

Why Child Evangelism is Valid

I **want my two young sons to have bland testimonies** - no sensational stories about rescue from drugs, perversion and rebellion.

I want it to be natural for them to trust the Lord Jesus early for salvation and then to trust Him for everything thereafter.

I believe in the validity of child evangelism.

For one thing, statistics are on its side. 19 out of 20 Christians receive Christ before the age of 25. After that, the odds against conversion become astronomical.

Early conversion saves not only a soul, but potentially points an entire life toward service to God and man. In 15 years of ministry I've met no one who is sorry he came to Christ early in life. I've encountered many who are sorry they didn't.

The late evangelist D.L. Moody was once asked how the night's meeting had gone.

"We had two and a half conversions," he replied.

"You mean two adults and one child?"

"No," he said, "two children and one adult. The adult has only half his life left."

Shortly before his second-century martyrdom at age 95, Polycarp said, "86 years have I served the Lord." 18th Bible expositor Matthew Henry was converted at the age of six, hymn writer Isaac Watts at nine.

W.A. Criswell, pastor of the large First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, was saved when he was eight. Evangelist Stephen Olford came to Christ on his 7th birthday.

65% of those enrolled in America's largest seminary Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary were converted before their teens.

Children are reached more easily than adults. Jay Kesler, president of Youth for Christ International, has well said, "Any evangelism after high school isn't evangelism. It's really salvage."

Young children are notably tender. Their sincerity is never in doubt. Their heart attitudes contribute to genuine conversion. And Jesus told adults that they must become as children to experience the new birth (Matt. 18:3).

True, children who make an early profession of faith sometimes struggle with assurance and make a second public commitment later. They often say, "I didn't know what I was doing the first time." More likely, however, the personal worker attending the child didn't know what he was doing.

We need not fully understand the Gospel to be saved; we need only believe and receive it. What adult fully comprehends the rationale or the magnitude of redemption?

Some argue that children are unable to stay true to their commitment. Yet the late English preacher Charles Spurgeon noted, "Out of a church of 2,700 members, I have never had to exclude a single one who was received while yet a child. Teachers and superintendents should not merely believe in the possibility of early conversion, but in the frequency of it."

Child evangelism assists in the formation of character. The Bible clearly teaches that man's only capability for good lies in the imputed righteousness of Christ. We do not expect unconverted adults to act like Christians. The same should be true for children.

Christians seem to be the only ones who believe they should wait to influence children's minds. Advertisers don't wait. Child abusers don't wait. Neither do humanist educators, false religions and cults, or Satan.

The church that reaches its children has a better chance of reaching its adults. Often newly-converted children win their parents and grandparents to the Lord. Those children grow up to be adults who can nurture their own families to faith in Jesus Christ.

Lest we forget, Christianity is always just one generation from extinction. We must reach the coming generation with the Gospel.

The late G. Campell Morgan, for many years pastor of London's Westminster Chapel, said that the church that always seeks the child is the church that is "seeking the Kingdom ... A vision of the desire for the Kingdom of God is the master passion in all work for children."

Scripture supports child evangelism. Fathers are given a mandate to bring up their children, "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). No one can be nurtured in the faith until first converted.

A prerequisite for elders in Titus 1:6 is that they have faithful children. A literal Greek translation reads, "having believing children." Paul believed not only in the possibility of childhood conversion, but also in the necessity of it for elders' families.

Most important, the Lord Jesus believes in child evangelism. In Matthew 18:1-14, He pronounces a stinging curse on anyone who offends a child who believes on Him. He considers it possible for little ones "to believe in Me" (v.6).

Did He know more than modern educators do about a child's "volitional ability"? Indeed.

The same phrase for "believe in Me" is 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 eternal life."

In Mark 10:14, which G. Campbell Morgan described as the "Magna Charta of Children," the Lord commands,

"Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not:
for such is the kingdom of God."

It is a double imperative - as strong as He can make it. "Allow them to come - do not forbid them."

Jesus also qualifies what children should come. Two major Greek words, *teknon* and *paidon*, are translated "child". *Teknon* simply means child or youth. *Paidon* signifies a very little or young child, or even a newborn infant (as in John 16:21). Here in Mark, the Lord used the word *paidon*: "Suffer the little children (i.e., even the very small children) to come unto Me."

It is as if He foresees the whole "age of accountability" controversy. In that context, He says, "Let them come ... stop forbidding them."

In 1953 a preschool child attended a vacation Bible school in Tulsa. After hearing that Jesus had died to take his sins away, the child understood enough to want the Lord to do that for him. That summer morning, he asked Him to forgive his sins, to come into his life and be his Savior and Lord.

Guided by a sensitive counsellor and the reinforcement of loving parents, the child never struggled with doubt.

Today, 30 years old, he looks back on that simple transfer of trust as the best decision he has ever made. He has no regrets that he came to Jesus early, but gratitude that he has walked with Him almost all of his life.

I know. I was that child.

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