

Theology of evangelizing children: Suggestions and Warnings

Christ said, “Suffer the little children to come unto me.” This quote often accompanies the surveys that have been done to show that the majority of Christians received Christ before the age of 18. While believing those statistics, it is often troublesome to see many childhood professions result in so little spiritual fruit.

Perhaps one reason why there can be some who profess and yet do not possess Christ is because of shallow teaching, preaching, and methodology that ultimately reduces the glory, mystery, and wonder of God’s Work of Salvation to simply praying a “repeat after me” type prayer.

The answer to this issue is not to share the gospel less but, to explain and preach the gospel in a more clear and thorough manner. The gospel is still the power of God unto salvation.

I. We are not to withhold the gospel from children.

Fear should never cause us to disobey Scripture. Some out of a fear of false professions would rather minimize the gospel invitation from those that are “too young.” The biblical text opposes such a view.

- **Matthew 18:3-4** *And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*
- **Mark 10:14-15** *But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.*
- **2 Timothy 3:14-15** *But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

II. We are to thoroughly communicate the essential elements of the gospel to children.

What is the core of gospel truth? What must be communicated in gospel presentations regardless of form? Let’s look at the following two passages and determine the essence of the gospel.

- **1 Corinthians 15:1-6** *Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also*

ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

- **Luke 24:46-48** *And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things.*

The essential aspects of the gospel can be organized around the answers to five questions.

- 1) **Who is Jesus?** He is the Christ, a title packed with all the theological significance of the promised Messiah.
- 2) **What has He done?** He suffered, died, buried, and rose again.
- 3) **Why did He do it?** Christ died for our sins. The essential outcome of the gospel is forgiveness of sin.
- 4) **How do we know?** Prophecy and eyewitnesses of the resurrection are essential proof.
- 5) **How are we to respond?** We are to respond with faith and repentance. We are to be converted

For further study:

1) Who is Jesus?

- He is God's only begotten son – John 3:16
- The titles and names of God the Father are claimed and given to God the Son.
- Proof texts:
 - i. **Matthew 16:15-17** *He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*
 - ii. **1 Timothy 6:13-15** *I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;*
 - iii. **Revelation 17:14** *These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.*

- iv. **Revelation 19:16** *And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.*
- v. **Psalm 2:7** *I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.*
- vi. **Matthew 1:18** *Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.*
- vii. **Matthew 3:17** *And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*
- viii. **Matthew 26:63-64** *But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*
- ix. **Romans 1:4** *And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:*
- x. **Isaiah 40:3** *The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*
- xi. **John 1:23** *He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. (Isaiah 40:3 prophecy fulfilled).*
- xii. **Isaiah 45:23** *I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.*
- xiii. **Philippians 2:9-11** *Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*
- xiv. **2 Corinthians 4:4** *In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*
- xv. **Colossians 1:15** *Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:*

2) Why did He do it?

- Jesus Christ came to die for sinners.
- Proof texts:
 - i. **Matthew 1:21** *And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.*
 - ii. **John 1:29** *The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*

- iii. **John 3:17** *For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*
- iv. **Hebrews 7:27** *Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.*
- v. **1 John 1:7** *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*
- vi. **1 John 3:5** *And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.*
- All of mankind is born with inherent sin.
- Proof texts:
 - i. **Rom 5:6-10** *For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.*
 - ii. **Weak** – *without strength powerless, Christ died*
 - iii. **Ungodly** - *Christ died for the ungodly*
 - iv. **Sinners** - *while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*
 - v. **Enemies** – *we were enemies, we were reconciled to God*

3) How do we know?

- The Old Testament includes about sixty different prophecies, with more than 300 references, of the coming of the Messiah.
- It was through the fulfillment of these prophecies that Israel was told she would be able to recognize the true Messiah when He came.
- The four gospels record several times when Jesus said that He was fulfilling a prophecy of the Old Testament.
- Proof texts:
 - i. **Luke 24:27** *And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.*
 - ii. **John 5:46** *For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.*
 - iii. **Acts 3:18** *But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.*
 - iv. **Acts 17:2-3** *And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and*

alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

- v. **1 Corinthians 15:3-4** *For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:*

4) What is our response to be?

- The call of the Gospel is to be converted.
- **Matthew 18:3** – *And said, Verily say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*
- Conversion is our willing **response** to the gospel call, in which we sincerely repent of sins and place our trust in Christ for salvation.
- True Conversion is to “Turn FROM Sin and Turn TO Christ.”
- This involves Faith and Repentance.
 - i. There are verses that call for only faith.
 - **Acts 16:31** – *And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*
 - ii. There are verses that call for only repentance.
 - **Luke 13:3** – *I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*
 - iii. There are verses that call for both faith and repentance.
 - **Acts 20:21** – *Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*
 - **Acts 3:19** – *Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;*
- Wayne Grudem: “The gospel call is important also because through it God addresses us in the fullness of our humanity. He does not save us “automatically” without seeking for a response from us as whole persons. Rather, he addresses the gospel call to our intellects, our emotions, and our wills. He speaks to our intellects by explaining the facts of salvation in His Word. He speaks to our emotions by issuing a heartfelt personal invitation to respond. He speaks to our wills by asking us to hear his invitation and respond willingly in repentance and faith – to decide to turn from our sins and receive Christ as Savior and rest our hearts in Him for salvation.”
- Therefore: God requires man to repent of sin and have faith in Christ. It is the responsibility of every man to repent and believe.
- It is fully man’s responsibility to turn from sin and trust in Christ. Yet, it is God who is at work.
- This kind of faith is not of human origin:
 - i. **Philippians 1:29** – *For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;*

- ii. **Ephesians 2:8** – *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not yourselves: it is the gift of God:*
- This kind of repentance is not of human origin:
 - i. **Acts 11:18** – *When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*
 - ii. **2 Timothy 2:25** – *In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.*

III. **We are to give careful and purposeful gospel invitations to children.**

- Be careful to invite to Christ and nothing else.
- When the New Testament talks about people coming to salvation it speaks in terms of a personal response to an invitation from Christ himself.
- **Matthew 11:28-30** – *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*
- Key Question: What are you inviting people to do?

- Example of an invitation to be saved.
 - i. **Admit – that you personally are a sinner.**
Romans 3:10 As it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one;
Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
 - ii. **Agree – that God was right to condemn you for your sinfulness.**
Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
 - iii. **Abandon – all of your own efforts to earn God’s favor and forgiveness.**
Titus 3:5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,
 - iv. **Accept – Jesus’ claim to be the exclusive way to salvation and, repent before God and believe on Jesus Christ!**
John 14:6 Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.
Acts 3:19-20 "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, "and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before,

v. **Ask – God to forgive and save you from your sin, and to become your Savior and Lord.**

Romans 10:9-10 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Dear Lord – I know I am a sinner who has fallen short of the perfect righteousness you demand of a person who wants to be with you in Heaven forever. I agree that you were just and right to condemn me for my sins. I know that I have no way of earning righteousness by my good works, my baptism, my church membership, or my religious or moral deeds. And so I turn away from my sinful ways and my efforts at self-righteousness and I ask you to forgive me and to cleanse me of my sins. Make me your child and help me to live in obedience to your Word as my Lord and Savior.