

# BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

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**Objective:** Understand how God views children throughout His Word.

**Quote:** A man once asked this question: "Where can I plant this seed so when it is fully grown, it will bring forth much fruit"? Someone replied: "In the Heart of a Child!"

## 1. Old Testament Teaching

Throughout the Old Testament God clearly commanded parents to diligently teach their children the Word of God (Deut. 4; 6; 11; 18; 31). The result was that the little ones would learn to love, obey, fear, honor and put their trust in the One



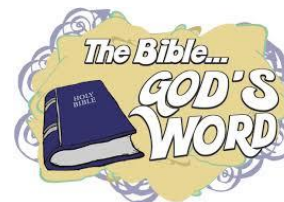
True Living God. In Psalm 78 the psalmist is very explicit that the next generation should be taught the "praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done" (vs. 4). The purpose was that "they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds, but would keep his commands" (vs. 7). It is obvious that God, who created all people, knew that children could respond to Him in faith and trust even at early ages.

## 2. New Testament Teaching

One of the most convincing passages in the New Testament that establishes the need of child evangelism, the ability of young children to have saving faith and the responsibility of adults regarding their conversion is Matthew 18:1-14. Within this passage we see our Lord not only teaching that adults must be converted as children do but also affirming young children as believers, having saving faith in Him.



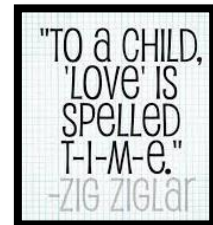
Mark 10:13-16 is one of the most beautiful passages regarding children. People were bringing their young children ("paidión") to Jesus for Him to bless.



Obviously, the disciples had not learned the lesson about the importance of the children to Jesus. As they sent the children away He was "greatly displeased" that the disciples kept the children from Him. The Greek word "aganakteo" is used here and means "greatly afflicted, indignant, sore displeased, moved with indignation." It carries a sense of grief. There is only one other occasion where this word is used in the New Testament to imply anger of Jesus. The fact that Jesus was angry suggests the seriousness of excluding children from the blessings of the reign of God. Jesus rebukes, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (vv. 14-15). Jesus couldn't have made a more emphatic statement about children and conversion. He commanded the disciples to "let the children come" and repeated His teaching in Matthew 18:3. Children and those who believe as children in simple faith can receive the kingdom of heaven.

### 3. Paul's Teaching

Paul Witnesses the word of God to both Small & great (Acts 26v22). In the book of Titus 1:6, Paul gives instruction for the selection of leaders in the church - the qualification is that a man be "blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient The original (tekna pista) may mean "faithful children" but "believing children" is intended here. It refers to those who are old enough to have made a personal decision for Christ and reflect it in their conduct. Paul acknowledges that a man who would be a leader in the church must first lead his own children to put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is another indication that the early church taught their children to put their faith in Jesus as their Saviour.



### 4. Biblical examples that God used children

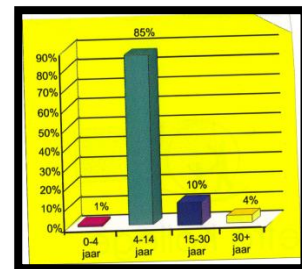
In the Bible, we know of Moses, Samuel, Jeremiah, David, Mary. In addition to the Scriptural evidence for child conversion, there are a host of Christians who have

come to know Jesus as their personal Saviour as young children. James Dobson, Christian psychologist, author and founder of Focus on the Family was saved at age 3. At the end of this Manual, there are a few examples.

## 5. Research Studies

Formal and informal studies also confirm the fact that children can be saved and have a much higher conversion rate than adults. For over 60 years informal surveys conducted by Child Evangelism Fellowship workers as well as others have confirmed that 85% of Christians receive Christ as Saviour between the ages of 4-14; 4% for those in the 13-18 age range and 6% for people 19 or older. In recent years Christian leaders have begun referring to this age group as the "4-14 Window" because of the high percentage of conversions that take place during these critical years of a child's life.

Studies by George Barna indicate that children are much more likely to trust Christ as their Saviour than adults. He found that lifelong moral values are largely in place by the teenage years. A series of studies confirmed the importance of children inviting Jesus into their hearts as Saviour when they are young. Barna found that if people do not receive Jesus Christ as their Saviour before they reach their teenage years, the chance of their doing so at all is slim. Statistics confirm that children can and do make solid decisions for Christ and are therefore the most fruitful mission field in the world today.



Historically evangelical churches have emphasized adult and youth evangelism but the children have very often been neglected. Children's ministry leaders who have studied child development theories have made dogmatic statements that children cannot understand symbolism or abstract concepts and therefore cannot understand the truths of the Gospel until they are 11 or 12 years old. They take an "intelligence-based" approach to evangelism which implies that a higher level of intellectual development must be reached before children can make a decision for Christ.



Unwise workers ask children, "How many want to go to heaven?" and seeing raised hands declare these children "saved." Some children are told to just "pray a prayer" without any instruction about the Gospel. Many children's ministries merely entertain children. Such wrong approaches to children's ministry have caused children in our churches to grow up with a false security of salvation and/or head knowledge about the Bible but they do not know the God of the Bible personally. They think they are "saved" because they attend church, said a prayer or because they are "good." As a result, a large percentage of these children become involved in the "world" and eventually leave the church because the Bible and church are not relevant to them personally. The Biblical order is salvation and then spiritual growth.

## 6. Implications for Ministry Practice with Children

The greatest hindrances in the Church today to children coming to know Christ as their personal Saviour are the unsound philosophies that have infiltrated many children's ministries, the misunderstanding regarding the biblical view of child conversion and the lack of practical training in effective methods of child evangelism. To change this situation several things need to happen:

1. Adults must remember, while teaching children, that salvation is by simple faith, not by reason or intellectual development. In addition, it must be remembered that the first step in spiritual formation is salvation. "If you doubt the child's ability to communicate with God, don't doubt God's ability to communicate with the child."
2. Adults need to be trained in how to present the Gospel message in an age-appropriate manner, even to young children. They also need to learn how to give children an opportunity to respond to the Gospel and to be sensitive to the direction of the Holy Spirit. Further, they need to know how to counsel children regarding assurance of salvation, confession of sin, first steps of spiritual growth and other truths regarding the Christian life.



3. Adults should present the Gospel in every class session and children should be given an opportunity to respond to the Holy Spirit's work in their lives. Children's workers should be trained to counsel by asking questions to determine if the child really understood and to guide him in his decision.

When these crucial principles are put into practice, the ministry of child evangelism in the local church will be transformed.

Christian educators, children's ministry workers and the Church in general need to re-examine their theological, philosophical and practical ministry approach to childhood conversion. In light of the Scriptural and other compelling evidence it is more than clear that young children can make a true decision to trust Christ as their Saviour and be born into God's Kingdom as the Holy Spirit works. Over one-third of the world's 7.7 billion population consists of children under the age of 15.



There is no doubt that as the Church strategizes to fulfil the Great Commission for world evangelization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond, child evangelism must become a major thrust. When Jesus' disciples were sending the little children away, He adamantly declared, ". . . anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will *never* enter it" (Mark 10:15). Let us not be guilty of continuing to hinder children from coming to Jesus. There could not be a higher calling, for all evangelism is child evangelism!



## DISCUSS

1. Read Deuteronomy 4:9-10 and 6:4-9. What does God say to you?

2. Discuss Psalm 78:1-8