten million children are reached with the Gospel.

CEF workers provide training opportunities which vary from a one hour course to a three month institute. A full range of visualized Bible lessons and additional tools for the evangelism of children is produced in many languages.

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