In this book you will delve into the pages of Holy Scripture to discover that God has a special plan for each child. You will find that God wants boys and girls to know him personally and to have complete trust and confidence in Him. God has given you responsibilities towards the little ones - to pray for them - to care for them. God wants the Gospel truths to be clearly taught so that children may put their trust in the Saviour - The Lord Jesus Christ.

Whether your are a parent, school teacher or church worker you will find this book both informative and challenging. This is an excellent text book to use at training seminars to introduce teachers or prospective teachers to what the Bible says about children.

May God give you the grace to respond to the challenges that this book will bring as you discover God's plan for the children.

Child Evangelism Fellowship Inc.
Specialized Book Ministry
Assisting Children's Evangelists Worldwide
www.cefbookministry.com

U-Can Know God's Plan for Children

Dr Sam Doherty



U can

Know God's Plan for Children

Learn what the Bible teaches about the spiritual needs of children

Dr Sam Doherty

U-can Know God's Plan for Children

Learn what the Bible teaches about the spiritual needs of children



Dr Sam Doherty, BA; EdD

A series of short 'U-can' training manuals for children's workers:

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

This book is for free distribution only — and not to be sold.

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Published by
Child Evangelism Fellowship
Specialized Book Ministry
Assisting Children's Evangelists Worldwide
PO Box 308, Lisburn, BT28 2YS, Northern Ireland, UK
© February 2011 All Rights Reserved

Table of Contents

Introduction **1**

Section I - Three Basic Facts..... **3**

1. The Bible is the Word of God and Verbally Inspired
2. The Child is Created by God
3. The Gospel is the Message that Children Need

Section II - A Study of Five Bible Passages about Children **11**

1. The book of Deuteronomy
2. Psalm 78 v1-8
3. Matthew 18 v1-14
4. Mark 10 v13-16
5. The book of Proverbs

Section III - Pictures of Children in the Bible..... **46**

Section IV - Biblical Answers to Eleven Questions about Children..... **48**

Section V - Biblical Answers to Six Questions about a Ministry to Children **104**

Section VI - Additional Bible Truths About Children.....**114**

INTRODUCTION

Your approach to children should be guided by, and based upon, the clear teaching of the Word of God. Peoples's views, opinions and theories have their place, but must be subservient to the Scriptures. You must measure what you and others think and say 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 child evangelism by seeking to find out what the Bible actually says concerning children, because one's methodology and whole approach to them will be determined by one's theology, and by what one believes about children.

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 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 pre-conceived 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 speculation or theorizing.

This book is an enlargement and update of a book entitled "*Biblical Basis of Child Evangelism*" which I wrote with the help of Roy Harrison in 1981 and which is published by European CEF

This book is divided into six sections:

1. An introduction to three basic introductory facts which need to be understood.
2. A study of five of the main Biblical passages which teach about children.
3. A look at a number of pictures of children in the Bible.
4. A series of eleven important questions concerning children, and the answers from the Bible.
5. Six questions which some people have asked concerning a ministry to children, and the answers given in the Bible.
6. Several additional truths in the Bible concerning children.

I pray that this book will be a help and a blessing to all who love children and who want to see them come to a saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sam Doherty
September 2010

Section I

Three Basic Facts

There are three basic facts which we need to understand and believe as we begin to study the *biblical basis of child evangelism*. Each of these three facts is linked to one key word in this phrase **– Biblical**, **Child**, **Evangelism.**

Fact 1. The Bible is the Word of God and verbally inspired

Because the Bible is the basis for all the studies contained in this book, it is necessary for every teacher to understand exactly what the Bible is.

We believe that the Bible is truly, fully and completely the Word of God; that it was written by men of God under the inspiration and direction of the Holy Spirit; and that every word, as originally given, is true and without error of any kind *(2nd Timothy 3:16; 2nd Peter 1:21)*.

The Bible can therefore be depended upon, absolutely and without hesitation, to give each earnest and seeking teacher the answers to his questions, and to establish a firm basis for his work among children.

Fact 2. The child is created by God

Before commencing a detailed study of what the Bible teaches about children, it is helpful to see one very important and basic truth in the Word of God about them. This truth needs to be understood, accepted, and acted upon by all who have a desire to be of spiritual help to boys and girls.

All children are the product of God's creative power. The first two chapters of Genesis give the account of how God created the first man. God made man and gave life to him. Every child born

into this world is a descendant of that first man and continues to breath the breath which God gave to him.
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 in *Psalm 139:14* said, *"I am fearfully and wonderfully made."* Paul said in *Acts 17:25* "*He gives to all life, and breath, and all things."*
An understanding and acceptance of this wonderful truth, that every child is created by God, should lead each teacher to a number of conclusions and applications.

- **Children have dignity, respect and worth**

They are the result of God's handiwork, and are descended from the first man who was created originally in the image of God *(Genesis 1:27; Genesis 2:7).* Traces of this original image can still be seen in them, although it is much marred by sin *(Genesis 9:6; James 3:9).*
It must be remembered also that childhood is not just a time of preparation for adulthood, but is an important, unique and dignified part of a person's total life and experience.
This surely is underlined by the attitude of the Lord Jesus towards children *(Matthew 18:1-14; Mark 10:13-16,* and *Matthew 21:16).* He had a special regard for children.
It can also be seen in the fact that the Lord Jesus was born into this world as a child, and that He lived, grew and developed through all the stages of childhood *(Luke 2:7, 40,52).*
Therefore it is necessary to treat children with dignity and respect.

- **Children are dependent upon God, their Creator, for everything, physically and spiritually.**

Paul said to the Athenians in *Acts 17:26* that the Creator God*"has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings";* and "*in Him we live and move and have our being" (verse 28).* Physical life is dependent upon God, and spiritual life comes as the result of God working in the hearts of children through the preaching of the Gospel *(John 6:44,65).*
Therefore it is necessary to trust God to work in the children's hearts.

- **Children are responsible to God as their Creator**

Paul underlined this truth in Athens when he said *"He"* (the God who created the world and made you) *"now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained." (Acts 17:30,31).*

Ecclesiastes 12:1 says *"Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth…"*

Therefore it is necessary to teach this responsibility to the children.

- **Children have an intrinsic desire to worship someone – or something**

Paul, at the beginning of his Gospel message to the Athenians, said: *"I even found an altar with this inscription TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, THE One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you. (Acts 17:23).*

Either the child is responding in thankfulness and obedience to His Creator, or he is, in essence, worshipping another.

Therefore it is necessary to present them with the truth about God.

- **Children are created equal in the sight of God**

God created ALL children. A child's race, colour, culture, country or circumstances do not make him any more (or less) favoured by God. Paul clearly stated to the Athenians: *"He"* (God) *"has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth (Acts 17:26).*

Therefore, a teacher should never have any favourites, nor allow any inequalities

- **Children are different one from the other**

While there are many features shared in common by all children, each individual child comes from the Hand of God as a unique person, different from all others. No two children are created completely alike.

Therefore it is necessary to adapt ourselves, and our approach, to individual children.

➢ **Children are whole beings**

God created the child, not just as a body, or a soul, or a spirit, but as a whole being, having unity. In addition, the child's soul, or "*real self*", consists of a mind to think with, emotions to feel with and a will to decide with – all together and interacting upon each other.

Therefore it is necessary always to cater for the whole child.

Fact 3. The Gospel is the message which children need

Several facts should be clearly understood:

- The preaching of the Gospel to unsaved children is a command from the Lord Jesus *(Mark 16:15).* The teacher is to evangelise children, not entertain them.
- The Holy Spirit uses the preaching of the Gospel to speak to the hearts of unsaved children and lead them to Jesus Christ *(Romans 1:16; Ephesians 2:5).*
- The content of the Gospel message is given clearly in the New Testament. It can be found especially in the Gospel messages preached by the Apostles in the Acts, in Paul's detailed and logical outline in Romans, and in many other shorter portions of the New Testament (eg.*1st Corinthians 15:1-4; John 3:14-21,* etc.).
- There is only one Gospel message which must not be altered (*Galatians 1:8,9*). It must be proclaimed to young and old, to children born into Christian homes and to children born into non-Christian homes (*Mark 16:15*).

What then is the Gospel message?

The proclamation of the Gospel to children involves the teaching of as much as possible of five areas of Bible truth:

➢ **Teach about God – the source of salvation**

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 for salvation begins with a clear understanding of God.

Emphasise:

- God is the Creator *(Acts 17:23-29).* Therefore man has a responsibility towards Him.
- God has spoken to man through the Bible (*1st Corinthians 15:3,4*). Therefore man should listen to God's Word.
- God is Holy and Just (*Acts 17:31*). Therefore He must judge sin.
- God is good and gracious, loving and merciful (*John 3:16*). Therefore He has provided the answer to man's need.
- The holiness of God makes salvation necessary; the love of God makes salvation possible. Teach these truths in Biblical balance.

➢ **Teach about sin – man's need of salvation**

Teach about the sinfulness of the human heart. Explain what sin is and that all are sinners before a holy God. Teach the consequences of sin.

Emphasise:

- Sin is against God (*Psalm 51:4*). It is the transgression of His law (*1st John 3:4*).
- All are sinners by nature (*Ephesians 2*:3) and by act (*Romans 3:23*).
- Sin deserves punishment and everlasting separation from God (*Romans 1:18*).
- It is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict of sin. Pray that He will do this work in the hearts and lives of those children whom you teach.

➢ **Teach about Jesus Christ – the way of salvation**

Teach about the Lord Jesus Christ; He is the One who saves. Teach about His Person (Who He is), and His Work (what He did).

Emphasise:

- He is God the Son, the only Saviour (*Acts 9:20*)
- His death: its meaning and importance, and its sufficiency to atone for sin (*Acts 2:23,36,38*).

- His resurrection: He is a living Saviour (*Acts 2:24-32*).
- His exaltation: He is Lord of all (*Acts 2:23-32*).
- Christ is the One Who must be believed in for salvation. (Acts 16:31)
- 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 6:37; John 1:12*). Pray for an immediate, present trust in Christ.
Emphasise:

- Christ's invitation to come to Him (*Matthew 11:28*).
- The need to turn from sin to God (*Acts 2:38; Acts 20:21*).
- The need to trust the Lord Jesus Christ and to submit to Him in obedience (*Acts 16:31; Acts 20:21*).
- Both repentance and faith involve a three-fold response to Christ's invitation – a response of mind, heart and will (*Romans 6:17*).

➢ **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 13:38,39*)
- They will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (*Acts 2:38*)
- They will be regenerated and receive a new nature (*John 3:3-8*), and God will expect to see a real change in their lives (*Acts 26:20*).

What methods should we use in our evangelism?

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 truths of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection (*1st Corinthians 15:3&4*). But the good news concerning these two truths 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. 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 28:19,20*). 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 2:38; Acts 13:39, Acts 16:31*). 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 3:26; Acts 14:15; 2nd Corinthians 5:17; 1st Thessalonians 1:9*).

During the first European Congress on Child Evangelism,the late Dr Frances Schaeffer, the internationally known Christian writer and teacher said, "*There is only one Gospel for both adults and children. Children's evangelism is not a different Gospel but is a translation problem in which we must proclaim the great truths of the Christian faith in a very simple manner. The greatest reason for my belief that little children can really understand the vital truths of the Gospel is that I believe in the Holy Spirit's ministry to communicate the message of salvation and sanctification to them.*

There is no adult, however intelligent, who can understand the Gospel without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit."

Questions for further thought

- *How would you explain the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures to a young teacher who is preparing to begin his ministry to children?*
- *Considering what has been said in this section, why is the theory of evolution so dangerous and harmful?*
- *Does a study of the Gospel messages preached by the Apostles in the Acts of the Apostles confirm that they should involve teaching about God, sin, and Jesus Christ, and about man's response in repentance and faith? (Give references).*

Section II

Five Bible Passages Concerning Children

In this section we will look at, and expound, five of the main passages in the Bible concerning children.

(1) The Book of Deuteronomy
Our Responsibility to the Children

It is important to remember the circumstances under which the book of Deuteronomy was given. The Children of Israel, after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, had come to the Promised Land and were preparing to enter it. Thus they were beginning a completely new stage in their personal lives and in the life of Israel as a nation. Ahead lay the conquest and occupation of the land which God had given them.

Their future would depend upon the generation of children who would grow up in the Promised Land. Therefore, much emphasis in the book of Deuteronomy is given to children, and the responsibility the parents had to their children. Every teacher and parent today can learn many valuable lessons from what is taught about children in this book.

There are four main passages concerning children in Deuteronomy.

a) Deuteronomy 4:9,10
God's warnings to those who teach children

In this passage there are four warnings to heed.

- *Verse 9a: "Only take heed to yourself..."*

TAKE HEED to yourself. This means a correct relationship with God. It is important that children's workers examine themselves to see that they are in this correct spiritual relationship with God. It is not possible to teach satisfactorily unless one is "*right with God*."

- *Verse 9b: ... and diligently keep yourself"*

KEEP yourself and your soul diligently. This means a constant communion with God. A teacher's spiritual life is to be jealously guarded by constant communion with the Lord and study of His Word.

- *Verse 9c: ... lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life."*

REMEMBER what God has done for you. They were to remember what the Lord had done for them – their deliverance from slavery, the dividing of the Red Sea, the manna, the tabernacle, and especially the giving of the law at Sinai.
We need to remember what the Lord has done for us. This means a careful study of God's Word and work.
He has delivered us from sin's slavery, has kept us by His power, has met our daily needs, has given us fellowship with Himself, and He has given us His Word.

- *Verse 9d: "...and teach them to your children and your grandchildren*

TEACH these truths to the children. This means a conscientious teaching of God's Word. The people were commanded both to teach the works of God *(verse 9)* and the words of God (*verse 10*).

b) Deuteronomy 6:3-9
God's commands to those who teach children

These verses can be divided into four parts.

- **God's initial command**

- *Verse 3a: "Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it."*

This is a two-fold instruction:

- ✓ *"Hear"* – Listen to what the Lord says.

- ✓ *"Observe to do"* – Obey what the Lord says.

➢ **God's two-fold promise**

- *Verse 3b: "... 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."*
  - ✓ *"That it may be well with you"* – those who listen and obey God's Word will **be blessed**.
  - ✓ *"That you may multiply greatly"* – those who listen and obey God's Word will **grow** and multiply.

At the time of Moses God wanted His people to be spiritually healthy and also to grow numerically. This is also God's will for His people today.

➢ **God's three main commands.**

- *Verse 4: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One!"*

This verse introduces these three commands and shows first of all the authority and revelation of God on which these three commands are based. We are to hear or listen to the great truth that the Lord (Jehovah) is our God (Elohim) – and we should ensure that this truth is the basis of our ministry to the children. We need to teach our children about God – His greatness, eternity, holiness and love. Our lives and our teaching should be God centered.

- *Verse 5: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."*
  - ✓ This is the first command: **Love the Saviour.**

  Your relationship with the Lord should have first priority in your life. First of all, you must see Him as He is – the Lord our God (*verse 4*); then you must love Him. In *John 21:15* the Lord Jesus asked Simon Peter the question, *"Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?"* When Simon answered Him, *"Yes, Lord, you know that I love you"*, the Lord Jesus said to him, *"Feed my lambs."* He did not command Simon Peter to feed the lambs until, first of all, He had ensured that the right relationship was there. Your work

amongst children, therefore, starts with a right relationship to God and a heartfelt love for Him.

- *Verse 6: "And these words, which I command you today, shall be in your heart."*

  ✓ This is the second command: **Learn, and keep the Scriptures in your heart.**

  The Word of God must be hidden in our hearts - not just kept in our heads! God gave His Word, not only for information (although that is important), but also for transformation.

  When God's Word is in our hearts our lives are transformed and we are best able to teach the children.

  "The river can rise no higher than its source!"

- *Verse 7:* "*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."*

  ✓ This is the third command: **Labour for the souls of the children** – we need to teach the children.

  - What, and how, should we teach the children?

  The children need to be taught the Word of God – and it should be taught in all diligence ("*You shall teach **them** diligently").* The Hebrew word "diligently" means "greatly" or "exceedingly". In other words we should teach the children well and thoroughly.

  - Where should we teach the children?

  We should teach them in all places *("When you **sit** in your house and when you **walk** by the way.)*

  - When should we teach the children?

  We should teach them at **all** times *("When you lie down and when you rise up")*.

  But remember, before we can do this we must have a correct relationship to God – and we must have His Word hidden in our hearts.

➢ **Three important reminders**

God gives three important reminders to those who love the Saviour, learn the scriptures and labour for the souls of children.

- *Verses 6,8 & 9: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house, and on your gates."*
  - ✓ We are to **live** out the Word of God in our daily lives: *"And these words which I command you today shall be in your HEART."*
  - ✓ We are to **look** at the Word of God and think about it: *"they shall be as frontlets between your EYES".*
  - ✓ We are to **let** others know about the Word of God: *"Write them upon the doorposts of your house and on your GATES".*

Only God can give our children spiritual life, but we pray that as we obey these three commands and remember these three conditions, we will see God work in the lives of our children and His two-fold promise will be realised.

c) Deuteronomy 11:18-21
God's Word and those who teach children

God 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**

- *Verse 18a: "Therefore you shall lay up these words in your heart and in your soul."*
  - ✓ **HIDE** His Word in your heart
- *Verse 18b: "Bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes."*
  - ✓ **READ** His Word (you can't hide it if you don't read it!).

- *Verse 19: "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."*
  - ✓ **TEACH** His Word to the children – anywhere (inside and outside) and at any time (early and late).
- *Verse 20: "And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."*
  - ✓ **SHOW** His Word to others. Don't forget the children outside.

➢ **Two results promised by God if you teach His Word**

- *Verse 21: "That your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the Lord swore unto your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth."*
  - ✓ You will prosper, be blessed and multiply
  - ✓ Your children will prosper, be blessed and multiply.

d) Deuteronomy 31:12,13
God's aim for those who teach children

"*Gather the people together, men, and women and children, 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."*

Note that these words were addressed to the priests (Levites) and to all the elders of Israel (*verse 9*). The spiritual leaders of God's people had to fulfill this responsibility. They were given six things to aim at and achieve regarding their people, and this included the children.

➢ **That they should COME**

- *Verse 12a*: ***GATHER*** *the people together, men, and women* ***and little ones****…"*

Notice that the children are mentioned specifically in *verses 12 and 13*. They wanted the children, first of all, to come so they could hear the Word of God. If they were not gathered they would not hear what God wanted to say to them. The gathering was every seven years so that no child would be untaught, but that all would have an equal opportunity to trust personally in God and obey Him *(verses 10,13)*.
Our first aim must be to **GATHER** the children together so that we can teach them God's word, and so this first aim is directed towards their FEET!

- **That they should LISTEN**

- *Verse 12b: "…that they may **HEAR.**"*

Our second aim is directed towards their EARS! It is not enough for the children to come. Nothing will be accomplished unless they hear the truths that are being taught.
The Apostle Paul asked: *"How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" (Romans 10:14).*

- **That they should UNDERSTAND**

- *Verse 12c: "…that they may **LEARN.**"*

The MIND (understanding) comes next.It is not sufficient just to hear. After hearing the truth the children must understand it. Moses, several thousand years ago, was already stating the principles involved in modern teaching methods.

- **That they should TRUST**

- *Verse 12d: "…to **FEAR** the Lord your God."*

The HEART (experience) should now follow.
This expression *"fear the Lord your God"* is applied specifically to children in *verse 13.* Hearing with the ear and learning with the mind are but the necessary stepping stones to a work of grace in the heart. The fear of the Lord means reverential trust in God. Our goal is not just that the children might listen, not just that they might learn, but that they might fear God and put their trust

and hope in Him. Any children's work which stops short of this goal is not Scriptural.

- **That they should OBEY**

- *Verse 12e: "…and carefully **OBSERVE** all the words of this law."*

This involves the WHOLE PERSON, and his obedience.
When the child has listened and understood the truth, and has had a real experience of God in his heart through obedience to the Word of God, he must then show his faith and his new life by continuing obedience to that Word. As an obedient disciple of the Lord he must put into practice the Word of God. In your teaching you should seek to encourage and teach the child to live a life of such discipleship and obedience.

- **That they should WITNESS**

- *Verse 13: "…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 Jordan to possess."*

This, lastly, is the transmission of the message (with the TONGUE) to others.
Someone has said that when we reach children, we reach a multiplication table! As the children grow, and in turn have children of their own, they will then seek to lead their children to hear, to learn, and to fear the Lord.
In these two verses we can see that we need to focus in our ministry on the children's feet, ears, minds, hearts, whole person and tongues - and we cann see there are six things we want the children to do.
We want them:

- ✓ to COME together, with others, to be taught God's Word - in Sunday School or Good News Club
- ✓ 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 Lord and Saviour
- ✓ to OBEY Him –initially and continually

✓ to WITNESS to others.

And, above all, these verses show us that it is possible for children, even young children, to do all of these.

Note also:-

- *Deuteronomy 29:10-13:* The children (little ones) were also to enter into God's covenant. God also loves the children and wants them to enjoy all the blessings He has for His people.
- *Deuteronomy 32:46*: The people of God were to command their children to obey carefully all the words of the law. This verse, towards the end of this key Bible book, reiterates once more how important it was (and is) for God's people to teach His Word to the children and encourage them to obey it.

Question for further thought

For each of the six goals listed from Deuteronomy 31: 12 & 13 give a one-sentence suggestion for achieving it in practice.

(2) Psalm 78:1-8
The Importance of Teaching and Evangelising Children

Introduction

Verses 1-2: "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 stressed that what he has to say is important and unchangeable – and should be listened to.

➢ **Our privilege**

- *Verse 3: "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. Someone was faithful in giving us the Gospel. We heard it and 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.

➢ Our promise

- *Verse 4: "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 been told, he makes a promise not to hide these things from the children, realizing the importance for them to also 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 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 judgement of God. Teaching and evangelism must centre on the Person of the Lord.

- ✓ ***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 to teach the children who the Lord is, and then 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!

➢ **God's precept (or command)**

- *Verse 5: "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 19:7).*
This verse tells us that reaching and teaching the children is not an option. It is something which we are **commanded** to do. The Lord Jesus in *Mark 16:15* 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 because He has told us to.

- ✓ The first responsibility for teaching children is that of believing parents.
  Ephesians 6:4 says: "*Fathers … bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord."*
- ✓ The local church has also 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 4:11*). This is to perfect the saints, and these saints include some boys and girls *(Ephesians 6:1).* (Also see *John 21:15).*
- ✓ **All** believers should be ready, and willing, to teach the Word of God to children. We get an example of this to imitate in *Matthew 18:12,13*.

➢ **God's plan**

- *Verse 6: "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 are reached they will grow and in turn reach their children, who will grow and in turn reach their children, and so on. And that is still God's plan today. In the book of *Joel 1:3* we read: "*Tell your children about it, let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.*" This is always God's plan. If the children are neglected, not only will it mean their loss, but the loss of succeeding generations.

➢ **God's purpose**

- *Verse 7: "That they might 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 three-fold purpose in all that He has set forth in the previous verses. What is the goal of our teaching? What is God's three-fold purpose for our work among the children?

✓ The Psalmist says firstly:"*That they might set their hope in God."*

The teacher's aim is not that the children should only know more about the Bible, and about God (although both are necessary). His goal is that the children SET THEIR HOPE IN GOD. Setting their hope in God and obedience to God are in the realm of experience with God and is a step beyond the "*knowledge*" of *verses 5 and 6.*

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.

This verse also reminds us that the goal of evangelism is that sinners come **to God**. *(John 14:6, John 17:3, 1st Timothy 2:5).*

Jesus Christ came and died that sinners might be reconciled to God (*2nd Corinthians 5:20*). 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 judgement of God the Father on sin, as He died upon the cross (*2nd Corinthians 5:21*) – so that sinners could be saved, have the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to them, and thereby be right with God.

- ✓ Secondly, the Psalmist says *"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 three-fold purpose, then, is for the children …

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

➢ **A possibility**

- Verse 8:*"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."*

There is a striking contrast between *"the generation"* of *verse 8* and *"the generation to come"* of *verses 4* and *6.* The former refers to adults and the latter to children.

This verse, therefore, presents a terrible possibility. The Psalmist speaks of a stubborn and rebellious generation, He calls them *"their fathers"*, and emphasizes that if the children are not reached and taught, and if they do not set their hope in God and keep His commandments, then they will grow up to be a stubborn and rebellious generation like their fathers.

Even if one generation of people in a country is godless, God can still intervene and the next generation can set their hope in God. The key is to teach God's Word to the children *(verse 5).*

All around us today we can see such a 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, where the heart becomes hard and unresponsive. 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 lives and bodies broken by sin. What a tragedy! Many Christians are working at the bottom of the cliff with those broken bodies and lives, seeking to build a "spiritual hospital" where they 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, and 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 from falling over the cliff and reach them before sin has left its mark upon their lives.

Building the wall at the top of the cliff is child evangelism, and 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!

Questions for further thought

There are other references to children in the Psalms including Psalm 8:2; 10:14; 34:11; 51:5; 58:3; 68:5,6; 69:36; 71:17,18; 72:4; 103:17; 115:14; 127; 128; 139:13,14; 148:12.

Read all of these references in the Psalms concerning children. Then choose two and explain what they teach.

(3) Matthew 18:1-14
The Teaching of the Lord Jesus

(Note the parallel passages in *Mark 9:33-37* and *Luke 9:44-48*)

This is the main, and most important passage in the Bible concerning children and so it needs to be studied in great detail.

Introduction

These verses are in two main parts:

- ✓ To disciples concerning themselves (*verses 1-4*). The Lord Jesus uses the child as a visual aid to encourage them to imitate children and be humble. The theme of these four verses is *"greatness in the Kingdom."*
- ✓ To disciples concerning children (*verses 5-14*). The Lord Jesus uses the child to teach them about children. The theme of these verses is *"children in the kingdom."*

In the first part the child is a model; in the second he is a mission field.

Matthew 18:1-4

A question concerning greatness in the kingdom of heaven and the three-fold answer.

➢ **A question**

- Verse 1: *"At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"*

On the way to Capernaum the disciples had been having an argument as to who was the greatest, and the most important (*Mark 9:33,34*).The actual conversation is not recorded. Perhaps Peter, or John, or even Judas, was claiming to be the greatest! Peter may have claimed this position on the basis of our Lord's commendation (*Matthew 16:17*). John, on his description as *"the beloved disciple"* (*John 13:23, John 19:26*), and Judas may even have claimed greatness because he was the treasurer of the group (*John 13:29*).

Now, in this house at Capernaum, they ask the Lord Jesus to answer the question for them: *"Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"*

➢ **The answer (part 1)**

- *Verse 2: "And Jesus called a little child to him, set him in the midst of them."*

A child is called and used as an object lesson.
The Lord Jesus may even have called him by name, for He had often been to this house before. It was Peter's house (see *Mark 1:29-33; 2:1; 9:33;* and *Matthew 17:24, 25)*, and the scene is a remarkable one. The Lord Jesus is seated in the presence of His twelve desciples (Mark 9:35) and he called a little child to come to him (Matthew 18:2). He set him before the desciples (Matthew 18:2) and then took him in his arms. (Mark 9:36)
It is clear that this was a little child because the word used in *verses 2,3,4 & 5* is *"PAIDION"* (which means *"little child"*), However, he was not an infant because he was old enough to come when the Lord Jesus called him (*Matthew 18:2*) and because the Lord Jesus did not take him **up** in His arms.

➢ **The answer (part 2)**

- *Verse 3: "… and said, assuredly, I say unto you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will not by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."*

The child is now used as an illustration to give the qualifications for **entrance** into the kingdom of Heaven.
In this verse the Lord Jesus gives the next part of the answer, but He does not yet mention greatness in the kingdom of Heaven. He speaks about entrance into the kingdom of Heaven!. Perhaps He was thinking especially of Judas Iscariot and, perhaps, He looked at him while He was saying these words! Was Judas indeed one of those arguing about greatness, when he himself was not in the kingdom of Heaven? The Lord Jesus explains how one enters the kingdom of Heaven. It is only through conversion – there is no other way.
It is vital that you, the reader, ask yourself at this point the question – *"Am I converted? - Am I born again?" "Have I repented of my sins and put my trust in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour?"*

Your position and service in the kingdom of Heaven are only possible if they have been preceded by entry into that kingdom through the New Birth (*John 3:5*).

➢ **The answer (part 3)**

- *Verse 4: "Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven."*

The child is now used to give the qualification for greatness in the kingdom of heaven.

This is the third and final stage of the answer. Having called a child to use as an object lesson, and having given the condition for entrance into the kingdom of Heaven, the Lord Jesus explains that the quality which makes one great in the kingdom of Heaven is humility. He uses the child (who is probably shyly standing with eyes lowered) as an illustration. This is our model. We must become humble like children to be great in the kingdom of Heaven.

The question which the disciples had asked is now answered; but the Lord Jesus has a little child in His arms, and He continues to talk to the disciples. He no longer speaks about them and their question, since that has been dealt with. He now speaks (*verses 5-14*) about CHILDREN themselves. Here in these verses can be found many great truths concerning boys and girls.

Matthew 18:5

A promise and an exhortation concerning children

- *"Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me."*

➢ **A promise –** to receive a child is like receiving Christ.

The word "*to receive*" is used here in the sense of "*to welcome*". *Mark 9:37* also says: *"Whoever receives one of these little children in My name, receives Me: and whoever receives Me, receives not Me, but Him who sent Me."*

This is an amazing promise. The Lord Jesus says that if we receive, or welcome, a little child in His name, it is just as if we are receiving or welcoming Him. What a promise! If I receive a child into my home in the name of the Lord Jesus it is just as if I am receiving

Him. This promise is for those who receive children in Christ's name and because of Him, so that they may teach them about Him. What a privilege it is to work among boys and girls!

➢ **An exhortation to receive them!**

If the Lord Jesus so identifies Himself with children, it is to encourage believers, all the more, to turn their attention to the little ones, to receive them and to welcome them.

A number of years ago God used this verse to speak to the heart of a wealthy Christian woman who lived in a large, expensive house in the midst of other such houses. She thought, *"How wonderful it would be to welcome the Lord Jesus into my home. I can do this by inviting all the children around me into my home."*

And that is what she did. She started a Good News Club in her home which was attended every week by the children from that district. Most of them did not attend Sunday School, but they were taught the Word of God regularly and, during the many months and years which followed, a number of the children trusted Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Have you ever considered the possibility of welcoming children into your home? Just think of the promise attached to doing so!

Matthew 18:6-7

A fact and a warning concerning the offending of 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 offences! For offences must come, but woe to that man by whom the offence comes!"*

➢ **A fact – little children can believe in Him**

The question is often asked, *"Is it possible for a little child to be born again"?* Some people say *"yes"*, and some people say *"no"!* The most important thing is to find out what the Lord Jesus says. Here, as He holds a child in His arms, He speaks about *"one of these little ones which believe in me."* The word *"believe in"* is the word used for saving faith throughout the New Testament. It means *"to trust"*. For example, it is used in *Acts 16:31*. When the

jailer asked what he needed to do to be saved Paul said: "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.*" It is also used in *John 3:16:* "*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.*"
The Lord Jesus is making it clear, therefore, that it **is** possible for a little child like this one here to believe in Him, to trust in Him and be born again.
This, surely, is the answer to all who have doubts about the possibility of a child – a little child – believing in, or trusting, the Lord Jesus Christ. These are the words of the Lord Jesus Himself.

➢ **A warning – do not cause them to sin**
These are also verses which warn against the sin of offending others (especially children) and causing them to stumble and sin. *Verse 6* warns us that we must never cause a believing child to sin. If we do, it were better for us that we were drowned in the depth of the sea. What a terrible thing it is to cause a little saved child to stumble! Yet it can be done so easily.

- ✓ A wrong example. Children watch us and imitate us. If the example that we give is a bad one, we are leading them astray and causing them to stumble.
- ✓ Wrong teaching. If we teach them things which are harmful we will cause them to stumble. But 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.
- ✓ A wrong expectation. We must not expect them to live and act as adults. They are still children and immature in many ways.
- ✓ A wrong attitude. If a child receives the Lord Jesus as his Saviour and we think he is too young to understand, the child senses this and is offended.

Verse 7 tells us that offences such as these are bound to come in a sinful world, but that the person who actually does the offending – especially against the little ones and particularly against those

children who are believers – is the one who will be judged because of the harm he has done.

Matthew 18:8-9

A warning concerning offences in our own lives (Personal things causing US to sin).

- *"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."*

These verses are a kind of parenthesis in this passage because they relate to ourselves rather than to children.

After a warning to disciples about wrong things they might do to cause others (and especially children) to sin, the Lord warns them about the danger of sin and personal offences in their own lives. We are to have done with anything that could cause US to stumble (See also *Matthew 5:27-30* and *Mark 9:42-50*).

The Lord Jesus applies the subject of offences, personally, to those who are disciples. Remember He is speaking here in these two verses – not about offending children, or others, as in the previous two verses – but offending ourselves. He speaks about "*your hand*" and "*your eye*" offending "*you*". If any of these would cause you to stumble in your own Christian life, and also affect and harm your ministry to the children, it would be better for you to get rid of them. The *'hand'* stands for action, the *'foot'* for conduct, and the *'eye'* for desire. Get rid of sinful actions, conduct, or desires, at all cost.

But it means more than that. These verses also apply to those who profess to be Christians and are not. The true discipleship of a born-again Christian is entered into only by genuine repentance and faith. If one is hindered from this because his hand, foot or eye are pulling him in the opposite direction – it would be better for him to lose them than to lose his own soul. Again (*verse* 3) this might be a direct admonition to Judas Iscariot

– a professing disciple who was not converted, and had allowed his own personal sin and desires to hinder him from salvation and true discipleship.

How necessary it is for us to "*to examine yourselves, as to whether you are in the faith*", *test yourselves*" (*2nd Corin-thians 13:5);* and to "*make your call and election sure*" *(2nd Peter 1:10).* Remember the solemn words of our Lord Jesus in *Matthew 7:21-23:* "*Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesised in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!*"

Matthew 18:10

A fact and a 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."*

This verse is a little more difficult to understand than the others, but it would seem to include two important truths.

➢ **A fact – believing children have angels**

Hebrews 1:14 teaches that angels are "*ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation.*" This verse makes it clear that only believers have angels. Psalm 34:7, 91:11, Luke 16:22 and Acts 5:19 teach the same truth. The Lord Jesus, therefore, must be referring to believing children when He speaks about "their" angels.

This view is strengthened by referring back to verse 6, where the Lord Jesus speaks of "*one of these little ones who believe in me." Verse 10*, therefore, would seem to continue this same train of thought.

- ✓ "*Do not offend believing children*" (*verse 6*)
- ✓ "*Do not despise believing children*" (*verse 10*).

The Lord Jesus says that the angels of believing children always behold the face of His Father in Heaven. God thinks so much of

these little believing children that their angels have continual access to His throne.

➢ **A warning – do not despise them!**

If the Father esteems believing children so highly as to give them such angels, we are to make sure that we do not despise even ONE of them.

It is a natural tendency with many adults to look down upon a child and feel that he is unimportant and of no value in the Lord's work. The Lord Jesus emphasises that we must **not** despise them. They are capable of much more than we think they are!

Matthew 18:11-13

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."*

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* &*14* teach the same truths). *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 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 detail of the story. We should, instead, endeavour to see the context of the story and then find the truth(s) which the Lord Jesus is especially teaching through it.

➢ **The context**

There is no doubt that the context concerns children, because, previous to this story (*verse 10*), the Lord Jesus has been speaking

about children, and the word "For" links that verse and the children to this story.
Verse 14 which follows the story commences with the words "*even so*" (referring 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 *2nd Corinthians 4:3.* It had "*gone astray*" (*verses 12 & 13*) – the same word as in *1st Peter 2:25.* It could "*perish*" *(verse 14*) – another form of the word for "*lost*" as used in *verse 11*. The same word is used in *2nd Peter 3:9*.
There is no need here for speculation. The Lord Jesus is simply teaching us that children are lost and need Him! They are sinners who need a Saviour. The context of the story especially teaches that the children are OUTSIDE the fold by nature and by birth and need to be brought into it. And so the shepherd leaves the others and goes to look for the little one outside who is LOST. The children are lost, they are outside and it is possible for them to perish. So often we are sentimental about children and don't like to think that they can be lost and separated from God forever. But the words of the Lord Jesus make it clear that this is possible. 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. They cannot find their way back alone, so the initiative and first step in their salvation is taken by the Saviour, not by themselves.

➢ **Summary of story**

✓ There was one sheep which was:
- little (*Matthew 18:10*)
- lost (*Matthew 18:11*)

- lonely (*Matthew 18:12*)

✓ There was a Saviour and Shepherd Who:
- loved (*John 10:11-14*)
- left (*Matthew 18:12*)
- looked (*Matthew 18:12*)
- located (*Matthew 18:13*)
- lifted (*Isaiah 40:11*)
- laid (*Isaiah 40:11*)
- led (*Isaiah 40:11; Psalm 23:1; John 10:3*)

➢ **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 & 13*); it is possible for them to perish and be separated from God forever (*verse 14*). They are OUTSIDE the Kingdom.

These are solemn words from the lips of the Lord Jesus. May God burden our hearts concerning the great spiritual need of boys and girls. This burden for the souls of children must be the basis of our ministry to them. If we do not see their need there will be no real desire to evangelise them.

This story also outlines an example which we are to follow. The Lord Jesus is the Good Shepherd (*Psalm 23:1; John 10-11*), the Great Shepherd (*Hebrews 13:20*) and the Chief Shepherd (*1st Peter 5:4*). But we, as His *"under-shepherds"* ,(*1st Peter 5:2-3, John 21:15-17*) are to imitate Him. As He was willing *"to leave"*, so must we be. As He was willing to go *"into the mountains"* (the difficult places), so must we. As He *"found"* those who were *"lost"* and *"rejoiced"* so shall we. He is our example to follow. What a challenge!

Matthew 18:14

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."*

➢ **A revelation**

- ✓ *"Even so"* refers us back to the story of *verses 12* & *13* and shows us that the Lord Jesus is still speaking about children who are lost and astray.
- ✓ *"It is not the will"* speaks to us of God's burning concern and desire.
  The word *"will"* used here means *"wish"* or *"desire"*. In *1st Timothy 2:4* another form of the same word is used – *"God our Saviour … who **desires** all men to be saved and to come to 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 (see also *2nd Peter 3:9*).
  Similarly, therefore, it is God's desire that not one child should perish or be lost. But because He desires, it does not mean that it may not 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.
  It is therefore possible for little children to perish now or later. But God has revealed that this is not His desire.
- ✓ *"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 to do that which is best.
- ✓ *"which is in Heaven"*
  These words emphasise God's Holiness. His Love is holy love and all that He does is just, righteous and correct. And it emphasises also 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, 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.

Special Project
Learn by heart *Matthew 18:1-14!*

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 18:1-14* 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 emphasise their need for humility.
But from *verse 5* onwards the teaching obviously concerns **children** and not those who are young in the faith.

- ✓ 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 & 5* He refers to a *"little child"* or *"little children"*. Then in *verses 6,10 & 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 intended.

- ✓ The words used are *"PAIDION"* or *"little child"* in *verses 2, 3, 4 & 5*, and *"MIKROS"* (*"little or small ones"*) in *verses 6,10 & 14*. While these words are used on a few occasions when addressing adults (e.g. *1st John 2:18*), the context here, and their general usage elsewhere, indicate clearly that the words are used here in their literal meaning, as referring to "*little children*".
- ✓ 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 who are children in the faith. But this application is a secondary one (although I doubt if *verses 11-14* could be applied in this way, because they refer to these little ones as lost). The primary application must be to children such as those who were in the arms of the Lord Jesus.

Two brief outlines of Matthew 18:1-14

Verses	The facts concerning children	The commands concerning children
verse 4	Children are humble	Imitate Them
verse 5	Christ identifies Himself with children	Receive them
verse 6	Children can be born again	Offend them not
verse 10	Children are precious	Despise them not
verse 11-14	Children are lost	Leave, go seek and find them

A Warning	A Blessing
verse 3 For all who do not trust like children	*verse 4* For all who are humble like children
verse 6 For all who offend children	*verse 5* For all who receive children
verse 10 For all who despise children	*verses 11-14* For all who love and win children

(4) Mark 10:13-16
The Lord Jesus and the Children

(See also *Matthew 19:13-15* and *Luke 18:15-17)*

Introduction

This is probably the best-known passage in the Bible concerning children. However, it is essential not to read into this passage things which are not there, nor to use it to teach things which it does not teach. This story is not an example of child evangelism as such. We do not know if these children became followers of the Lord Jesus. Nor is there any justification whatsoever for using this passage to teach the regeneration of children in baptism – or that it is possible in any way for us to impart blessing to children by "*laying hands*" on them. Only the Lord Jesus can do that.

This is simply the 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. Despite the rebuke of the disciples, the Lord Jesus took the children in His arms and blessed them.

However we can deduce from this account several principles and instructions which will help us in our ministry to the children.

The best approach to the passage is firstly to ask ourselves three questions about the story and then find the answers to those questions. From these answers we will then be able to find the three instructions concerning children which the Lord Jesus wants us to obey.

- **Three questions we need to ask**
  - ✓ Who are the people involved in the story?
  - ✓ What concrete facts do we know about them?
  - ✓ Are there any principles and applications which might be deduced from these facts?

These questions are answered in the following diagram.

Verses	The People	The facts	The principles
verse 13	The faithful friends	They brought children to the Lord Jesus	We should seek to bring the children to Him for His blessing
verse 13	The consenting children	They were willing to come	Children are easily influenced for good (or evil)
verses 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. They may even try to stop them.
verses 14-16	The loving Lord Jesus	He was displeased with the disciples and received the children	The Lord Jesus still wants to receive, save and bless the children.

There are four people, or groups of people, involved in the story

- ✓ **The "*friends*" and their desire to bring the children to Christ**

We are not told who these people were. Perhaps they were parents or grandparents of the children. Perhaps they were simply neighbours or friends. The one thing that we do know is that they wanted to bring the children to the Lord Jesus so that He might touch them.

May this also be our desire. We want the Lord Jesus to save and bless our children.

✓ **The children and their willingness to come**

It is interesting to notice that the children came to the Lord Jesus. Matthew 19:13,14; Mark 10:13,14 and Luke 18:16 say that theywere little children ("*PAIDION*"). Luke 18:15 says that they were infants ("*BREPHOS*" – a word also used in Acts 7:10 and 2nd Timothy 3:15 for a newly-born child). So it was a mixed group of little children and infants. The children did not draw back nor want to go away. They came willingly with those who brought them.

Many children are still like this today. They are easily influenced – for good or evil. They are willing to come. How necessary it is for us to show them how to come to the Lord Jesus for salvation. If you compare the story that follows (*verses 17-22*) you can see a great contrast. Here was a young man who had the opportunity to come to the Lord Jesus but refused it. What a difference between the children and this rich young ruler!

✓ **The disciples and their rejection of the children**

How unfortunate it was that the disciples tried to turn the children away! We do not know why they did this. Perhaps they felt the Lord Jesus was too busy, or perhaps they thought the children were not important enough to be blessed by the Lord Jesus, or that they did not need Him as much as adults. We do not know the reason, **but** we do know that they rejected the children.

How sad it is that such a thing still happens today! There are still believers and church leaders who do not see the need for children to come to the Lord Jesus, and would even, in one way or another, turn them away.

Notice that the Lord Jesus was much displeased. I understand that the Greek word used here indicates very strong emotions. Why was the Lord Jesus so displeased? This was because He had already told the disciples in *Matthew 18:5, "Whoever receives one little child like this in my name receives me."* What the disciples were doing now was not the result of a misunderstanding but real disobedience! We must be careful that we receive the children and that we don't disobey the exhortation in *Matthew 18 v5.*

✓ **The Lord Jesus and His willingness to receive the children**

The Lord Jesus loved the children. He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them and blessed them. He still loves the children and wants them to come to Him. May we seek to bring the children to the Lord Jesus at all times.

➢ **Three instructions we need to obey**

✓ Let them come

• Verse 14: "*Let the little children come to Me and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.*"

Children (and those who become like children) can enter the kingdom of God. Let the children come to Christ. We should be "*stepping-stones*" to bring them to the Saviour – not "*stumbling blocks*"!

✓ Don't stop them

• *Verse 14:* "*And do not forbid them.*"

We should not be obstacles hindering children from entering the kingdom.

✓ Imitate them

• *Verse 15:* "*Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter in.*"

We should be sure that we ourselves have received the kingdom of God like little children. If a person is not willing to be converted and become like a child, he cannot receive the kingdom of God (see also *Matthew 18:3*).

A question has been asked

"When the Lord Jesus says, *'of such is the Kingdom of God'* (*Mark 10:14*), does this mean that all children are in the kingdom of God?"

Answer

No! This cannot be so – for the following 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. On the contrary, the Bible teaches that children are lost and need a Saviour (e.g. *Matthew 18:11-14*); and the only way into the Kingdom of God is by the new birth – by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (*John 1:12,13; John 3:3,7,16*).
Remember that 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 belongs the Kingdom of God*", but "*to such as these belongs the Kingdom of God.*" The French Bible puts 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 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.*"

- Because if the Lord Jesus had meant 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?
Answer

- 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.

➢These verses show us that if everyone must receive the Kingdom of God in the same way as a child (*verse 15*), then surely the child needs to receive it also.
➢These verses and many others in the Bible mean that 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 other parts of Scripture. There is no other way.
➢These verses also mean that little children can enter the Kingdom of God. If "such as children" are welcome, then surely children themselves are! They can also receive the Kingdom of God "*like little children*" – more readily, of course, than adults, because they are little children. It is also for them and we must never turn them away. The Lord Jesus loves children and wants them to come to Him.

A word of warning
The theory that all children are born into the Kingdom of God - or that the children of believers 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 on these words in *Mark 10:14*, and to a lesser extent on *1st Corinthians 7:14* (see pages 98-101 in Section IV). But surely it can be seen that these two verses do not teach either of these theories, and indeed Scripture is strongly opposed to such teaching.
I feel that I must sound a serious word of warning about these theories. If it is believed that all children, or the children of believers, are already in the Kingdom of God, and that it is not possible for these children to be lost, then the whole cause of child evangelism will suffer severely. Why evangelise 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 them how to become better members of that Kingdom – when, in reality, they may not be in it at all. The Lord Jesus teaches clearly that no-one

can see or enter God's Kingdom without spiritual rebirth *(John 1:12,13; John 3:3-7).*
I trust you will see the irreparable harm which can be done to the cause of child evangelism by these theories; 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.

(5) The Book of Proverbs
Wise Instruction

In the first seven chapters of the Book of Proverbs, Solomon, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives instruction and exhortation to his children. However, throughout the book the responsibilities of parents and children are emphasized:

- **Instructions to children**
  - ✓ Fear and know God *(1:7;2:5;24:21)*
  - ✓ Give your heart to God (*23:26)*
  - ✓ Listen to, and obey, your parents *(1:8-9;4:1;4:20-22; 5:1;5:7;6:20;7:24;13:1;15:5;19:27;23:22).*
  - ✓ Seek knowledge and understanding (*2:2-9;4:5-13;7:1-5).*
  - ✓ Love God's Word *(3:1-4;3:21-26;28:7a).*
  - ✓ Keep away from sin *(1:10-19;23:19-21).*
  - ✓ Do not despise God's chastening *(3:11-12).*

- **A promise to children**
  - ✓ Children who seek God will find Him *(8:17)*

- **Instructions to parents**
  - ✓ Train your child *(22:6)*
  - ✓ Discipline your child *(13:24;19:18;22:15;23:13,14;29:15,17)*
  - ✓ Be wise with your child *(17:2).*

- **A promise to parents**
  - ✓ Instruct a child with this purpose, that he/she will begin to follow God's way and when he/she is old they will not turn from it *(22:6).*

- **The importance and value of children**
  - ✓ Children can be godly (or ungodly) (20:11)
  - ✓ Godly children bring joy to parents *(10:1a; 17:6;23:15, 16,24,25*
  - ✓ Ungodly children bring grief to parents *(10:1b; 28:7b)*
  - ✓ Godly parents are a blessing to their children *(20:7;31; 28).*

Questions for further thought

Solomon also wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes. Read verses, 11:9 and 12:1 of that book. Then answer these three questions:

- ✓ *What word is used here to describe God to those who are young?*
- ✓ *In the light of that description, what are young people to shun and whom are they to follow?*
- ✓ *Why should they do this when they are young?*

SECTION III

Pictures of Children in the Bible

It is fascinating, and very helpful, to look at the children who are portrayed in the Word of God, and find out what lessons we can learn from them. We do not have the space in this book to do this in detail, but this is something you can do on your own.
I will give you a list of such children and young people with Bible references and in each case suggest one lesson we can learn from them. I should point out that it is often not possible to determine the age of those on our list. Some of them are definitely children, some are definitely teenagers or young people, and the others are either one or the other. But each one is a picture of someone who is young. We can surely presume that those who are teenagers had good foundations from their childhood. Also we should remember that in the earlier books of the Bible people lived longer than today and it is possible that the teenager of that time might be rather similar to the child of today.

- Ishmael – the boy who prayed (*Genesis 16*)
  Children can pray.
- Isaac – the boy who obeyed (*Genesis 22*)
  Children can be obedient to God's will.
- Joseph – the godly teenager (*Genesis 37* onwards)
  Children can live godly lives.
- Moses – the child whose future was determined in his early years. (*Exodus 2*)
  Children can be so influenced and taught when they are tiny that they will later trust and serve God.
- Miriam – the child who played a part in God's plan (*Exodus 2*)
  God can use children to accomplish His purposes.

- Samuel – the child who came to know God (*1st Samuel 3*)
  Children can respond to the Word of God and come to know Him.
- David – the teenager who trusted God (*1st Samuel 17*)
  Children can trust God when faced with problems.
- Daniel – the teenager who took his stand for God (*Daniel 1*)
  Children can stand for God and do what is right.
- Naaman's maid – the child who witnessed for God (*2nd Kings 5*)
  Children can witness for God and be used by Him.
- Josiah – the child who did what was right. (*2nd Chronicles 34 :2*)
  Children can live for God and do what is right in His sight
- Joash – the child who turned back (*2nd Chronicles 24:2-12* and *24:17-25*).
  Believing children can backslide.
- John the Baptist - the child with a very special experience (*Luke 1:15*)
  God can work sovereignly in the lives of children.
- The boy who gave all he had to the Lord Jesus (*John 6*)
  The Lord Jesus can use what the child gives to bless and help many.
- The children who praised the Lord Jesus (*Matthew 2*)
  The Lord Jesus wants to hear children praising Him.
- The girl who believed that God answers prayer (*Acts 12*)
  Children are often more believing, more trusting and less sceptical than adults.
- Timothy – the boy who understood the Word of God. (*2nd Timothy 3:15*)
  Children can hear and understand God's Word from an early age.
- Children who were judged by God (*2nd Kings 2:23-25*)
  Children can be judged by God - if they are guilty of unbelief and rebellion.

Section IV

Biblical Answers to Eleven Questions Concerning Children

Introduction

Those who work with children have many questions which need to be answered. I have selected eleven of these questions and sought to answer each one in four different ways using as our guide what we have learned from the Bible.

- 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, or answer, 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 be learnt from observation 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 (not the reverse). Correct experience will always be based upon, and agree with, the correct exegesis of Bible truth.
- Lastly, it will be seen if well-known CHRISTIAN LEADERS of the past and present have any comments to make on the subject.

I trust you will find your answers to these questions following this four-step method.

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 systematically and thoroughly to be of little importance. Current trends would indicate that in some Sunday schools and other forms of children's work there is a movement away from the actual teaching of the Word of God. This has been subsituted by simply telling stories and using different kinds of hand work. Evidence of this can be found in some Sunday School literature being produced today.
It is important therefore to understand the Biblical answer to this question.

1) Specific Bible verses which refer to the importance of teaching children the Word of God.
There are many such verses.

The Old Testament

- *Proverbs 22:6: "TRAIN UP a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."*
- *Deuteronomy 6:7: "You shall TEACH THEM(God's words) 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."*
- *Psalm 78:4-6: "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."*

Also:

- *Deuteronomy 4:9,10*
- *Deuteronomy 31:12,13*
- *Deuteronomy 11:18,19*
- *Joel 1:3.*

The New Testament

- 2nd Timothy 3:15: "*… from childhood*" (this word means "*infant*") "*you HAVE KNOWN the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*."
- Ephesians 6:4: "*And you fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the TRAINING AND ADMONITION of the Lord*."
- Matthew 11:25: "*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*."

2) Other Scriptures which include children, but which do not specifically mention them

- *Mark 16:15: "Go into all the world and PREACH the Gospel to* ***every*** *creature."*
- *Acts 26:22: "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."*
  (The word "*small*" or "*MIKROS*" at least includes children).
- *1st Timothy 2:4: "Who will have* ***ALL*** *MEN to be saved, and come to THE KNOWLEDGE of the truth."*

Both in the Old and New Testaments, children were neither neglected in, nor excluded from, the preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

3) Experience with children

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. Experience shows 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 trying to win the children and influence them for evil. These do not wait until the children are grown. 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 value that is lived to the glory of God.

A little boy was asked one day what he would like to be when he grew up. He answered, "*A gangster or a Christian – it all depends on who gets me first!*" 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.

4) Comments from Christian leaders

✓ Martin Luther, the initiator of the Protestant Reformation, 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 early 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."

✓ John Knox, the leader of the Reformation of Scotland, 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.*"

✓ Matthew Henry, the famous Bible commentator, 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.*"

✓ Chrysostom, the great fourth century preacher and theologian, 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, the great 18th Century preacher, whom God used mightily in Great Britain and elsewhere, 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 anytime you see any of them at home. Pray in earnest for them."

✓ C. H. Spurgeon, the well-known Baptist preacher and pastor in 19th century England, 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."

✓ Hudson Pope of England, who had over 50 years of experience in children's work with Scripture Union, 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 notice also these comments

✓ 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." As a result the Communists in Eastern Europe always focused their attention and propaganda on the 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."
The Roman Catholic church has always made children their number one priority. After the Reformation their plan was to "reach out after the children." The Jesuits based their counter reformation on the strategy of reaching children.

Conclusions

➢ **It is important to teach the Word of God to children.**
ALL our ministry to them must be based solidly and completely upon the exposition of God's Word.
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, memorising Bible verses, reviewing 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 God's Word if it is thoroughly prepared and effectively presented. Let us not give them any less than this. Remember God has promised to bless **His Word**.

- *Isaiah 55:11: "So shall My Word be that goes forth out of My mouth; it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."*

- **It is especially important – indeed vital – to preach and teach the Gospel to the children.**

Firstly this is the best time to evangelize them**.** And secondly the Lord Jesus commands us to evangelize them

- *Mark 15:16 "and He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."*

In relation to this command there are two important facts to remember:-

- ✓ Over one-third of the world's population consists of children;
- ✓ Childhood is a stage EVERYONE must pass through. That means that the other two-thirds who are not children, were children at one time, and could have been reached with the Gospel.

Questions for further thought

Give other Bible references (apart from Isaiah 55:11) to show that God blesses the teaching and preaching of His Word.

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 worker among children should know the answer. It should be emphasised 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.

1) 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 hearts of the children.

- *Deuteronomy 31:12,13*
  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, as can be seen in *Psalm 34:7,9,11; Psalm 103:11,13,17.*
- *Psalm 78:7*
  This verse refers specifically to children (*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.
- The story of Samuel, the young child, in *1st Samuel 3:7-19.*
  These verses tell us three facts concerning Samuel.
  - ✓ He had not previously known the Lord (*verse 7*)
  - ✓ He heard and RESPONDED to the voice of the Lord (*verse 10*)
  - ✓ He GREW spiritually afterwards (*verse 19*).

It is therefore possible for a little child to respond to, and obey, the Word of God.

The New Testament

- *Matthew 18:6*
  The word translated "BELIEVE IN" in this verse is the word used throughout the New Testament to describe saving faith – it means to trust. For example, in Acts 16:31 Paul uses the same word, "*Believe on*" (or trust) "*the Lord Jesus Christ*" in answer to the jailer's question "*What must I do to be saved?*" It is also used in *John 3:16*, and in many other verses. So this verse states clearly that it is possible for a little one to believe in or trust the Lord Jesus for salvation.

- *Ephesians 1:1* and *6:1,* plus *Colossians 1:2* and *3:20*
  These letters were addressed to "*saints*". Later in the epistles Paul addressed directly various groups of Christians in the church – believing wives, husbands, fathers, servants, and **children**. Therefore he must have believed in the possibility of children being SAINTS (born-again believers).
- *Titus 1:6*
  One of the qualifications for elders was that they should have "*FAITHFUL*" (BELIEVING) CHILDREN *not accused of riot or unruly.*" This shows that it is **possible** for children to be believers, otherwise this would be for some an impossible and unattainable condition.

2) Other Scriptures which include children, but which do not specifically mention them

Apart from the above verses which refer specifically to children, there are many other verses in the New Testament which promise salvation to "*whosoever believeth*" (*John 3:16*), to "*all who believe*" (*Acts 13:39*), and to "*as many as received him*" (*John 1:12*). Such verses teach the possibility of children being regenerated because they are 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 16:30,31*). To add another qualification, such as reaching a certain age, is unscriptural!

Also see *Romans 10:9; John 3:36; Romans 10.13.*

3) Experience with children teaches us that they can be born again

As we present the Gospel to children we can see that some really do turn from their sin and trust Christ, and through the following years we can see the results of a regenerated life. Also, many who trusted the Lord Jesus when they were children know, from their own experience, that a child can be saved. In addition there are also some Christians who believe they were saved in their

adult years – but they can remember "*making a decision for Christ*" when they were children. I am one of them! It is possible they were saved at that time, then backslid and were restored at the time they thought was their regeneration.

Church history also reveals that many were saved as children, including a number of well-known Christians:

- ✓ Matthew Henry, the great writer of Bible commentaries, was saved at the age of eleven.
- ✓ Dr Isaac Watts, the hymn writer, was saved at the age of nine.
- ✓ Jonathan Edwards, the well-known American preacher of the 18th century, was saved at the age of seven.
- ✓ Richard Baxter, the Puritan preacher, was saved at the age of six.
- ✓ Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna in the Second century, was saved at the age of nine.
- ✓ Lord Shaftesbury, the famous English reformer, was saved at the age of eight.
- ✓ Leighton Ford, the well known American evangelist, was saved at the age of six.
- ✓ Corrie Ten Boom renowned Dutch missionary and writer was saved at the age of five.

And many more names could be added to this list.

4) 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 work.

- ✓ D.L. Moody, the well-known American evangelist of the 19th century, 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.*"

✓ 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 should judge them to have been more numerously genuine than any other class, more constant, and in the long run, more solid."

He also wrote:

"Children need to learn the doctrine of the cross that they may find immediate salvation. I thank God that in our Sabbath school we believe in the salvation of children as children. How very many has it been my joy to see of boys and girls who have come forward to confess their faith in Christ! And I again wish to say that the best converts, the clearest converts, the most intelligent converts we have ever had, have been the young ones; and, instead of there being any deficiency in their knowledge of the Word of God, and the doctrines of grace, we have usually found them to have a very delightful acquaintance with the great cardinal truths of 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."

✓ Stephen Olford, a well-known speaker at conventions and on the radio, wrote:

"I believe in child evangelism for three reasons:

- *Because I was born again when I was only seven;*
- *Because the history of general evangelism shows that by far the greatest proportion of conversions take place before twenty years of age;*
- *Because the Bible makes it plain that youth is the time to turn to God (Ecclesiastes 12:1)."*

- ✓ Dr Armin Mauerhofer, one of the leaders in the Free Evangelical Church in Switzerland 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.*"
- ✓ R. Murray McCheyne, who was greatly used by God in Scotland in the early 19th century, writes:
  "*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 unto those who were younger and had less wisdom. If you are not saved in youth it is not likely that you will be. Youth is converting time.*"
- ✓ Henry Bosch, one of the teachers with Radio Bible Class in USA, writes:
  "*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 14:6*).

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. In many of our European churches and Sunday schools it is believed that we should teach the Word of God to children but not evangelize them until they are well into their teens. This is the result of a lack of faith in the possibility of a child trusting Christ and being regenerated. However the Bible tells us that they can be regenerated and we should therefore evangelize them.

I trust you do not have either of the two following problems about this great and wonderful truth which some people have.

➢ Some people feel that a person must be 12 or 13 years old before he can be converted. This is never taught or indicated in the Bible. There is nothing said about age at all!

The teaching of Scripture is 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.

➢ Some people say that a child cannot possibly understand the Gospel and salvation.

But there are four Biblical 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. At the same time we must not under-estimate the capacity of a child to see and understand truths which those who are more intellectual find it difficult to see and understand.
- ✓ *Ephesians 2:8* makes it clear that no-one is saved just by understanding or intellectual capacity – but rather by grace through faith.
- ✓ Truth comes by revelation (*Matthew 11:25*). It is not a question of our human capacities: revelation and illumination are the work of the Holy Spirit (*John 16:13*) and we must not underestimate what He can do!
- ✓ We need to realize also that all believers have not been saved in exactly the same way. Some have been saved with a maximum of preparation, understanding and conviction. But others including younger children like Samuel (*1st Samuel 3 v10*) have been saved by faith, but with a minimum of preparation, understanding and conviction. In the latter case much understanding and conviction come later. We must not be too dogmatic!

What is your goal? Is it just to teach the Word of God to children and 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?

All the answers given above teach clearly that it IS possible for a child, especially a little child, to be regenerated. Therefore you should make this your aim and your prayer at all times.

Questions for further thought
1) How would you answer a person who said "How can a child, and especially a little child, possibly understand enough to be saved?"
2) What do you feel is the minimum that is necessary for anyone to understand before he can be saved?

Question 3. At what age can a child be regenerated?

This is a question which is closely related to the previous one, and we need to find the Biblical answer to it.

1) Specific Bible verses with reference to the age of conversion
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 any other age, it is impossible for anyone to be regenerated. It is also unscriptural to believe that the regeneration of a child is unusual, exceptional and completely unexpected.

2) Other Scriptures which shed light on the possible age of conversion

- We know that LITTLE children can really believe and be born again (*Matthew 18:6*). In *Matthew 18:1-14*, the Lord Jesus emphasises that the child about whom He was speaking was young. This can be seen firstly from the fact that He took the child in His arms (*Mark 9:36*) – but not up in His arms like an infant.
  And secondly he uses two words with regard to children:
  - *"PAIDION"* which means little child – *verses 2,3,4,5*

- "*MIKROS*" which means little one – *verses 6,10,14*

So, while no age is given for the believing children mentioned in verse 6, the Lord Jesus calls them "*little children*" or "*little ones*".

- We must preach the Gospel to everyone (*Mark 16:15*). 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. I repeat again that 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 (*John 1:12*).

3) Experience with children teaches us that every child is different.

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 five and six years can have a clear understanding of spiritual things, a real conviction of sin, and be able to trust Christ. Some children of seven, eight, nine and even older do not have this understanding and conviction, and are not yet able to trust Christ.

It should also be remembered that there are many who cannot identify the exact age and time when they were regenerated. This applies especially to children growing up in a Christian home. The important truth is that they know they are regenerated, even if they don't know the exact age and time.

And we need to remember also that there are some children (and some adults!) who trusted Christ with a relative minimum of understanding and conviction. God is sovereign in the salvation of a child(or anyone).

4) Comments from Christian leaders

✓ Because he was saved so young, the great English Bible expositor and author of Bible commentaries, Dr G. Campbell Morgan, could say:

"I do not remember a time when I did not know the Saviour."

✓ Mr Lionel Hunt, a Canadian evangelist who has worked many years with children, writes:

"*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 three, four or five, and a very large number between six and ten. 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 Shaftesbury were converted between seven and ten. 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, the famous Scottish missionary and explorer, 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.*"

Conclusion

We need to remember three fundamental facts

- ✓ The Bible does not give a specific age at which regeneration is possible.
- ✓ The Lord Jesus makes it clear that LITTLE children can be saved (*Matthew 18 v6*).

- ✓ The Bible commands us to evangelize everybody (*Mark 16:15*).

Question 4. Is a Child a Sinner? When Does He Become One?

Introduction
Christians often view children, and especially little 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, in the same position as Adam and Eve were before they sinned. These people believe that these little ones remain in this state of sinlessness (like Adam and Eve) until they choose to sin – and then they become sinners.
But what does the Bible teach on this subject?

1) Specific verses concerning children and sin

- *"Behold I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother **conceived me**."* (*Psalm 51:5).*
  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 58:3).*
  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" (2nd Chronicles 36:9).*
  He was eight years old and he did evil in God's sight. So it IS possible for an eight year old to be sinful and rebellious.
- *"Even a child is known by his deeds, whether what he does is pure and right" (Proverbs 20:11). "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him" (Proverbs 22:15).*

The heart of a child is foolish, or sinful, and shows itself in what he does.

- *"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 gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly". (Ezra 10:1).*

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. They show that children are born with a sinful nature which manifests itself in sinful actions.

In addition, there are a number of verses which speak of man's sinfulness from youth *(Genesis 8:21; Jeremiah 3:25; 22:21; 32:30).*

2) Other scriptures which include children

There are many other scriptures which teach and emphasise the universality of sin – that everyone, without exception, is a sinner, 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. It teaches that EVERYONE is a sinner.

- *"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 53:6).*
- *"For ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". (Romans 3:23).*
- *"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 5:12).*
- *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).*

➢ The Bible also explains why everyone who is born into this world is born a sinner, with a sinful nature.

- *"For by one man's disobedience many were made sinners". (Romans 5:19).*

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.
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 which shows itself in sinful actions.

➢ 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 physically.
  - *"The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).*
  - *"In Adam ALL die" (1st Corinthians 15:22).*
  - *"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 5:12).*
  - *"By the one man's offence many died…" (Romans 5:15).*
- ✓ But we must remember that our sin has a second, more important result. Because of sin we are also, by nature, SPIRITUALLY DEAD – and that includes children of every age.
  - *"…who were DEAD in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1)*
  - *"Even when we were DEAD in trespasses"* (Ephesians 2:5).

➢ The Bible teaches us that nothing that defiles will enter Heaven (Revelation 21:27a) and therefore, that this sinful nature (and the sinful actions it produces) separate all of us (including little children) from a holy God

- *"But your iniquities have separated you from your God" (Isaiah 59:2a)*

This makes it necessary for each of us (including children) to trust Jesus Christ and be born again if we are to be saved and enter Heaven

- *"Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* (*John 3:3*).

All children have a sinful nature which they receive at conception – and this sinful nature will manifest itself in sinful actions as the child grows. The Bible teaches that God is holy and must judge and punish sin

- *"He (God) has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness* (*Acts 17:31a*).

As a result the child needs to be saved/born again if he is to enter Heaven. (We will study the position of infants and very little children later in the book).

3) 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. 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?
- ✓ Disobedience. Children can deliberately disobey the Word of God. This cannot be excused as *"a little mistake"*.
- ✓ Rejection. We know of many children who have consciously rejected Christ on hearing the Gospel.

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.

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!

4) Comments from Christian leaders

- ✓ Mr Hudson Pope wrote: *"Children might not look like sinners and lost, but God looketh upon the heart. Not much has been worked out yet, but the heart is full of things* (*Mark 7:21*) *only awaiting opportunity to proceed. If the human heart is what the Lord says it is here, and if Romans 3:23 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."*
- ✓ A 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 acknowledges that children can know sin and guilt. But 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?"

- ✓ The founder of CEF, Mr Overholzer, had a tremendous burden for children. Every time he spoke about children tears rolled down his cheeks. At his last CEF conference, before he went to be with the Lord, he stood before an audience of 800 people and began to weep. Then the people in the audience also began to weep. This continued for 15 minutes, then Mr Overholzer sat down. On that occasion 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 are sinners and need salvation!

Conclusion

The present question is, *"Is a child a sinner?"*, and this deals with his position and condition before God.

Are children lost? *Does God judge children*? *"Does an infant who dies go to Heaven*? These are other questions which we will deal with later.

However we have seen that the Bible teaches us that all children are sinners by nature and spiritually dead and separated from God and as a result they therefore need a Saviour. As we understand this Biblical truth, we need to do all we can to teach them the Gospel and show them how, firstly, they can have their sins forgiven and, secondly how they can have the power to deal with sin in their lives.

Question 5. Is There An Age of Accountability?

Introduction

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*".

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 has the thought of what is said. In the context of the passages where it is translated "*account*", it refers to a future "*reckoning*" or "*judgement*" before God, when man 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 14:12).*
- "*They will give account of it in the day of judgement*" *(Matthew 12:36).*
- "*They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead*" *(1st Peter 4:5).*

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 cannot be seen as accountable yet to Him.

There will come a time in a little child's life, known only to God, when he will understand, when he will deliberately sin, reject and disobey God. He will then be responsible to God for his actions and 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 and responsible to God for his actions.

Answer
The actual phrase "*age of accountability*" is not used in the Bible but there are several verses, and passages, and Biblical truths which clearly indicate that there is such an age.

1) Specific verses concerning the accountability of a child

- "*Moreover your little ones and your children, 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 1:39).*

  This verse establishes the principle that it is possible for little ones to have no knowledge of good and evil – they were, in other words, not accountable and would avoid the judgment received by the older ones who were disobedient to God, and were held accountable for their disobedience.
- *"For before the child SHALL KNOW to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings." (Isaiah 7:16).*

  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 – a time 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 4:11).*

  This verse shows God's grace and special love to those who were too young to know the difference between right and wrong and were not accountable.

These verses clearly indicate an age of accountability.

2) 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 3:19).*

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 and our sin separates us from God. But we are condemned for our disobedience to God and for 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 are all born that condemns us and results in God's judgment, then infants are condemned and under God's wrath. However verses such as these indicate that until a child is old enough to understand what sin is – *to love darkness rather than light* - and old enough to say "*No*" to God, he is not condemned. I believe that this child is somehow covered by the Death and Atonement of Jesus Christ. But when he comes to an age of accountability and says "*No*" to God, he is under the wrath of God and condemned.

- *"And I saw the dead small and great stand before God and the books were opened. And another book was opened which is the book of life. And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the book, ACCORDING TO THEIR WORKS"* (Revelation 20 v12).

  Their judgement will be based upon their accountability - upon what they have done, or have 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"*
- *"Therefore, to him who KNOWS to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.* (James 4:17).

  In this verse we can see this same conclusion. Accountability is based on knowledge and the ability to obey or disobey.
- "*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).

"*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).

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).

These verses and many like them clearly indicate an age of accountability.

3) 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 work with children we often find that those from Christian homes, or who have been taught the Word of God from an early age, seem to come earlier to a consciousness of sin. It is possible to meet LITTLE children who are conscious of their disobedience to God and their sin before Him 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 at 13 or 14 years. Surely it is lower than that. When the child is old enough to know he is a sinner, and he is deliberately disobeying and rejecting God, he is accountable.

4) Comments from Christian leaders

- ✓ Mr John Niver, a pastor in Canada, writes: "*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, a Baptist pastor and leader writes:*"I am convinced that unaccountable children are saved by the love of Christ."*

✓ Lewis Chafer, the well known Presbyterian theologian writes: *"It may be definitely asserted that infants who die before accountability are saved."*

- see also comments on pages 78 & 79

Conclusion

➢ There are three main facts to remember about infants and little children:

- ✓ They are born spiritually dead, separated from God, 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 to God and not yet under His wrath.
- ✓ As they continue to grow and understand and become aware of their guilt and sinfulness before God, and reject God's voice in whatever form(s) it comes (through the Bible, creation or conscience), they are now accountable to God and if they die like that, and have not trusted Christ, 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 evangelize 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 16:15: "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 everybody. 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, in this case, 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. Our business is to evangelize and leave the results in the Hands of the Holy Spirit. He will do what is best and right.

Question 6. When a Baby or a Very Young Child Dies Does He or She go to Heaven?

I want to ask and answer this specific question because it is one which is especially asked by parents whose infant child has died.

Introduction

Our answer to the previous question goes a long way to answering this one and you should read that answer again before going any further.

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.

1) Specific verses concerning infants and 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 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'" (2nd Samuel 12:22,23).

This is a story of a baby who died when very young, recently born to King 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. He knew the 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. 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.

- We have seen in our previous answer that there are verses which indicate that there is an age of accountability *(Deuteronomy 1:39; Isaiah 7:16* and *Jonah 4:11*). These verses also indicate that those who have not reached that age will 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 and offered them up to them by causing them to pass through the fire?" (Ezekiel 16:20,21).*

  These verses refer to the awful practice of sacrificing infants and little children to pagan gods – and God calls these little ones "*My children*".

2) 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 3:16,18 & 19, James 4:17).

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" (1st John 4:8,16).
  "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 145:8,9).
  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. Indeed this is perhaps His greatest and most wonderful attribute. And we can even see that love and care for infants in verses like Psalm 22:9,10 and Psalm 139:15,16, and Jonah 4:1. Could we, as a result, possibly believe that it is possible for Him to judge and condemn an infant who has never consciously rejected Him? How could a God of love do such a thing?
- They cannot be condemned because the eternal banishment of those dying in infancy or early childhood would be completely inconsistent with the wonderful, loving character of our Lord Jesus Christ.
  We picture Him in *Mark 10:16: "And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them and blessed them."*
  And in *Matthew 18:14, "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?

3) 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.

4) Comments from Christian leaders (in addition to the ones given in answer to the previous question).

- ✓ Harry Ironside, a leading Brethren preacher and author writes: "*Little ones who die go to be with Christ.*"
- ✓ Charles Hodge, a well known reformed theologian, wrote: "*All who are in infancy are saved … the Scriptures nowhere exclude any class of infants, baptized or unbaptized from 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.*
- ✓ Charles H. Spurgeon, the well known English preacher, wrote as follows: "*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, leads 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 life 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 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 regenerated 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 1:15).*

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 3:5)*. 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 1:15). 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 16:15*) – including little children.

Questions for Future Study

- ✓ *At what age should you start presenting the facts of the Gospel - truths about God, Jesus Christ, sin, the cross, the resurrection, faith etc. to little children? Give Bible references and reasons for your answers.*
- ✓ *How can you best help and comfort a mother whose baby has just died?*

Question 7. Are 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 8:35 and Mark 9:41) 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. 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 5:4 & 6, Luke 19:10, Matthew 15:24;* the lost coin in *Luke 15:4,8 and 9*, and the lost son in *Luke 15:24.*
- The word is also translated in a number of places as "*destroy*" (*Matthew 10:28 and James 4:12*), or "*destruction*" (*Matthew 7:13*). 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 3:15-16; 10:28; 2nd Thessalonians 2:10; 2nd Peter 3:9*), 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 the lost and guilty sinner is under the wrath and condemnation of God and will perish and be lost forever if he dies in that condition (*Matthew 10:28 and John 3:16,36*). What a loss! The first translation shows that he 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 and look firstly at "Other Scriptures" – the general teaching of the Bible on this subject.

1) Other Scriptures including chilren

The general teaching of Scripture outlines nine basic truths concerning mankind AS A WHOLE.

- All mankind are sinners by nature (*Ephesians 2:3, Jeremiah 17:2*).
- This sinful nature expresses itself universally in sinful actions (*Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:23*).
- The result for all mankind is physical and spiritual death (*Romans 5:15,17; Ephesians 5:1*).
- God is holy and cannot allow sin into His Presence (*Revelation 21:27*).
- God is just and must punish sin (*Romans 5:18*).
- Those who do not believe are under God's condemnation (*John 3:36*) and will be judged for their sin and disobedience (*Acts 17 :30-31*).
- God loves sinners and has provided a way of salvation through the death of His Son on the cross (*Romans 5:8*).
- Those who trust the Lord Jesus as Saviour are justified (*Romans 5:1*) and will never be condemned (*Romans 8:1*).
- Those who are disobedient and do not trust Jesus Christ are condemned, will be judged for their unbelief and lost forever (*John 3:15-17*).

2) 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 (even little children) in *Matthew 18:11-14*.

- 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 minimise 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 in *1st Peter 2:25,* and *2nd Peter 2:15*, and is used by James in *James 5:19-20*. 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 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 2:4.* 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. 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 judgement 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 lost forever.

3) Experience

This is a subject to which we cannot add or submit our own experience, or that of others. We can only find an answer from Scripture. But we could add one significant statement. We must remember that the question of being saved and the question of being 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.

4) 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 8:42,44 and 1st John 3:1). The only entry from one class to the other is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:12). 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, of Scripture Union, wrote:
  "A child is capable of sin. He was born with a sinner's nature. This is clear from John 3:6,7 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 18:11 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 judgement.

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. 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: 13-15,17).

Question 8. Should you speak to children about God's judgement?

Introduction

This question should 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.

Some Christians believe that it is wrong to speak to children about God's judgement. 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.

1) Specific Bible verses concerning children and judgement

- *Joshua 8:34-35.* 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 28:15,20,32).*
- In *Jeremiah 6:10-13* children were warned of God's coming judgement upon them because of their sin and disobedience.
- In *Joel 2:16,17* children, even little children, were to be included in the display of repentance.
- *Matthew 18:7-14.* 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".* 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 and separated from God for all eternity, and God wants them to know about it.
  Read *also 2nd Kings 2:23-24* and *Ezekiel 9:4-6.*

2) Other Scriptures that include children

- *Mark 16:15*: "*And He said unto to them, go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*"
  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 the method of presenting it may differ. The whole Gospel is for everyone, including the children! The message of judgement is part of the Gospel message. Children cannot come to Christ for pardon unless they know they are condemned sinners and need to be pardoned. To eliminate anything from our message – for any age group – is therefore contrary to the Scriptures. *(Romans 1:15-18).*
- *Acts 20:27*
  Paul was able to say concerning the Ephesian church, which included children, "*I have not shunned to declare to you* ***the whole*** *counsel of God.*" This must have included teaching concerning God's judgement.
- *Ephesians 2:1-3*
  These verses were written to the church at Ephesus, which included children *(Ephesians 6:1).* They were therefore to hear what was taught in these verses. This letter includes the fact that those who are outside of Christ are "*by nature the children of* ***wrath****.*"

3) Experience with children

While we must tell the children about God's judgement, experience with children teaches us that we must be wise in how we do it. We must do it in love and tenderly without any over-emphasis. Our task is to warn the children, not to frighten them. It is easy to frighten children and get them to "make a decision" on the basis of that fear. But this is wrong. We need to understand and respect the sensitive nature of children – especially little children – and not take advantage of it.

4) Comments from Christian leaders

✓ Mr Anthony Capon writes:

"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 judgement is seen to be inevitable unless there is repentance. It is far easier to explain judgement to children than to adults."

✓ Dr Francis Schaeffer said:

"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 for further thought

How would you answer a person who said: *"It is not right to frighten children by speaking to them about God's judgement and about the possibility of being lost and separated from God forever. And, besides, any profession of salvation made as a result of this would not be genuine."*

Question 9. Are children more open to the Gospel than adults?

Introduction

The number of Christians converted as children is considerably greater than those converted in advanced years. Is there a reason? 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 to see the advantages of evangelizing children when they are young. The Bible makes it clear that there are such advantages and that children are more open to the Gospel than adults.

1) Specific Bible verses concerning children and their openness

- *Mark 10:15: "Assuredly I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as (or like) a little child, will by no means enter it."*

  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 it with childlike faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But the child is already a child. He has an advantage in that he has not been so much hardened as an adult by unbelief and years spent in sin. Also, 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.

- *Matthew 18:3*: *"Assuredly I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."*

  In the Scriptures children are not told to become like adults, but rather adults are told to become like children.

Children, like adults, must be converted in order to enter the Kingdom of God; but they do not have to become like children – they are children already. This is an advantage for them.

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 have to become like a child – he already is one.

- *Ecclesiastes 12:1:* "*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.*"

The Bible teaches that youth is the best time to turn to God "*before the difficult days come*". When those days come there will be less possibility of "*remembering the Creator*". Hearts will be harder and more sceptical. It is good when a child comes to Christ, because not only is it a soul saved, but a life saved.

2) Other verses that include children

- *Hebrews 4:7:* "*Again, he designates a certain day, saying in David,* "*Today*", *after such a long a time; as it has been said: 'Today if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.'*"

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. This is why one should not put off coming to Christ. "*Now is the*

accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation" (2nd Corinthians 6:2).

3) Experience with children

When we work with children we realize why adults need to become like children. There are certain characteristics common to most children which adults need to have. These natural traits are not saving faith, but, consecrated by God, they may 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 the child occupied the lowest and most obscure place in society. He was, in a sense, worthless. 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 worthless – the very opposite to what most adults feel they are. For arrogant adults to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, they must become as helpless and insignificant as little children were in the ancient world. Even if children today do not feel so helpless, it is still an advantage when we present the Gospel to them because they know what it means to be weak and helpless. They are open to be led by the Holy Spirit to the One Who will save them and strengethen them.
- ✓ **Trustful**. Children generally believe what they are told and taught. On the other hand, adults are often sceptical. That is why they must become like little children. They must become trustful. Therefore we aim to guide this trust, prayerfully and in the power of the Holy Spirit, towards the Lord Jesus.
- ✓ **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.

✓ **Dependent** upon others for everything. Everything children receive – their food, clothes, learning – they receive from someone else, for nothing. Adults are usually independent and earn everything they have. They want to work and not receive. Children are accustomed to receiving things for nothing. So when they hear that "*the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*" (Romans 6:23) they may understand this. Adults often do not understand! This is why they must become like children before they can be saved. But 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.

✓ A child's heart is **tender**, and more readily conscious of sin. 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 **teachable** and always ready to learn things. The adult must become teachable – like a child.

4) Comments from Christian leaders

✓ C.H. Spurgeon wrote: "*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 little child receives Christ humbly, for he never dreams of merit or purchase. I do not recollect ever having met with a child who had to battle with self-righteousness in coming to Christ… 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 the 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."

- ✓ R.A.Torrey, the author and co-preacher with D.L. Moody 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, the well known English pastor and author wrote: "*Children do not have to unlearn those habits of doubt and misconceptions which hinder so many from accepting the Saviour. There is everything in our Saviour to charm and attract children."*
- ✓ 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 inbringing to Christ. If you are not saved in youth it is likely you never will be. Youth is converting time."

- ✓ John Cotton, a well known 17th century pastor and Puritan theologian in America, once said: "*Young children are flexible and easily bowed. It is far more easy to train them up to good things now, than in their youth and riper years".*

Conclusion

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 we should not wait until they become older and more resistant. Our goal is that they "*set their hope in God*" so that they don't become "*like their fathers – a stubborn and rebellious generation*." (Psalm 78:7:8). Our churches and missions need more, and better, child evangelism. Many secular groups, sects and false religions, see the importance of children – and do all they can to influence them. What a shame that many Christians do not.
- ✓ There is a real need for prayer that God will raise up more men and women with a real call to evangelise 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 unto salvation *(Mark 16:15; Romans 1:16; Galatians 1:8,9).*
- ✓ There is, at the same time, a real need **not** to depend upon the child's openness to the Gospel. Because of the child's openness it is relatively easy to get him "to make a

decision." But our dependence must be upon God. No matter how open a child may be, he cannot come to Jesus Christ unless God takes the initiative and works in his heart *(John 6:44,65).*

Oh that we might reach the children of the world with the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Questions for further thought

If it is true that there are advantages in evangelizing children, should Christians therefore concentrate on evangelizing children and neglect adults?

Question 10. What is the best age for a person to trust Jesus Christ and be saved?

Answer

The simple and obvious answer is – as early as possible. A child saved is a life saved. We who evangelise children are not just interested in their souls, but also in their lives. When a child trusts Jesus Christ he has still many years to live for Him.

1) Specific Bible Verses concerning children

- *"It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth."* (Lamentations 3:27).

The best time to start serving God is when 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 12:1).

It is important to remember Him when young and before the difficult days come.

- *"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 78:7,8).

Those who set their hope on God when young will not become stubborn and rebellious like *"their fathers"*.

2) Other Bible Verses that include children

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. These include Samuel, Joseph, Moses, David, Joash, Josiah, Obadiah, Daniel and Timothy.

3) Experience

Common sense tells us it is better to receive God's salvation before hearts are hard and before sin gets too much control. Also, it is a recognized fact that the human personality is formed, and many of life's habits created, during the early years of life. When a child comes to Christ his personality and habits can be influenced and guided by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The time to direct the growth of a sapling is when it is young and flexible; when it becomes a tree change is almost impossible.

Many servants of God trusted Jesus Christ as their Saviour when children and began lives of service and usefulness. These include well-known Christian leaders like Richard Baxter, Matthew Henry, Jonathan Edwards, Isaac Watts, Jim Elliot, Leighton Ford, Stephen Olford and Corrie Ten Boom. Corrie 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!

If I obtain three candles – a tall one, a short one and a medium-sized one – and light all three of them, each candle could represent a Christian who light is shining. Which one represents an adult? Which one represents a child? The child is not the little candle. He is the tall one because most of his life and light is still in the future.

4) Comments from Christian Leaders

✓ Gypsy Smith, the well-known British evangelist of the early 20th century said: *"Save an old man and you save a unit, but save a boy and you save a multiplication table."*

✓ Dr R.A. Torrey, another famous American evangelist, 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 most 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 obvious? 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 answers to all these ten questions can be summarised in four simple statements

- ✓ **It is possible for a child to be saved**
- ✓ **It is necessary for a child to be saved**
- ✓ **Children are open to the Gospel**
- ✓ **It is good for children to be saved**

Question 11. What does the Bible teach about children born into a Christian family? Are they different from other children?

Introduction

I felt that I should include one extra question and answer on the subject of children born into a Christian home. 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.

- **1st Corinthians 7:14: "...** *For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband;* ***otherwise your children 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 already, and automatically, saved and in God's kingdom.
- ✓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"* has the same meaning, in the Greek, as the two words *"sanctified"* 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"*, 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 carefully *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 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. But it was through him and his salvation that they heard the Gospel (verse 32). What a privilege!
- ✓ 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 8:4-13).
- ✓ 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, 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. But it does show that these children do have a very special privilege.

Revision

As we can look back over these last 11 questions and answers, we can gather and assemble now a number of brief, clear Biblical truths about children which encourage us to teach them and evangelize them.

- They are by nature sinners, spiritually dead, lost and separated from God and need to be saved (*Matthew 18:11-14*).
- They can trust Jesus Christ as their Saviour and be saved (*Matthew 18:6*), and were included in the membership of the early church (*Ephesians 6:1*).
- They are open to the Gospel (*Matthew 18:3*).
- If they trust Jesus Christ they have their whole lives to live for Him (*Ecclesiastes 12:1*).
- The Lord Jesus has a special love for them (*Mark 9:36-38*).
- We (and the Gospel) can reach into their homes and parents' hearts through them (*Isaiah 11:6*).
- The future of the community, the city, the country and the church is in their hands (*Psalm 78: 7,8*). They are the politicians, lawyers, doctors, teachers, police and parents of tomorrow.

These seven Biblical truths about children bring three challenges

- Parents are instructed to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4) - and that includes evangelizing them.
- Church leaders have a responsibility to feed the children in their churches (*John 21:15*). - and the first part of a "feeding ministry" is evangelism.
- All believers have a responsibility to reach out to all the children and evangelize them (*Mark 16:15*).

Section V

Biblical Answers to Six Questions about a Ministry to Children

Introduction

Most Christians accept the validity of a ministry to children. But, at the same time, many of them have questions about such a ministry.

- ✓ Many pastors and church leaders feel that their most important ministry is to adults – and a ministry to children is seen as well down their scale of priorities.
- ✓ Many do not see the need for full-time children's workers, and the vast majority of the students in Bible Colleges are preparing for a ministry to adults.
- ✓ And there are those who hesitate to evangelise children or support those who do so for a number of reasons.

Consequently, we need to examine Scripture and find the answers to questions and doubts about the validity and importance of a ministry to children.

Question 1. "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 are 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 16:15* – the evangelism of every possible person without segregation or distinction. This is what Paul means in *Acts 26:22.*

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 reason to believe that there were children there also – even though they are not specifically mentioned (see *Acts 2:39; 11:14; 16:15; 16:31-34*).

The reasoning in this question 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* is 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* - but are firmly based on the principles outlined there. 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.

✓ I would emphasize three additional facts to underline the importance of a ministry to children:

- The attitude of the Lord Jesus towards children as expressed in *Matthew 18:1-14,Mark 10:13-16,* and *Matthew 21:15,16.*

- The importance of children in the early church as illustrated in *Ephesians 6:1-4, Colossians 3:20-21* and *Titus*

1:6. 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 (see *Acts 1:1*). "*The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus* ***began*** *both to do and teach.*" Christ ministered to children; He taught the children in those crowds which came to hear Him; He taught His disciples concerning the importance of children. Certainly the Apostles must have followed His example and His 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 have been, or are being, so often omitted from total evangelism. Our aim is to help meet this deficiency, and thus make evangelism total and Scriptural.

Question 2. "Where is the scriptural basis for specialising in work among children?"

Answer

It is true that the Bible does not speak of specialisation in children's work, but we do so for several reasons:

- ✓ Children are often neglected in the evangelistic outreach of the church.
- ✓ The Scriptures teach total evangelism, and we specialise in the evangelism of children – to help fulfil the concept of total evangelism.

- ✓ Children need a specialised 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 3. **Sometimes it is said, *"I feel it is 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 there." Is this so?***

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 evangelise parents rather than children.
- ✓ That we should evangelise the children through the parents.

I do not agree with the two above implications for two reasons.

- ✓ I do not feel it is right to evangelise parents and exclude children because:
  - This is not scriptural. Scriptural evangelism is total evangelism, according to *Mark 16:15.* 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 evangelise, 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 16:15*; even if it might, at a later date, lead to a spiritual division within that family *(Matthew 10:34-39*). Of course, if possible, we should always seek to inform the parents about what we are doing.

Question 4. "It is not 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." Do you agree?

Answer

- I believe that this reasoning is wrong because:
  - ✓ It disagrees with *Mark 16:15*, 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.
  - ✓ It decries the simple faith and ready response of a child, no matter what kind of home he comes from.

  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. (*Mathew 18:14*).

  Apostolos Bliates, a well-known pastor in Greece, was born into adevout Greek Orthodox family. He describes how an evangelical neighbor 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 trusting Jesus Christ.

  Byang Kato, a secretary of the African Evangelical Fellowship, and one of Africa's outstanding spiritual leaders until his death, came to the Lord at the age of twelve 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 indeed 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 walk away, 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! Because of prayer follow-up work is never completely impossible!

Question 5 Some ask "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 (similar to 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.

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 6. Some say "Yes, I agree that a child can 'make a decision for Christ', but he does not really understand, and he will need to confirm it when he reaches his teenage years." Do you agree?

Answer
I do not agree with this statement for five reasons:

- ✓ 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.

He needs to understand that the Lord Jesus died for him and he needs to trust and receive Him. On this simple basis a child 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 (*Ephesians 2:9*). God is sovereign in the salvation of a child – and a little child can be saved by faith – but it may be with a minimum of understanding and conviction.
- ✓ There is no doubt that in the case of a little child, as in the case of many older people, further understanding 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. (Read carefully *Matthew 11:25*).
- ✓ 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. This, however, is not a confirmation of regeneration – it is 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, at that very moment through the New Birth, his position as a child of God.

Like many other questions, this one is based on a doubt as to whether a child can genuinely receive Christ and be born again. Scripture teaches: "*As many as received Him, to THEM gave He power to become the Sons of God.*" (*John 1:12*).

Of course it should be recognized that there **are** children (as there are adults) 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. But if the child then "*makes a genuine decision*" later in his life **that** becomes his conversion experience.

It should be remembered that a number of Christians, looking back over their lives, are not sure as to exactly when they were regenerated, and will only know the answer when they get to glory. But even if they don't know the exact momment of their re-birth it did take place at a specfic time and does not need to be repeated.

Section VI

Additional Bible Truths about Children

The Value of a Child's Praise

Is *Psalm 8:2* we read: *"Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have ordained* (or laid a foundation for) *strength."*
In *Matthew 21:16*, referring to the praises and hosannas of the children, the Lord Jesus said to the critical priests and scribes (quoting *Psalm 8:2*), *"Have you never read, out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have perfected praise?"*
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 21:16*), and a strong stumbling stone to His enemies (*Psalm 8:2*).

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 18:4 *– they are the most humble, the least contaminated by a desire for personal glory."*

The Importance of Visual Aids when Teaching Children

➢ Visual aids are not a modern invention! They are biblical! They were used often by the Lord Jesus in His teaching ministry to all kinds of people.
For example: the coin, the lilies, the fowls of the air, the sower, the shepherd, the sheep, the vine, the door and many more.
He even used a child as a visual aid on at least two occasions (*Matthew 18:2; Mark 10:15*).

➢ On three occasions instructions were given to the Israelites to use visual aids in the teaching of their children:

- *Exodus 12:26:* In connection with the passover (which portrays for us the truth of salvation).
- *Exodus 13:14*: In connection with the redemption of the first-born (which portrays for us the truth of dedication).
- *Joshua 4:6*: In connection with the memorial of stones on the banks of the Jordan (which portrays for us the truth of identification).

The Importance of the Influence and Teaching of Parents

The Bible lays much emphasis upon the responsibilty of parents to influence and teach their children the Word of God.

➢ Commands to Parents in the Bible

- *Proverbs 22:6* links a command with a promised result: *"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."*

Andrew Bonar, a well-known preacher and writer in 19th century Scotland, wrote of this verse:

"The person with whom this text is favourite probably applies it thus – '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 2:1-10; Hebrews 11:23-26*).

- *Ephesians 6:4*: *"And, you fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord."*
- *Colossians 3:21*: *"Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged."*

➢ **Contrasts Between Good and Bad Parents in the Bible**

In the Bible we can find examples of both good parents, who taught their children the Word of God and taught them obedience to themselves and God, and bad parents who did neither:

- **Abraham** was a good parent:
  "For I have known him, in order that that he may command his children 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 18:19*)
  A child taught obedience in the home (as Isaac was) will be more ready to obey God.
- **Eli** was a bad parent:
  "For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile and he did not restrain them."(*1st Samuel 3:13*)

A child who is not taught to obey his parents is less likely to obey God. However it should be noted that there are examples in the Bible of godly parents whose children were not godly (1Samuel 8:3-5) and ungodly parents whose children were godly (2 Chronicles 28:1&2; 29:1&2) It is also interesting to see that godly Hezekiah's son Manasseh did not initially follow in his father's footsteps (2 Chronicles 33:2) - but later he did. (:12&13).

➢ **Consequences of the Influence and Teaching of Parents**

An example of this is seen in the study of two families in the State of New York. This survey covered five generations:

✓ One man, Max Jukes, was a criminal; 1,026 of his descendants were traced and of these:

- 300 died prematurely
- 100 were sent to prison for an average of 13 years
- 190 were public prostitutes
- 100 were drunkards

The sin of parents can have sad consequences for their children and for future generations.

✓ The other man was Jonathan Edwards, saved at the age of seven and who, with his wife, founded a Christian home. 729 of his descendants were traced and of these:

- 300 were preachers of the Gospel
- 65 were university presidents
- 60 were authors of good books
- 3 were USA congressmen
- 1 was a USA vice-president

Exodus 20:5,6 would seem to be relevant in this context.

*"You shall not bow down to them, nor serve them: for I the **Lord** your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."*

However, the Bible also teaches plainly that no one is lost because of another person's sin or saved because of another person's righteousness. Each person is responsible individually to God.

"The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself." (*Ezekiel 18:20*).

The Use of the Words "little children" in John's Epistles

It is interesting and helpful to study two words used by John in his first espistle

➢ The word *"TEKNION"* (little child) is used in *1st John 2:1; 1st John 2:12; 1st John 2:28; 1st John 3:7; 1st John 3:18; 1st John 4:4* and *1st John 5:21.*

This word is a term of endearment often used by the aged apostle to believers in general, all of whom are much younger both in years and Christian experience than he is.

We know this use of the word can be applied to believers of all ages because:

- ✓ The context in these verses in 1st John shows that it can be used in this way.
- ✓ The word is not used elsewhere in the New Testament with regard to actual little children. Apart from *1st John*, the word *"TEKNION"* is only used in *John 13:33* and *Galations 4:19* where it obviously applies to believers of all ages. The word *"TEKNON"* (of which *"TEKNION"* is the diminutive) is used much more often and also in a very wide sense, with little reference to age.

- However the word *"PAIDION"* is used in *1st John 2:13* and in *1st John 2:18*. It is the **usual** word in the New Testament for children in the generic sense, e.g., *Matthew 18:2,3,5; Mark 10:14,15*. It is used for John the Baptist and Moses as babes (*Luke 1:59,66,76* and *Hebrews 11:23)*. Also, it is used for the Lord Jesus when He was young (*Matthew 2:8,9; Luke 1:80* and *Luke 2:27)*. It is also used of the twelve-year-old girl in *Mark 5*.
  There are very few examples of this word being used in connection with adults. *John 21:5* is the only significant one.
  It is therefore possible, even probable, that John is thinking of actual children in *1st John 2:12, 13 & 14*
  *"I write to you, **little children**,(TEKNION) because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. 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. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one."*

  We could come to the following conclusions from these three verses -

- ✓ John could be referring to three groups or age levels - those who are children, those who are fathers and those who are young men. The context would indicate therefore he is thinking here literally of children
- ✓ His use of the word "*PAIDION*" or little child would confirm this.
- ✓ He writes that these little children "*have known the Father*" and that their sins are "*forgiven for His names' sake*"

It seems he is referring to little children but we cannot be **sure**. It is possible he is thinking of young and immature believers. If it does refer to little children, note that it is a further proof of child conversion: *"Little children …your sins are forgiven ... you have known the Father."*

The Ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ to Needy Children

The Lord Jesus loved children when He was here on earth and ministered to them in two ways -

- He ministered to their physical needs
  - ✓ The demon-possessed boy – *Matthew 17:14-21*
  - ✓ The diseased boy – *John 4:46-54*
  - ✓ The dead girl – *Mark 5:21-43*
- He ministered to their spiritual needs
  Undoubtedly there were many children whom Christ addressed in the crowds (*Matthew 14:21, 15:38*), who listened to Him – like the boy in *John 6*.

The apostles also ministered to the children in the crowds who listened to them.

This is possibly what Paul means in *Acts 26:22.* The word *"small"* or *"MIKROS"* at least includes children.

May the Lord Jesus give each of us a desire to minister to our children who have such a deep spiritual need.

CONCLUSION

All around us is a great mission field – **THE CHILDREN**. They represent one-third of the total 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)

Additional 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" An Autobiography
  "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 Lead a Child to Christ"
  "How to Teach Bible Doctrines to Children"
  "Why Evangelize Children?"
  "The Principles of Teaching"
  "100 Questions and Answers Concerning a Ministry to Children"
  "How to Evangelize Children"
  "Bible Talks for Children Vol 1"
  "Bible Talks for Children Vol 2"
  "Now I See It"

- **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 & Evolution" (10 Lessons)

For information on the availablity 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 165 countries and each year over 10 million children are reached with the Gospel. CEF workers provide training opportunities from a 1 hour course to a three month institute. A full range of visualized Bible lessons and additional tools for the evangelism of children are produced in many languages.

For further information on CEF either contact your National Office or write to

CEF Inc, PO Box 348, Warrenton, MO 63383 USA

www.cefonline.com