

Biblical Basis of Child Conversion Essay Questions

As you answer the questions below, be sure to use complete sentences (proper grammar, spelling, etc.). When referring to Scripture passages, type out the portion of the verse that connects the thoughts together. Please do not simply state a Scripture reference. Reference material should be used throughout the assignment. Be sure to use at least five sources besides the Bible to substantiate your answers. Use proper citations throughout. Word count includes only your answers to the questions. (Be sure to read the **Requirements for Essay Questions and the Biblical Basis Essay Rubric** prior to beginning this assignment.)

1. Explain why you believe that children are lost. Why do you believe they need to be evangelized? (Use Scripture, statistics, and other resources to substantiate your answer. Provide 350-450 words.)

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When a six-year-old girl went missing from her front yard, the news was filled with information about her in hopes they would be able to find her and bring her home. Just one day later, both her body and 30-year-old kidnapper's, were found. When children's lives are threatened physically, alarms go out. News and social media alert people. Amber alerts are issued attempting to bring the children back safely. And so it should be, for children's lives are precious. However, while adults try to protect children from physical dangers, sometimes the greater danger, that of being lost for all eternity, is overlooked.

Why is the spiritual condition of children often overlooked? Some would say since they are innocent or safe until a certain age sharing the Gospel with them isn't urgent. However, Romans 5:12 clearly states, "When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for all sinned" (New Living Translation). Romans 3:23 agrees, "For everyone has sinned..." In both verses, the word, "everyone" is used indicating that regardless of age, all are sinners. Furthermore, Scripture teaches that everyone has been born with a sinful nature (Ps. 51:5) and that "even from birth they have lied and gone their own way" (Ps. 58:3). Scripture teaches "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). None of these verses give an age to which they apply, thus, all are lost, including children, and will be held accountable before God.

Additionally, Scripture teaches that salvation is offered to whoever believes. “Whoever” includes *anyone* who puts their faith in Jesus Christ as the only way for salvation (John 1:12; 3:15, 16; 5:24; Acts 16:31, Rom. 10:13).

A study by the National Study of Youth and Religion shows that 58.8 percent of believers made their first commitment to live their lives for God before the age of 14. So, 85% of adults appear to have come to faith before age 14 (Smith 2009, 247). Research indicates that nearly half of all Americans who accept Jesus Christ as their Savior, do so before reaching the age of 13 (43%) (BarnaGroup 2004). Theologian Charles Spurgeon said, “A child of five, if properly instructed, can as savingly believe and be regenerated as an adult” (Spurgeon 2019). It is for these reasons that child evangelism is so vital in the world today. Children have no guarantees of growing to adulthood, therefore, the time reach them is now.

2. Discuss the four main philosophies held regarding child evangelism. With each philosophy, include discussion as to why you either agree or disagree with it. Be sure to use Scripture and outside sources to support your answers. Answers should immediately follow the definition of the philosophy. (Provide 300-450 words **per philosophy**.)

TRADITIONAL PHILOSOPHY

The Christian life of the child is formed by his environment. Conversion is a phenomenon of adolescence and until he has the use of reason (around twelve years of age) the child is not lost, since he is safe under the covenant by belonging to a Christian family (CEF 2016, 30).

This philosophy is based on the belief that children born into a Christian home are “safe.” One Scripture used to support this belief is Exodus 12:13. The Israelites placed the blood of a lamb on the doorposts in faith that God would spare the all who were in the household. Since children were saved by the act of the parents, this passage is used to support the teaching that children are safe because of their parents’ faith—until later in life when they are confirmed. Passages like Acts 2:38-39 and 1 Corinthians 7:14-16 speak about the family being “saved” or “holy” so the thought it is that children are safe. However, Acts 2 begins with “Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God...for forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift

of the Holy Spirit,” indicating an individualized decision. Verse 39 says it is a promise, “...to you, to your children, and to those far away.”

In this passage, each adult present must decide on his/her own. The apostle indicated that salvation/forgiveness was for anyone who believed, not that if one person believed all would be saved. Thus, to say that salvation is provided for children because of believing parents is unscriptural.

As has already been noted, every person who is born is a sinner (Ecc. 7:20; Rom. 3:10) and needs a Savior. Additionally, Scripture indicates that each one must believe for himself. Unfortunately, research shows that “...your spiritual condition by the age of 13 is a strong predictor of your spiritual profile as an adult “ (Barna 2003, 41). So, if a child has not put his faith in Christ before adolescence, chances are slim that he ever will.

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

The child should receive biblical knowledge from a very young age and develop Christian habits and attitudes. One day he will make a personal decision for Christ, and be saved (CEF 2016, 31).

On the surface, this philosophy sounds good – children should be taught spiritual truths from an early age. However, the emphasis is placed on teaching living a Christian life by their parents and church without experiencing an inward change. Children *should* be taught the Scriptures and learn about what it means to be a Christian, but they must also be taught that salvation brings them into a relationship with Christ in order to grow. When children are simply taught *how* to live, without faith in Christ, Christianity (religion) becomes a list of rules and regulations.

This philosophy is based upon Horace Bushnell’s book, *Christian Nurture*, in which he stated, “That the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise” (Bushnell 1876, 6). Studies indicate that individuals who only learned *how* to live, without conviction, later walk away from their childhood religion (Jones 2016).

Additionally, it is impossible to *develop Christian habits and attitudes*, without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:14 “But people who aren’t spiritual can’t receive these truths from God’s Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can’t understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means.” Living as a Christ-follower is difficult even though the Holy Spirit resides in the believer. Biblical Christians live counter-culturally and that cannot be done without His indwelling power. Often individuals who cannot remember a time when they “weren’t Christians,” seem to base being a Christian on going to church, their parents being Christians, or similar responses. In many cases, they have difficulty answering from Scripture that salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Without coming to faith in Christ, a child cannot mature in Christ. Therefore, I strongly disagree with this philosophy.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

The child is incapable of understanding symbolism and abstract concepts and is unable to reason; therefore, he cannot make a decision for Christ (CEF 2016, 32).

This philosophy is based on intellectual studies conducted by Jean Piaget who devoted his life to studying the cognitive development of children. He divided the stages of intelligence into the following categories: Sensory-Motor Period – birth to age 2 – learning through senses. Pre-Operational Period – ages 2-7 –a time when abstract concepts are difficult to understand but language increases. Concrete Operations ages 7-11—concepts are tied to concrete solutions and the Formal Operations Period around age 12 when children understand abstract concepts and come to their own conclusions (The Piaget Stages of Cognitive Development 2020). While Piaget’s studies are very useful for educational purposes (enabling teachers to understand how kids learn and how to present abstract concepts in a way children can grasp them), research today suggests that Piaget underestimated children's abilities (Piaget’s Stages of Cognitive Development 2019). Additionally, Piaget was not a believer and thus did not take into account the working of the Holy Spirit in spiritual matters.

The Psychological philosophy has infiltrated many evangelical churches and Christian literature resulting in the Gospel is not being shared with young children because they reason that “spiritual concepts are too difficult for children to comprehend.” They feel children will respond positively to becoming a Christian because it pleases an adult or even God. However, young children are taught abstract concepts daily in the physical world. Children learn the A, B, C's, to tell time, to use the internet, and to do math at increasingly younger ages. When abstract spiritual truths are taught using concrete examples, children can understand them.

For example, when teaching a concept like sin, using age-appropriate examples of things children do that go against God, brings understanding. Using pictures and objects to explain the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ helps children to understand the sacrifice He made for their sins. When teaching children (or anyone) the Holy Spirit is the one who reveals truth and gives understanding, regardless of age (John 16:8, 13), and each person understands at different times. Jesus said, that for anyone to enter the kingdom he must become like a child (Matt. 18:3, 4) which indicates that children can believe while still children.

CHILD EVANGELISM PHILOSOPHY

The Gospel should be presented to the child at an early age so that as the Holy Spirit works, he will come to know Jesus as his personal Savior. As a result, the child can begin to develop Christian character, which is the outward expression of a new inward life (CEF 2016, 33).

I agree with this philosophy. Children need to be taught the message of salvation simply, but accurately, so they understand their sinful condition, the need of a Savior, and how to have a personal relationship with God. Only after conversion can they develop Christian character because it comes from the overflow of the heart that has been transformed through the working of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14; John 3:36; 2 Cor. 5:17).

Scripture commands parents to teach their children about God in everyday situations of life (Deut. 6:7-9). But the children need to have more than a head knowledge of God; they need to understand how to have a relationship with Him. As a four-year-old girl I attended my

grandma's *Good News Club* where the Gospel was clearly taught. A year later I understood that I was a sinner and needed Jesus to forgive my sin and save me. When my Sunday school teacher gave an invitation, I responded, putting my faith in Jesus as Savior. Hearing the teaching from God's Word regularly in at home, Sunday school, and *Good News Club* brought conviction to my young heart. After counseling time, I ran up the stairs and met my mom coming down. I exclaimed, "I just asked Jesus to be my Savior!" Five decades later, I know that was the day I became a Christian.

The Bible includes examples as well: The prophet Samuel responded to God's call as a child. Though he lived in a time of great spiritual wickedness, God spoke to him and Samuel answered, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." God used him throughout his life to be a spiritual leader (1 Sam. 3). David was a young teen when Samuel anointed him to be the next king of Israel (1 Sam. 16). In the New Testament, "[Jesus] broke through the bonds that prevented disenfranchised people groups such as women, children, sinners and Gentiles from appropriating the new life offered freely by his heavenly Father" (Anthony 2001, 121). He brought a little child amid the adults to show that children were could believe in Him (Matt. 18:1-14). Jesus also emphatically told the disciples to let the children come to Him for the kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these little ones (Mark 10:14). Since Jesus counted the children as recipients of eternal life, then we should imitate His actions in allowing children to hear the good news of salvation and lead them to the Father.

3. Discuss Matthew 18:1-14 thoroughly in regard to child conversion. (Total word count is 900-1100 words.)

Include in the essay answers to the following questions:

- a. What was happening in the passage?
- b. What Greek words are used to describe the child? Write out the words and their meaning. Be sure to connect the significance of the words meaning in context of the passage.
- c. From verse six, how can people "offend" children who believe in Jesus? How does God view the offense?
- d. From verses 6-14, how do you know that children can be saved?

- e. Why do you believe this passage is speaking about children and not merely new believers?

The setting for this passage is that Jesus and His disciples were in a Capernaum home, possibly Peter's (Wilkin 2010, 179). In verse one, the disciples asked Jesus, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?" However, Mark 9:33-37 indicates that the disciples had argued amongst themselves while on the way. Because the people were looking for a leader who would set up a political kingdom that would overthrow the Romans, the disciples were concerned about the positions they might have in Jesus' kingdom. While Jesus overheard the discussion, He did not respond until they reached Capernaum and then did so in an unusual manner.

"Jesus called a little child to him..." (v.2). Rather than directly addressing their question, Jesus used the child as an object lesson. The Greek word used for *child* is "paidión," which speaks of a young or little child (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong "3813: paidión"). Mark 9:36 says Jesus took the child in His arms, so the child was young enough to be held. Throughout the passage the child is in the midst, indicating that Jesus was not using a metaphor to describe an adult or one who is young in the faith but actual children.

Jesus began to discuss not greatness, but entrance to the kingdom. He said the disciples must turn or be converted *like* a little child. The Greek word used is "strephó" (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong "4762: strephó") which carries the idea of a complete change of thinking or actions. Then Jesus talked about humility using the word "tapeinoó" meaning to make low or be humbled (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong "5013: tapeinoó"). The disciples were more concerned with power, position, and prestige rather than humility, but humility is required to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. In Jesus' day, children had a low place in Jewish society, making this concept difficult to grasp. Jesus added value for becoming like little children by stating, "welcoming a little child like this on my behalf is welcoming me" (v.5). "It is so taken by Christ, as if he was personally present, and personally received, and had all the favors shown to his, done

to himself in person...[it was said] to encourage persons to receive such that are modest and humble, since the respect shown to them, is all one as if shown to him” (Gill 2020).

Verse six introduces a new Greek word for *child*, “mikrós” which means small, little, or the little ones (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong "3398: mikros"). Jesus gave a stern warning about not offending little children who believe in Him—to cause someone to sin or stumble in their faith or “fall into sin” (NLT). Offenses could include telling children they are too young to believe, not teaching them correctly, setting a bad example, or even simply failing to teach them how to grow as a Christian (Theology of Child Conversion 2019, 10). The consequence for this offense was to have a large millstone tied around the neck and be drowned in the sea. This graphic description would have brought fear to the disciples’ hearts since “the Jewish people feared large bodies of water. They referred to the sea as an abyss and saw it as a symbol of chaos and hell” (VanderLaan 2020).

The word *believes* in verse six is critical concerning children and salvation. In Greek “pisteuó” means to believe in, to have a faith directed unto, believing or in faith to give oneself up to (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong “4100: pisteuó”). This same word is found in passages like John 3:16 and Acts 16:31 referring directly to believing for salvation. Scriptures referring to salvation are inclusive of all, without regard to age, comprehension, or standing.

Next, Jesus dealt with tempting others to sin. He pointed out the seriousness of causing the little ones to stumble in their faith or leading them to sin (vv.8-9). Wiersbe states, “The truly humble person helps to build up others, not to tear them down. He is a stepping-stone, not a stumbling block. Therefore, anything that makes me stumble must be removed from my life, for if it is not I cause others to stumble (Wiersbe 2007, 53).

Jesus emphasized the importance of little ones who believe, stating, “beware that you don’t look down on (despise) any of these *little ones*” (mikrós) (v10). In Greek, *despise* is “kataphroneó” meaning to “think little of or look down on based on my mind-set, contempt or disregard, because they seem of no account” (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong “2706:

kataphroneó”). Believing children have a special place in God’s eyes evidenced by His comment concerning angels, “...their angels are always in the presence of my heavenly Father” (v10). These are angels that have been appointed by God to watch and protect the children. An illustration of a shepherd seeking a lost sheep is included in verse 12. Luke 15 uses the same parable to indicate the lengths Jesus goes to save the lost—another reason this passage would indicate it is speaking of lost children and not new believers.

Jesus concluded the object lesson (v.14), linking what had been taught using the phrase, “In the same way.” “Houtó” in Greek “refers to what precedes, in the matters spoken of, in the way described” (Bible Hub 2020, s.v.Strong “3779: houtó”). The word “mikrós” is used again (Matthew 18:6, 10), connecting the disciples to the literal child in His presence. Jesus finished by stating the Father’s will regarding children is that none should perish. In Greek *perish* is “apollumi” which means, to destroy, to put out of the way entirely, abolish, and put an end to (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong“622: apollumi”). The same word is used in John 3:16 indicating anyone who does not believe for salvation, will be separated from God for all eternity. When one looks at this passage, Jesus was teaching that if adults must believe the same way children do for salvation, children can believe...and that children will be lost if hindered from coming to Him. Therefore, one might say, “All evangelism is child evangelism” (Doherty 2011, 238).

4. Discuss Mark 10:13-16. Explain what was happening in the passage. Does this passage support child conversion? If yes, how? If no, what does it teach? (Provide 450-550 words.)

The account of Jesus blessing the children comes near the end of his ministry while on his way to Jerusalem. Mark provides a beautiful picture of the love, care, and compassion Jesus has for children. Parents and possibly grandparents were bringing their children to be blessed. Mark uses the word “paidion” to describe them but Luke indicates babies were brought by using the Greek word “brephos” (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong "1025: brephos") meaning infant or babe in the arms. “[T]he Talmud says it was customary for parents to bring their...little children, to

be blessed by the elders of the synagogue. In Judaism, there was a special day set aside for this, the day before the Day of Atonement..." (J. MacArthur 2010).

However, the disciples "scolded the parents" (v.13). The word *scold* in Greek is "epitimaó" meaning "to rebuke, admonish, berate" (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong "2008: epitimaó"). Perhaps the disciples rebuked the parents because they thought Jesus was too busy or that the children were not important. Jesus' response is immediate and extraordinarily strong; this was no small issue and Jesus did not hold back his anger. The Greek word for *displeasure* is "aganakteó" (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong "23: aganakteó") carrying with it a sense of grief, to feel pain or anger. His response is in the form of a double command— "Let the children come to me. Do not stop them!" (v.14). "Their attitude was strange because Jesus had already taught them to receive the children in His name and to be careful not to cause any of them to stumble, Mark 9: Matthew 18" (Wiersbe 2007, 118).

Jesus reminded them that "...the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like children" (v.14). This passage does not use words such as, "turn from your sin" (converted) or "trust" (believe) regarding salvation as was seen in Matthew 18:3, 6. Neither does this statement indicate all children are automatically saved. "Jesus welcomed children because the Kingdom of God, God's present spiritual rule in people's lives belongs as a possession to such as these. All, including children who come to Jesus in childlike trust and dependence, are given free access to Jesus" (Walvoord and Zuck, 150). One must come "like a little child—with the temper and spirit of a child - teachable, mild, humble, and free from prejudice and obstinacy" (Barnes 2020).

Verse 16 provides another amazing picture of Jesus and his relationship with children. "Then he took the children into His arms and...blessed them." This was not just a casual comment or moment of contact but sincere heartfelt love and blessing being expressed. The Greek word for *blessing* is "eulogeó" meaning to speak well of or praise, or to bless (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong "2127: eulogeó") "He enfolded them, embraced them, and began blessing them. One by one He pronounced an intense blessing on them, He blessed them fervently, you

could say, by praying for each one of them, one at a time, with His hands on them, a remarkably familiar blessing posture” (J. MacArthur 2010).

5. Explain Colossians 1:2; 3:20 and Ephesians 1:1; 6:1 and the significance of these passages to childhood conversion. (Provide 300-450 words.)

Paul penned the letters of Colossians and Ephesians to the believers. He refers to them as “God’s holy people...who are faithful brothers and sisters in Christ” (Col. 1:2). The Greek words used are *hagiois* (saints) and *pistois* (believers, ones who trust in God’s promises (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong, “40:hagiois”, “4103: pistois”). The same terms are used in Ephesians 1:1. Paul addressed those who have put their faith in Christ.

The first three chapters of Ephesians address the believers’ standing in Christ – doctrinal information, but in the last three address how this affects the believers’ condition ethically (Bassara 2015, 26-27). The same structure is found in Colossians. In the second half of each book, Paul addresses different groups within the Body of Christ – Husbands, wives, *children*, fathers, slaves, and masters. The letters teach believers that because of who they are in Christ; how they ought to live.

In Ephesians 6:1 the word used for children indicates they were young enough to be living at home, not adult children. Paul admonishes the children to “obey your parents because you belong to the Lord.” Some translations say, “in the Lord.” One cannot do something “in the Lord” if he is not a believer. Paul also emphasizes that this the right thing for the children to do. Children needed to understand that as a believer, to obey God would result in obedience to their parents. He made the same point to the believing (adult) servants in the congregation.

Fathers were to train their children in the instruction of the Lord (6:4). The instruction contained in this letter included teaching about being “adopted as sons through Jesus Christ” as well as how to live once they put their faith in Christ.

Colossians contains the same information; how the believers received “the word of truth, the gospel,” how it changed their lives and then Paul prays that they would have spiritual

wisdom and understanding so they will live lives that “*please the Lord*” (Col. 1:5-10). Paul addressed the children (those under the authority of their parents) stressing the importance of obedience as being “*pleasing to the Lord.*” Hebrews 11:6 says, “It is impossible to *please* God without faith.” The same Greek word is used in Romans 12:1-2 which is also written to believers. Paul would not have expected the children to live lives “*pleasing to the Lord*” without having come to faith. He would not have addressed children if they were not coming to faith in Christ, just as the adults were.

6. Discuss the following passages in Deuteronomy: 4:1-10; 6:1-9; 11:18-21; and 31:9-13. While the Old Testament does not speak about “child evangelism,” it teaches much about the responsibility of the parents’ role in passing on their faith to the next generation. (Provide 950-1100 words.)
 - a. Discuss the significance of these passages as well as how these passages line up with the teaching in the New Testament about child conversion.
 - b. Include Hebrew words *ben*, *taph*, *shama*, *lamad*, and *yada* in answers as appropriate. Be sure to give the meaning of the words and the significance of the words in helping to understand the passage.

Deuteronomy 4:1-10

Deuteronomy 4 begins by exhorting the people to not only *hear* “shama” God’s Word but also to do it. “Shama” means to hear intelligently with the intention of obeying (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong “8085: shama”). Israel’s obedience would result in blessing for them and would also cause the nations around them to marvel at their wisdom and be amazed at their God.

Moses continued, “But watch out! Be careful never to forget...” (v. 9). “Watch” is the Greek word “shamar” meaning “to keep, watch, and preserve what you know (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong “8104: shamar”). Only as parents observed God’s Laws would they be able “to *teach* them to your children and your grandchildren.” The word *teach* “yada” means to know, to experience, to discern (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong “3045: yada”). Part of knowing God was also to fear Him, to stand in awe and respect. Moses emphasized the parent’s responsibility to teach their children again in verse 10, using the word “lamad” (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong

“3925: lamad”) meaning to goad or poke. The idea is to stimulate or drive; much as a shepherd does with his staff. Parents were to take every opportunity to teach their children about God.

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Here Moses reiterates the “commands, laws and regulations” that God commanded them to teach (vv.1-3). God’s instruction was two-fold: to obey His commands and to teach them to future generations so they would fear the Lord. With obedience would come blessing. He specifically included children and grandchildren, using “ben” which included anyone living in the home (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong "1121: ben").

Verse four begins: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.” Entering a land with multiple gods and wicked practices, the people needed to be reminded of their belief in ONE God. Moses stressed they were to love God, with all their heart, soul, and might. This had to be in the hearts of the parents first (vv.5-6). In Deuteronomy 6:7-9 he urged them to repeatedly teach their children. Teach here is “shanan” (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong “3925: shanan”) meaning to wet, sharpen, teach incisively, so there is clear thinking. It was the parent’s responsibility to teach about God in natural situations: at home, when walking, lying down, or getting up. They were to bind God’s Word as a sign and post them on their doors. God expected that daily the parents would speak, declare, warn, and sing about Him so the children would know Him.

Deuteronomy 11:18-21

Deuteronomy 11 begins with Moses specifically addressing the adults since they had seen God’s greatness and power while their children had not (vv.2, 5, 7). Again, the word “ben” is used when referring to the children. Moses reminded the parents of the blessings they would receive if they obeyed, but also warned them, “Do not let your heart turn away from the Lord to worship other gods” (vv.16-17). God is wise, He knew that if parents refused to love and obey Him, they would not be able to pass His commands to future generations.

Therefore, Moses instructed the parents in almost an identical way as in chapter 6—to repeatedly teach their children at every opportunity (vv.18-20). It was not enough that they knew about God, but the goal was that the children would believe in Him and obey, ensuring future generations would flourish by knowing Him and following His decrees (v.21).

God articulated the rewards of obedience and the consequences of disobedience. This knowledge was to be passed on to subsequent generations with the goal of each following Him out of love.

Deuteronomy 31:10-13

For the fourth time, near the end of his sermon, Moses speaks to the parents about teaching the children. This time he included the role of the religious leaders in the training of children. At the end of every seven years, the year of release, they were to bring the people together and publicly read the Word of God.

Every seventh year all the people were to be gathered for the reading of God's Word – men, women and children, and foreigners. There were other feasts that women and children were excused from attending, but at this particular reading of the Law, everyone was to be in attendance (Henry, Matthew Henry Commentary of the Whole Bible n.d., 857-858).

The children were singled out for special mention because they did not know the Law (Gaebelein 1992, 193). Even the very young children were included in this gathering. In verses 12 and 13 two words are used for children, “ben” and “taph.” Taph refers to a child with a “tripping gait” (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong “2945: taph”) indicating very young children. This reading of the law may have included the Pentateuch which outlined God’s promise of a Savior.

This reading was done so the people, including children, would hear the Word of God, learn to fear God, and then observe what had been taught. Even if the parents were failing at their job of teaching, this ensured that at least once in their childhood, children would hear the God’s Word and have it explained to them. Moses urged them to conduct this special gathering so the children who had not been born would be able to know God.

As seen from all the Old Testament passages discussed, a predominant theme is transmitting the truth of God's works and laws to each generation. Parents' were to love God with all their heart, soul, and might and put their trust in Him alone. Failure to do so resulted in the loss of God's blessing and protection. The implication for today is that parents teach their children about having a relationship with God; this would include sharing the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Children need to teach how to have a relationship with God through faith in the Lord Jesus (Acts 16:31, John 3:16). Children will not believe if they have not heard, and they will not hear unless someone tells them (Rom. 10:14). Someone has said, "If we don't teach our children to follow Christ, the world will teach them not to." Once a child is saved, fathers need to teach their children to trust God and follow Him (Eph. 6:4). "The goal is an awe-inspiring faith in God passed from generation to generation (Deut. 6:2), only a person of faith can pass on the faith" (Stonehouse 2008, 25)

7. Discuss Psalm 78:1-8. In your answer include key thoughts from the passage as it relates to the parents as well as why this passage important when considering childhood conversion. (Provide 250-350 words.)

Asaph begins by exhorting the people to "give ear" or to hear what he is teaching (v.1); using the Hebrew word "azan" meaning to listen, or pay attention to (Bible Hub 2020, s.v. Strong "238: azan"). In this Psalm, "The past is held up as a mirror to the present generation. It has been one long succession of miracles of mercy met by equally continuous ingratitude, which has ever been punished by national calamities" (Farrar 2020, 203).

Verses four through six challenge Israel not to hide "these truths from our children" but tell of God's wonders and works; how He protected, provided, and blessed them. Knowing Israel's past was key to knowing God and being able to put Him first in obedience. God commanded that each generation would pass on His truth to the next (Deut. 4; 6; Ex.10; 12). "As the children were reached and as they set their hope in God, they would grow and, in turn, reach their children...if the children were neglected, not only would it mean their loss, but the loss of succeeding generations" (Doherty 2011, 47). God's purpose was that they would *put*

their trust in God, not forget His deeds and not be like their ancestors a stubborn and rebellious generation (vv.7-8).

Research shows only 4% of Generation Z teens have a biblical worldview (McDaniel 2018). Parents play a key role in the spiritual life of their children and must understand that the Gospel “is the power of God at work, saving *everyone* who believes” (Rom.1:16) including little children. Timothy was taught the Gospel from early childhood (brephos) which resulted in salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). If the next generation is to follow God, parents need to follow Asaph's exhortation. "Our children and grandchildren need to know what God has done in the past. It will help them set their hope on Him ...when we know our past, we can begin to understand how God deals with nations and people groups and individuals...we should not forget our heritage” (Swindoll 2017, 697).

8. Scripture teaches that the requirement for salvation is faith. However, some people say: “*Children are too young to reason; therefore, they cannot make a decision for salvation until adolescence.*” Refute this statement, including in your answer Scripture and other supporting evidence proving salvation is for all, regardless of age. (Provide 200-300 words.)

The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is for *anyone* (even children) who believes *by faith* in the finished work of Christ. (Ephesians 2:8, John 3:15, Acts 16:31).

This question often arises because of Piaget's studies. Ronald Goldman wrote, “...children should not even be exposed to scriptural truth before formal operations” (Wilhoit, James & John M. Dettoni 1995, 155). This reasoning ignores the work of the Holy Spirit whose role is to guide people (regardless of age) to the truth (John 16:13). Romans 10:17 says, “Faith comes by hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ.”

As noted earlier, the majority of adult believers came to faith before age 14. There is a danger of waiting until adolescence:

By waiting until a person is in his or her late adolescent or teenage years, the nature of influential attempt must be significantly different, because the spiritual foundation has already been formed integrated into the person's life. The older a person gets, the more difficult it is for him or her to replace existing moral and spiritual pillars (Barna 2003, 47).

These Christian leaders trusted Christ as children and continue(d) to walk with God throughout their lives: Franklin Graham – age 8, Anne Graham Lotz – age 3, James Dobson – age 3, Luis Palau -age 11 and Corrie ten Boom – age 5 (Quotes by Famous Christians 2008, 3).

“Children are more than minds. Salvation is incomprehensible. Scripture reminds us that it is received by faith. While not totally understanding the concepts, the child can respond by faith with trust in a God who is loved and who does understand” (Wilhoit, James & John M. Dettoni 1995, 155). “Faith supersedes cognitive, affective, social, and valuative boundaries. By the mystery of faith a person can be transformed without understanding completely, can be changed in will without having to work through a series of attitudinal changes (Wilhoit, James & John M. Dettoni 1995, 247). Even adults cannot understand everything about salvation, yet no one questions their ability to believe.

9. What does Scripture seem to teach about the “Age of Accountability (Comprehension)”?
(Provide 250-350 words.)

Scripture does not teach a certain age of accountability. Rather than an "age of accountability" it might be best to consider an "age of understanding." It has been said, "When a child is old enough to understand what sin is and old enough to disobey God and deliberately reject the voice of God...he is now accountable to God for his actions" (Doherty 2011, 190). Some children understand these concepts earlier than others.

Every child receives the Adamic nature (Rom. 5:12). Additionally, there are times in a child's life when he does not know left from right or right from wrong (Jonah 4:11; Deut.1:39). So, “What happens if a young child dies or because of mental deficiencies never understands?” David's sin with Bathsheba may shed some light on this.

When their child was sick because of God's judgment on sin, David prayed for seven days for the child to live. When the child died, he cleaned himself, worshiped God, and ate. His servants were amazed! David's response? “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, ‘Who knows 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 will not return to me" (2 Sam. 13:22-23). David wasn't talking about being with his child in the grave, he knew that one day he would go to be with God (Ps. 23:6; 16:9-11; 17:15). He was acknowledging that one day they would be together with God.

John MacArthur puts it this way,

There is no place in Scripture in which a person suffers the judgment of damnation based on anything other than sinful deeds, including the sinful *deed* of disbelief – a conscious, willful, intentional choice to disbelieve. I cannot help but conclude that our Lord graciously and freely receives all those who die in infancy—not on the basis of their innocence or their worthiness, but by His grace, made theirs through the atonement He purchased on the cross (MacArthur, *Safe in the Arms of God* 2003, 89).

10. Based on Scripture, your reading, and lectures what seems to be the Christian's responsibility regarding child evangelism today? (Provide 300-450 words.)

Deuteronomy and Psalms explicitly teach that believing parents had the responsibility to teach their children about God. They were to tell of His attributes and acts and were to follow His decrees. Each generation was to tell the next so that the children would put their hope in God and remain faithful to Him (Psa. 78:7-8). Deuteronomy uses terms that indicate this included the toddlers and continue throughout life. The Old Testament looked forward to the day when the Savior would come. The prophets spoke of this and children were included in their teaching. God intended that every generation would follow Him but that would only happen as the parents taught the children. If one generation neglected the teaching of God's Word and its application to their lives, then the next generation would not know God. This was evidenced in Judges and throughout Israel's history. In New Testament times, parents were also given the mandate to teach the children (Eph. 6:4). Jesus pointed out His care for them, that children can believe and will perish if not brought into the fold (Matt. 18:6-14; 19:14).

It has been seen 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" (Doherty 2011, v).

Therefore, believers, must make the most of every opportunity to teach children. Beginning at an early age, using appropriate language and illustrations, in formal and informal situations they should teach about Who God is, His love for them, His mighty acts, their sinful state and that Christ Jesus paid the price for their sin to bring them into a relationship with God. In nurturing children, Christians must rely on the Holy Spirit to bring about conviction, and when the child is ready, lead him or her to the Savior.

Kira was born with Cystic Fibrosis. At age 10 she died from complications of the disease. However, her parents are comforted that due to her exposure to the Gospel in their home, through Sunday school and church, attending a Christian school, and even 5-Day Clubs, Kira understood her need of a Savior and put her faith in Jesus at an early age. While there is much pain in the loss of their daughter, they know she is in the presence of the Lord, completely healed...and that one day they will see her again. Christians need to remember there is no guarantee that a child will live to adulthood, so "Amber alerts" should be sounded that the time to reach children is now.

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