

## A Theology of Child Conversion

### ► Why a theology of child conversion?

- ◆ Your theology determines:
  1. Your \_\_\_\_\_ of children's ministry
  2. Your \_\_\_\_\_ to children's ministry
  3. Your \_\_\_\_\_ about children's ministry
  4. Your \_\_\_\_\_ for children's ministry
  
- ◆ Other reasons to have a theology of child conversion
  1. It is \_\_\_\_\_ that children be reached with the Gospel.
  2. Children are \_\_\_\_\_ to God.
  3. Children are \_\_\_\_\_.
  4. Ministry to children is crucial for \_\_\_\_\_.



## Biblical Basis for Child Evangelism

### Matthew 18

#### ► Historical background

- ◆ In Jesus' time, the people were very involved in politics.
- ◆ They almost always thought of Christ as a political leader.
  1. Herod called Jesus the "King of the Jews."
  2. The Jews were waiting for the Messiah—they had the idea that he would be a political leader. Examples:
    - The temptations of Christ—If He would have thrown Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, they would have recognized Him as their Messiah and leader.
    - Feeding of the 5,000—The people wanted to make Him their King (John 6:15).
    - Feeding of the 4,000—The people wanted to make Him their King.
  3. Jesus was finishing His ministry in Galilee and was now on His final journey to Jerusalem.
    - These were some of the last teachings for His disciples—They didn't understand that He would soon die.
    - This instruction took place after the transfiguration—Peter, James, John
    - On the way to Capernaum the disciples were still focused on Christ being a political leader. They were arguing over the Kingdom of Heaven which was a political Kingdom to them.

#### ► \_\_\_\_\_ of the child (Matthew 18:1-5)

- ◆ **18:1**—The Question: \_\_\_\_\_

It could be that the disciples asked Jesus this question along the way and that He decided to wait to answer it when they arrived at Peter's mother's house (Mark 9:33).

#### **Jesus prepares to teach a vital truth to His disciples.**

- ◆ **18:2**—Jesus uses the child as an \_\_\_\_\_.
  1. He called a little child (**paidiön**)—"a little or young child." (From Homer onwards, "A child up to the age of seven") (*Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 283).
  2. Jesus stood the paidiön among the disciples and later took him in His arms. Mark is the only Gospel that says He took the child in his arms (Mark 9:36).

3. This was “a child who had no rights according to the law.” (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*)
4. A child in that society had a very low position.

**Jesus teaches a vital truth before answering the question.  
He lays down the REQUIREMENT to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.**

- ♦ **18:3**—“Unless you be converted as little children, you won’t enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”
  1. “Verily I say unto you”—“I tell you the truth”
  2. “Except ye be \_\_\_\_\_”
    - In the Greek, the word “converted” or “changed” is “**strepho**” which speaks of a change that man by himself cannot make. It means to be converted to God with all your heart, with your whole life—exactly what happens in conversion.
    - The Ryrie study Bible says it means “**to turn, an active and voluntary turning from sin.**” It is a supernatural change that only God can make!
    - This is the REQUIREMENT TO ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM—it is far more than a mental acknowledgement of the truth or intellectual assent.
  3. “And become as little children”—to be born again/regeneration
    - Jesus is not saying that children must become like adults to enter Heaven but adults must become as children.
    - Some people think you must revert back to your childhood in order to enter heaven.
    - Jesus is not talking about going back to a former childhood, but rather going on to a new life!
  4. “Ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven”—in the original Greek this is the strongest form of negation—“You shall not.”
    - The disciples were not manifesting the type of spirit that flows from a transformed life, the new life of God is us.
    - He told the disciples that a change in their thinking was necessary.

**What is the vital truth?**

The requirement to enter the kingdom of Heaven is \_\_\_\_\_

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**Children can be converted!**

Adults who have simple faith like children can be converted!

**All evangelism is child evangelism!**

- ♦ **18:4**—Jesus answers the question. He gave the disciples the requirements. Now He will give the answer to their question.
  1. “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”
  2. “Humbles” in the Greek means “to bring low” (tapeinoo).
  3. Humility is true greatness in the kingdom of Heaven—as this child is humble.
  4. Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven? (He who humbles himself like this paidíon).
    - Demonstrates childlike faith
    - Considers himself the least of all
    - Becomes the servant of all
    - Greatness in the Kingdom is not based on great works or words but on childlike humility of spirit. With humility comes childlike trust.
  
- ♦ **18:5**—To welcome a child is to welcome \_\_\_\_\_.
  1. “Welcome” or “Receive”—(dechomai in the Greek)—It means “to accept deliberately and readily” (*The Complete Word Study Bible and Reference CD*)
  2. How do we welcome a child?
    - Receive him with a \_\_\_\_\_
    - Show him \_\_\_\_\_
    - Teach him about \_\_\_\_\_
    - Care for him

### **To serve or minister to a child is to serve Christ Himself!**

#### **You not only do it for the child, but for the Lord!**

“To receive a little child in His name is to receive Him, because He identifies Himself with all who trust Him. He is not only the Savior of those who, because of wasted years in sin and debauchery, realize their need of forgiveness and cleansing, but He is also the Savior of the little ones who, in their comparative innocence, are attracted to Him because of His tender interest in them” (Henry Ironside, *Notes on Matthew*, p. 223).

### ► **The \_\_\_\_\_ of offending a child** (Matthew 18:6-10)

- ♦ **18:6**—Jesus gave a stern warning concerning anyone who might place a stumbling block before one of these “little ones” who believe in Him
  1. The word “little ones” is “\_\_\_\_\_”—small children
    - It is the Greek word from which we get the word, “microscopic.”

Little children can and do believe in Jesus!

2. “Believe” (pisteuo)—same Greek word as in \_\_\_\_\_.  
  - It means “to have faith in, to trust” (*The Complete Word Study Bible and Reference CD*)
4. “Causes to sin” translates the verb “skandalizo” to offend, or cause to fall (a verb Matthew uses 13 times).

The Jews considered that the worst sin one could commit was teaching another to sin” (William Barclay, *Commentary on Matthew*, p. 186)

- How do we cause a child to stumble?

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4. “Drown in the depths of the sea” (Barclay)
  - “Drowning was a common punishment in Greek and Roman society.” (*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Frank Gabelein, p. 398)
  - The Jew was afraid of the sea. To drown in the depth of the sea was the worst thing that could happen to the Jew.
5. “A millstone”—“ass-stone”
  - Most millstones were hand tools for domestic use where the woman would grind her grain. The top stone turned on top of the bottom one. The woman could turn it with little effort.
  - The type of millstone referred to here was the “mulos onikos”—It weighed tons so that a donkey had to turn it.

♦ **18:7-9**—Instruction concerning offenses

1. Jesus continues the discussion by talking about those who cause offenses (v. 7)
  - “Offenses” means things that will produce sin; things that will cause us to sin or temptations to induce others to sin (*Barnes Notes, The Gospels*, p.185).
  - Jesus was warning His hearers not to be among them.
2. God’s judgment would fall on them.
  - “Woe”
  - “Eternal fire” (v. 8)
  - “The fire of hell” (v. 9)
3. Jesus was saying that one must remove whatever offends.

- ♦ **18:10**—Underlines the great importance of the child—“Little ones must be treated with respect.”
  1. “Don’t despise”—(“kataphroneo” in the Greek)—means “to think little of” (*Bible Companion Series CD*)
  2. “Their angels in heaven always see the face of my father in heaven.”
  3. The Jews had great beliefs in angels. Each country had its own angel—angels to minister to the little ones for their good.
 

“The expression intimates, as some think, the special dignity and honor of the little ones’ angels; the prime ministers of state are said to ‘see the King’s face,’” as if the strongest angels had the charge of the weakest saints.” (*Matthew Henry Commentary*, p. 256)
  4. In God’s eyes the little ones are so important that their angels have access to the intimate presence of God!

▶ \_\_\_\_\_ **Savior** (Matthew 18:11-13)

- ♦ Parable of the Lost Sheep—It is said that this parable is the simplest parable that Jesus told. He gave the disciples this illustration in order to demonstrate the importance God attaches to little children. The Good Shepherd is seeking the lost sheep!
- ♦ The parable shows:
  1. \_\_\_\_\_—The shepherd left the ninety-nine to search for the one that was lost.
  2. A love that \_\_\_\_\_—He went out in search of the lost sheep.
  3. A love that \_\_\_\_\_—He rejoices when it is found; all heaven rejoices over every lost sheep which is saved.

▶ \_\_\_\_\_ **of the Father** (Matthew 18:14)

- ♦ God’s will for children
  1. “Not the will of your Father”—God’s burning concern and desire.
  2. “Little ones”—Mikros
  3. “Perish”—same Greek word in John 3:16 (“To be lost eternally”)
 

(Parallel passage Luke 15:3-7 clearly refers to lost sheep).

It is not the ultimate desire of God that any child should perish.

♦ Three reasons why we should not despise the children

1. The angels in Heaven are ministering to the little ones (they don't despise them).
2. The Son of God left His glorious home in Heaven to save them.
3. The will of the Father is that **they should know Christ and be saved.**



## Why Do We in CEF Believe Matthew 18 Refers to Literal Children?

### ① Jesus begins a valuable teaching session for his disciples using a literal child as an object lesson (v. 2).

- A. The Greek word used in Matt. 18:2-5 is “paidíon” which means “a little or young child either male or female.”

Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers. 1991, p. 1089.

Vine, W. E., Merrill F. Unger; William White Jr. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. p. 100.

“A little child up to seven years of age”

Brown, Colin, editor. *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* Vol. 1. Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library. 1986, p. 283.

- B. Jesus clearly lays down the requirements to enter the Kingdom of Heaven in verse 3.

Converted—“strepho” “To turn; an active and voluntary turning from sin to God” (*Ryrie Study Bible*)—“a supernatural change that man himself cannot make by himself.”

1. The disciples had to be changed displaying simple faith and humility as little children have.
2. Adults must become like children in order to be converted or saved.
3. If adults do not become as little children, they will not ever enter the Kingdom of Heaven. (Strongest form of negation “you will not”)

- C. After dealing with the basic issue regarding the requirements to enter the kingdom, Jesus answers their question about “who is the greatest.”

Although little thought was given to children, Jesus did not overlook them. He told the disciples that to welcome a little child in his name is to welcome Him. (v. 5)

True greatness is not based on great works or words, but on a condition of helplessness and a low estate.

### ② With the “paidíon” still in his arms, Jesus gave a stern warning about placing a stumbling block before “one of these little ones who believe in Him.” (v. 6)

- A. The Greek word “mikros” is used in Scripture to mean “little or small” in size quantity, number or dignity. It is used with regard to station or age meaning small, young (Matt 18:6, 10, 14; Mark 9:42; Acts 8:10, 26:22; Heb 8:11). It also speaks figuratively of dignity or authority meaning low or humble.

B. The Greek word for “believe” is “pisteuo.” It is used in John 3:16 and Acts 16:31. This word is used for saving faith throughout the New Testament.

♦ Jesus assumes that little children can and do savingly believe in Him.

**③ Although some commentaries change the emphasis from actual children to new believers from verses 6-14, because “mikros” also refers to size and age, there is no reason not to believe Jesus was still referring to literal children.**

He still has the “paidi6n” in His arms. He may have broadened his audience to include “new believers” but this does not disregard his emphasis on believing children.

**④ From a hermeneutical perspective, individual verses of Scripture must be interpreted according to their context.**

A. Matthew 18 deals with the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus began his discourse with a paidi6n (young child) in his arms to illustrate the requirement to even enter the kingdom—to be converted and become as little children.

B. In the light of the entire passage of Matthew 18, it must be concluded that Jesus is referring to literal children in verses 6-14, in order to teach his disciples a lesson about conversion (the requirement to enter the Kingdom of God) and humility (true greatness in the Kingdom of God). He could have been referring to those who were weak in the faith or new believers, but in this context He was referring to little children.

1. Little children can believe in Jesus as Savior (v. 6).
2. Little children that believe in Jesus as Savior should not be offended or caused to fall (v. 6).
3. Little children have been entrusted to the care of a specific group of angelic beings (their angels) who are in constant touch with the heavenly Father (vv. 10-11).
4. Little children can perish [be eternally lost] (v. 14).

**⑤ Respected Bible commentaries and theologians view Matthew as referring to literal children.**

A. *Bible Knowledge Commentary* (By Dallas Seminary Faculty) New Testament

“In response Jesus took a little child (paid6n), who had no rights according to the Law, and stood him in their midst.

He told the disciple a *change* in their thinking was necessary. Greatness *in the kingdom* was not based on great works or words, but on childlike humility of spirit. Their service needed to be directed toward people, for Jesus spoke about welcoming *a little child . . .* in His name.

Little thought was directed in those days toward children, but Jesus did not overlook them. In fact, He gave a stern warning concerning any who might place a stumbling block before one of these *little* ones who believe in Him. (Interestingly little children can—and do—believe in Jesus!) p. 61.

“The disciples were reminded of the value the Lord places on these *little ones* (18:6, 14). Children are important to God. It may be God has entrusted the care of little children to a specific group of His angelic beings (their angels) who are in constant touch with the heavenly *Father*” (cf. Ps. 91:11; Acts 12:15).

18:12-14 (Luke 15:3-7) “In order to demonstrate the importance God attaches to little children, the Lord gave the disciples an illustration. Suppose a *man who owns 100 sheep* suddenly discovers only 99 are present. *Will he not leave them and search for the one until he finds it?*”

“*In the same way* God (your *Father in heaven*; cf. Matt. 18:10) is concerned about these little ones (cf. vv. 6, 10) and does not want to lose any of them. Great care must be exercised to avoid all offense.”

B. *The Preacher’s Homiletic Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974.

Verse 5: “Whether literally or only morally a little child, our Saviour had reference, we doubt not, to both phases of childhood.” p. 426

Verse 14: The love of God for little children

- I. A love of utter unselfishness
- II. A love of delight in them
- III. A love of compassion towards them
- IV. A love of trust in the almost infinite capacities of children  
(T. Gasquoine. p. 435)

C. *The Pulpit Commentary* Vol. XV St. Matthew. Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers.

Verse 5: “‘One such child’—primarily, Jesus refers to children, pure and confiding as the one he had placed in the midst; but his words are applicable to all who have the child like spirit and character, the graces which he specially loves and rewards.” p. 208

Verse 10: “The Saviour here returns to the subject of children, whether literally or metaphorically so called, and proclaims the high appreciation which is their due.” p. 210

D. *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew* H. A. Ironside. New York: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., Bible Truth Depot, 1948.

Matt. 18:1-14

“To receive a little child in His name is to receive Him, because He identifies Himself with all who trust Him. He is not only the Saviour of those who, because of wasted years in sin and debauchery, realize their need of forgiveness and cleansing, but He is also the Saviour of the little ones who, in their comparative innocence, are attracted to Him because of His tender interest in them.” p. 223

Verse 6: “Nor did He ever speak more sternly to anyone than to whoso should cause one of these little ones to stumble, who believed in Him . . . Better to mutilate oneself by cutting off a hand or a foot than to be guilty of using either physical member to point or lead one of these children astray.” p. 224

- E. *Through the Bible*, Vol. IV, J. Vernon McGee. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1983.  
Matt. 18:5-6

“The word offend means ‘to cause to stumble,’ that is to lead into sin. Jesus warns against it in strong language; it seems to me that what He is doing in this section is making the evangelism of children a divine imperative. He gives top priority to winning children to Christ. I commend anyone who is working with children today. There is nothing as important as that.” p. 99

- F. *Matthew Henry’s Commentary in One Volume*, Edited Rev. Leslie F. Church. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960.

Regarding verse 10—“Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones.’ We may understand it literally of little children; of them Christ was speaking (vv. 2, 4). Or figuratively; true but weak believers are these little ones, who are like little children, the lambs of Christ’s flock.” p. 1295

“The gracious design of Christ concerning them (v. 1) for the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost. This is a reason, first, why the little ones’ angels have such a charge concerning them, and attend upon them; it is in pursuance of Christ’s design to save them. Secondly, they are not to be despised; because Christ came to save them, to save them that are lost.” p. 1295

## Mark 10:13-16 (Matthew 19:13; Luke 18:15-17)

### ► Introduction to Mark 10:13-16

- ◆ This is one of the clearest passages in Scripture that shows the love that emanated from the life of the Lord Jesus.

### ► The scenario

- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 13)  
People—mothers, fathers and others—were bringing children (paidíons) to Jesus—  
Ranging from babies to preteens (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 149)
  1. Luke 18:15—“Brephos” is used meaning “infants and young children”.
  2. In using brephos instead of paidíon in Luke 18:15, Luke was perhaps thinking of babies—same word as “babe leaped in her womb.”
  3. Were bringing children that “Jesus might touch them.”
  4. The disciples rebuked them—tried to keep them from coming to Jesus. They thought the children were unimportant and an interruption. They placed more importance on adult matters than ministering to children.
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 14)—Jesus was \_\_\_\_\_.
  1. This is the only occasion where the word “aganakteo,” which implies anger was used in reference to Jesus. It means Jesus was “much displeased”; carries with it a sense of grief.” (*Complete Word Study Bible an Reference CD*)
  2. Jesus’ anger suggests the seriousness of excluding children from the blessings of the Kingdom of God.
  3. Jesus issues a double command as He rebukes the disciples. **He overrides the disciples’ orders to the people.**
    - “Let (literally “start allowing”) the children come to me”
    - “Do not stop them” (literally “stop preventing them”)
  4. Jesus had just talked to the disciples in Matthew 18 about the value of the child and the disciples failed the test! No wonder He was angry!

## 5. “For of such is the Kingdom of God”

- Jesus couldn’t have made a more emphatic statement of children’s reception into the Kingdom of God (*The Child In Christian Thought*, p. 38)
- This does not imply that all children are automatically saved or included in the Kingdom of Heaven. You can’t build a doctrine on one verse.
- “Of such”—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. (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 150)
- “All, including children, who come to Jesus in childlike trust and dependence, are given free access to Jesus.” (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 150)

The *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* says, “The term *such* may suggest “these and other (literal) children” or “these and others who, though not literally children, share the characteristics of children” (p. 284).

◆ \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 15)—Receive the Kingdom of God as a child

1. Not only are children recipients, they are also models of entering the Kingdom of God!

**Definition:** Kingdom of God/heaven (synonyms)—It means “the rule or reign of God over His creation. It is God’s present spiritual rule in people’s lives.” God’s rule invaded the world in the person and activity of Jesus. One must enter the Kingdom by faith in Him—individual repentance and faith (John 3:3).

2. “This claim is striking, for nowhere in Jewish literature are children put forward as models for adults, and in a Greco-Roman setting, comparison with children was highly insulting.” (*Children in Christian Thought*, p. 39, Judith M. Gundry-Volf)

- 3 The requirement for entering the Kingdom of God is

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

All of these are childlike qualities.

**Note:** It is not necessary for a child to become as an adult before he can come into the Kingdom of God—the adult must be converted and become as a little child (Matthew 18:3).

- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 16)—He took the children in his arms and blessed them.
  1. He blessed (Greek: “kateulogei”)—This is a beautiful picture—does not occur in any other part of the NT—“He blessed them fervently again and again.”
  2. This was the overflowing of Jesus’ divine love for children.

**Question:**

**How can we minister to our fellow believers so that this type of incident doesn’t occur in our churches and Christian circles today?**

### **Too Little**

Said a precious little boy to his father one bright day,  
“May I give myself to Jesus, let Him wash my sins away?”  
“Oh, my son, but you’re too little, wait until you older grow.  
Bigger folk, it’s true, do need Him, but little ones are safe, you know.”

Said the father to his little boy as a storm was coming on,  
“Are the sheep all safely sheltered safe within the fold, my son?”  
“All the big ones are, my father, but the lambs, I let them go,  
For I didn’t think it mattered, little ones are safe, you know.”

Oh, my brother, oh, my sister! Have you, too, made this mistake?  
Little hearts that now are yielding may be hardened! Then—too late.  
Before the evil days come near them, “Let the children come to Me  
And forbid them not,” said Jesus, “For such shall my kingdom be.”

Anonymous

## John 21:15-17

### ► The question (v. 15)

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### ► Jesus' response

Feed my \_\_\_\_\_ . (v. 15)

“Feed” means \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(bóske)

“The best of the church are none too good for this work. Do not think because you have other service to do that therefore you should take no interest in this form of holy work, but kindly, according to your opportunities, stand ready to help the little ones, and to cheer those whose chief calling it is to attend to them. To us all this message comes, “Feed My lambs.” To the minister, and to all who have any knowledge of the things of God, the commission is given. See to it that you look after the children that are in Christ Jesus. Peter was a leader among believers, yet he must feed the lambs.” *Come Ye Children* by Charles Spurgeon, p. 5

Feed my \_\_\_\_\_ . (v. 16)

“Feed” means \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(poímaine)

This word has the “sense of governing, caring for, guiding, protecting—the kind of faithful vigilance which a shepherd uses to guide his flock and to make provision against their wants and dangers.” (*Barnes Notes Commentary*, p. 383)

Feed my \_\_\_\_\_ . (v. 17)

“Feed” means \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(bóske)

“Jesus repeated the commandment using “bóske” (feed) because He wanted to make sure that the feeding is included with the shepherding” (Spiros Zodhiates, *Word Study Dictionary*, p.345).



## Greek Words for “Children” New Testament

Paidión	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “A little or young child either male or female.”</li> <li>• A child or children recently born, a baby or infant (Matt. 18:2, 3, 4, 5; 19:13, 14; Mark 10:13-15; Luke 18:16, 17).</li> <li>• It is used figuratively of believers who are deficient in spiritual understanding (1 Cor. 14:20).</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words</i>, W. E. Vine, Merrill R. Unger, William White, Jr.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “A child under seven years of age” (<i>Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> Vol. 1. p. 283).</li> </ul>
Mikros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaks of magnitude (Matt. 13:32; Mark 4:31); of stature (Luke 19:3; Ezek. 17:6); of age meaning small, young, not grown up (Acts 8:10; 26:22; Heb. 8:11; Rev. 11:18; 13:16; 20:12); in the comparative degree meaning less, younger (Mark 15:40).</li> <li>• Speaks of time (John 7:33; 12:35).</li> <li>• Speaks figuratively of dignity, authority, meaning low, humble (Matt. 10:42; 18:6, 10, 14; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2).</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament</i>, Zodhiates, Spiros. Chattanooga: AMG Publishing, 1992. p. 986.</p> <p>Mikros “little, small” is used of persons with regard to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) station or age (Mark 15:40 of James “the less”) possibly referring to age (Matt. 18:6, 10, 14; Mark 9:42).</li> <li>2) rank or influence (Matt. 10:42; Acts 8:10; 26:22).</li> <li>3) size (James 3:5).</li> <li>4) time (John 7:33; 12:35; Rev. 6:11).</li> </ol> <p>“Small” as in Rev. 11:18; 13:16; 19:5 20:12.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words</i>, W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr. p. 373. “Little”</p>
Paidáron	<p>A diminutive of país, a boy. A little boy, lad (Matt. 11:16; John 6:9; Gen. 22:5, 12; 42:22; 2 Sam. 12:18). Perhaps a boy under twelve years of age (p.1088).</p>

Bréphos	Babe, an unborn child (Luke 1:41,44); a newborn child or an older infant (Luke 2:12, 16; 18:15; Acts 7:19; 2 Tim. 3:15—meaning from infancy, from the cradle). <i>The Complete Word Study Dictionary, Spiros Zodhiates. p. 349</i>
Teknión	“A little child.” Diminutive of téknon. Used only figuratively in the new testament and always in the plural teknía (1 John 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21).
Téknon	A child, male or female, son or daughter (Matt 10:21; Luke 1:7; Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:2; Titus 1:6; 2 John 1:4).

**Note:** This is not an exhaustive list of all Greek terms for “children” in the New Testament.

## The Early Church and Paul's Teachings

### The Letter to the Ephesians

▶ **Addressed to the** \_\_\_\_\_ (1:1)

- Not a sinless person, but a saved sinner
- Includes **all** believers regardless of age

▶ **Directed to** \_\_\_\_\_ (6:1)

- “Children” (teknon)—small son or daughter
- “Obey” (hupakouo)—to listen, attend and so, to submit. To hear as under another with listening and attentive ears, to give obedient heed
- “In the Lord”—It is a Christian duty to obey their parents promptly, habitually and carefully, even non-Christian parents.
- “Right” (dikaion)—just, righteous

▶ **Conclusion:** \_\_\_\_\_

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### The Letter to the Colossians

▶ **Addressed to the** \_\_\_\_\_ (1:2)

- “Faithful” (pistois)
- “In everything”—to be complete

▶ **Directed to** \_\_\_\_\_ (3:20)

- “teknon”—little sons and daughters
- “obey your parents”—a direct command
- “In everything”—complete obedience
- “for this pleases the Lord”—why should they do this?

▶ **Conclusion:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## The Letter to Titus

### ► Qualifications for the appointment of \_\_\_\_\_ (1:6-9)

- Blameless
- Husband of one wife
- Faithful children not accused of riot or unruly

### ► Qualifications for the children of elders (1:6)

- Children (teknon) of elders must be \_\_\_\_\_. Greek: “tekna pista”—“faithful children” but “believing children” is intended here, referring to those who are old enough to have made a personal decision (Gaebelien, Frank, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p.430)

**Note:** If his children remained pagan (unbelievers), the father’s ability to lead others would be thrown into question

- Children of elders must not be “open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.”  
As believers, the children must fulfill the ethical requirements of the Christian life

### ► Conclusion: \_\_\_\_\_

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## 2 Timothy 3:14-15

### ► Learning from childhood (3:14-15)

- Timothy was to continue on in what had been learned at an early age.
- The child Timothy and his teachers

“This work was quickened by a saving faith. The Scriptures do not save, but they are able to make a man wise unto salvation. Children may know the Scriptures, and yet not be children of God. Faith in Jesus Christ is that grace which brings immediate salvation. Many dear children are called of God so early that they cannot precisely tell when they were converted; but they were converted.”

—Spurgeon and Children

### ► Conclusion: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Old Testament Passages

### Deuteronomy 4:1-10

#### ▶ **The pleadings of Moses** (4:1-2, 37)

- The Israelites were to do the Word of God, not only to hear it.
- They were not to add to the law. They were to obey it as God gave it.
- God's love should prompt their obedience.

#### ▶ **The discussion of Moses** (4:3-6)

- Moses discussed the results of obedience and disobedience.
- Israel was to be a witness to the world.
- Their obedience and faithfulness to God would cause other nations to hear these statutes.
- If they would not obey, God's judgment would be on them.

#### ▶ **Teach the children** (4:9-10)

- God gave the Israelites a teaching ministry.
- The greatest undertaking of any nation is the education of the young.
- They were to teach the word of God and His works.
- They were to assemble the people so they could learn and teach their children.

### Deuteronomy 6:1-9

#### ▶ **Obey commands and decrees** (6:1-3)

- Obey so future generations learn to fear (reverence) God.
- Obey so they would enjoy long life.
- Obey so things would go well in the promised land.
- Obey so the people would increase in number.

#### ▶ **Love the Lord your God** (6:4-5)

##### **The first and greatest commandment**

- Love with all your heart—the center of feeling and affection.
- Love with all your soul—feelings and emotions.
- Love with all your strength—with all your being.

## ▶ **Learn and keep the Scriptures** (6:6)

### **The second commandment**

- The words had to be in the hearts of the parents first through personal experience.
- Then the people could teach their children.
- The parents were the examples.

## ▶ **Labor for the Souls of the Children** (6:7-9)

### **The third commandment**

- God's Word should be discussed with the children everywhere.
- Parents should take advantage of all occasions to talk with their children about divine things.
- God's commandments were to be written in various places so they would always be visible to children and adults alike.

## **Deuteronomy 11:18-21**

### ▶ **Seek God**

- Fix God's words in your heart and mind (v. 18).
- Teach the children about God at all times and places (v. 19).
- Keep the written word visible in your house (v. 20).
- God will use His word to bless both you and your children (v. 21).

## **Deuteronomy 31:12-13**

### ▶ **God's aim for those teaching children**

- Gather them together.
- That they might hear.
- That they might learn.
- That they would fear the Lord God.
- That they would observe to do all the words of the law.
- This message should be transmitted to future generations. This is God's plan for the extension of His work.

## Psalm 78:1-8

### ▶ God's hand in Israel's history

- Call to listen—Important! Listen!
- Tell the things of the past to future generations

### Things to tell upcoming generations

- The praiseworthy deeds of the Lord
- His power “strength in battle” in days past
- The wonders He has done

### Reasons the children must be told about God

- So they will put their trust in Him
- So they will not forget His deeds
- So they will not be stubborn and rebellious like their fathers
- So they will be loyal and faithful to God

# Philosophies of Childhood Conversion

## I. 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.”*

### A. Where did this philosophy originate?

1. The Passover – the blood protected the entire household (Ex. 12:12-13)
2. Infant baptism – By the year A.D. 400 the doctrine of original sin came to justify infant baptism

Acts 2:38-39 and 1 Corinthians 7:14-16 are used to support infant baptism.

### B. Problems with this view:

1. The child is not lost.
2. The child is safe under the covenant by belonging to a Christian family.
3. Children need to be taught about the Christian life although they are not believers.
4. Children need to wait until adolescence in order to make a decision of faith.
5. How does this relate to children not living in a Christian home?



## II. 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.”*

Emphasis is placed on a good program of Christian education in the church.

### A. Where did this philosophy originate?

1. Originated from Horace Bushnell’s book *Christian Nurture* published in 1847.
2. Passages from Deuteronomy are used to support this type of teaching – parents to teach children.

### B. Problems with this view:

1. Children without Christ are spiritually dead and cannot comprehend spiritual truths (1 Corinthians 2:14). They cannot form Christian habits and attitudes until they have new life in Christ.
2. Children will in time just come to Christ on their own.
3. Emphasis is placed on good programming without consistently and intentionally sharing the Gospel.

### III. 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.”*

A. Where did this philosophy originate?

1. Jean Piaget (1896-1980)
  
2. Piaget developed a very complex theory about how an individual develops intellectually

#### **Four stages or periods of growth**

- a. Sensorimotor Period: Birth to 2 years
- b. Preoperational Period: Approximately 2 to 7 years
- c. Concrete Operations Period: Approximately 7-11 years
- d. Formal Operations Period: Beginning around age 12

B. Problems with this view:

1. Children cannot make a decision for Christ until they have reached a certain level of intellectual development
  
2. Younger children cannot understand symbolism, therefore they cannot understand the concepts involved in salvation (i.e. grace, trusting Jesus, believing, salvation, etc.)
  
3. The working of the Holy Spirit is ignored in this philosophy (John 16:13 – The Spirit of truth will guide into all truth).

Child Development Institute Chart of Piaget’s *Stages of Cognitive Development* can be found at [www.childdevelopmentinfo.com/development/piaget.shtml](http://www.childdevelopmentinfo.com/development/piaget.shtml) (Accessed 07/01/2013)

## IV. Child Evangelism Philosophy

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

This is the position held by *Child Evangelism Fellowship* as well as many Bible-believing churches.

### A. Arguments to support this view:

1. The biblical requirement for salvation is childlike faith (Mat. 18:3), not reasoning.
2. The intervention of the Holy Spirit regardless of intellectual development (Jn. 16:8).
3. The changed lives of countless children who have made solid decisions to receive Christ and have remained faithful.

### B. Issues to Resolve

1. Original sin – everyone is born into the world with a sin nature (Rom. 5:12).
2. When is a child accountable for his sin before God?

### C. Defense of Child Evangelism

1. Children are lost and need to be saved (Ro.3:23, 5:12; Ps. 51:5, 58:3)
2. Jesus’ command – Mark 16:15
3. Jesus’ affirmation that children can believe in Him
4. The biblical requirement for salvation is childlike **faith**, not reasoning
5. Personal testimony of your conversion experience as a child
6. Testimonies of others who received Christ as children
7. Biblical theology of salvation is for all mankind