

A Manual on

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The  
Evangelism of  
Children



by Jennifer Haaijer  
Child Evangelism Fellowship®

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# Foreword

In every country there are multitudes of children who have never heard the Gospel. Thankfully there are believers who want to bring them the Gospel. This book has been written to help these Christians to evangelise boys and girls.

It is not enough to gather the children together, to get their attention or to have an enjoyable time. The need of the children and the command of Christ demand that the boys and girls be *evangelised*. John Wesley, recognising that this was no easy task, called it, “a work which will exercise the talents of the most able preachers in England”! May God be pleased to use this book to guide, help and encourage many who are engaged in this vital work.

This book is the result of years of study, research, experience and teaching, and is the joint work of Jennifer Haaijer, a missionary with Child Evangelism Fellowship, Sam Doherty and Roy Harrison, Director and Assistant Director of European Child Evangelism Fellowship respectively. Many others among the ranks of CEF in Europe also helped through their comments and constructive criticism.

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# 1. Children

Today there is an abundance of books about children, written from social, educational, spiritual and psychological viewpoints. Many of them provide useful information. Many of them contradict each other. Many of them become outmoded. The Christian, concerned about the spiritual welfare of children, need not be confused. God has not left us in the dark on this important matter. In the Bible we find clear teaching about boys and girls. This teaching does not become outdated; it must always mould our whole approach to children. It is vital to have a Biblical perspective, for that will determine our message and our methods, as we endeavour to minister to the rising generation.

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## Children Need to be Saved

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Philip had been playing with his friends for hours in the hot sunshine. When he appeared panting, with damp hair and glowing cheeks, his mother knew at once what he needed—a glass of water! When you know a child has a need, you can do something to satisfy it. If he is hungry, he needs food; if he is tired, he needs sleep. The nature of the need determines the remedy you offer. Usually physical needs are easy to see, but spiritual needs are not so easily identified. If we are guided by the subjective conclusions of different people, we will be confused. But, if we turn to the Scriptures, we find there clear statements about the spiritual condition and needs of children.

The Bible clearly teaches that Adam was the head of the human race, and represented all men. All mankind was, therefore, in Adam when he sinned and fell. “. . . in Adam all die . . .” (1 Corinthians 15:22). “Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12). All have inherited a sinful nature from Adam. “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). This nature shows itself in the sinful actions of all. “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The result is that physical and spiritual death have come to all. “. . . so death passed upon all men. For all have sinned” (Romans 5:12). So all mankind is under the just condemnation of a holy God; “. . . by the offence of one judgement came upon all men to condemnation” (Romans 5:18). “We all . . . were by nature children of wrath, even as others” (Ephesians 2:3).

The great emphasis on the universality of sin and its consequences is so clear in the Bible, that we dare not conclude that children are exempted. On the contrary, the Bible makes it very clear that children are included in the “all” who are sinners.

“Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5).

“The wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies” (Psalm 58:3).

In Matthew 18 the Lord Jesus spoke about the condition of children. He had “called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them.” He said: “For the Son of man is come to save that which is lost. How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish” (Matthew 18:11-14).

The implication is obvious: children are lost and need to be sought and found. This is why we must evangelise them.

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Most commentators believe that children who die as babies go to heaven and that the grounds of their acceptance by God is the death of His Son for them rather than any inherent “innocence” on their part. They are “persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand” (Jonah 4:11); so God does not hold them accountable for their sin. The age at which an individual child moves out of this stage is a secret known only to God. When we observe children it is obvious that they sin knowingly at a very early age. They need to be evangelised.

### **All mankind, outside of Christ, is spiritually dead.**

“And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;” (Colossians 2:13).

When children are born into this world they are spiritually dead, “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). They will remain in that condition unless, or until, they trust Jesus Christ personally as Lord and Saviour. In John 1:13 we see something of the nature of spiritual life. This spiritual life is “not of blood”; it is not inherited. A child is not a Christian because his parents are. No one can do anything to acquire this spiritual life, it is “nor of the will of the flesh”. Nor can another human give this life through rites or ceremonies; it is “nor of the will of man”. This spiritual life is “of God”. So no child, whether born into a Christian home or not, is in the kingdom of God by natural birth. There is no other way into the kingdom except by the new, or second, birth.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:3, 5).

### **Children therefore need to be regenerated.**

A radical change must take place within the child so that he is no longer dead in sin. Only God can make this complete transformation, giving a child spiritual life. When a child is “born from above” he is a new creation with a new nature. The control of sin is broken and the child wants to obey God.

### **Children need to be justified.**

Sinners by nature and practice, children stand guilty and condemned before God. They need to have this position changed. They are justified when they personally trust Christ: “By him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39). Justification deals with their guilt and condemnation and gives them a right standing before God.

In considering the spiritual condition of children, there is no room for speculation or mistaken ideas, for we are dealing with the never-dying souls of boys and girls. If they are already in God’s kingdom, they do not need to be evangelised. But if, (and we have seen that this is the clear teaching of the Scriptures) they are sinners under God’s just condemnation, they need to hear the message of salvation. If they are dead in sins they need the spiritual life that only God can give. It is when our eyes are opened to their spiritual condition, that we will begin to have a burden to see them evangelised.

(The spiritual condition of children is dealt with in more detail in “The Biblical Basis of Child Evangelism”, published by European Child Evangelism Fellowship).

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## **Children can be Saved**

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True Biblical conversion involves a turning from sin (repentance), and a turning to Jesus Christ (faith). Salvation is promised to all who repent and believe (Acts 3:19; 16:31). Can a child turn from sin and have true saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Some people think that children are too young to be able to turn to Christ, that they have to wait until they are older. But in fact all people, young or old, are incapable of saving faith without the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts:

“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: because they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).

“By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9). At whatever age someone responds to the Gospel, it is not because he himself has developed a certain “capacity” to do so, but because God the Holy Spirit has worked in his life. The Bible teaches that a child can have true saving faith. “And that their children which have not known anything may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God.. .” (Deuteronomy 31:13). “That they (i.e. the children) might set their hope in God.” (Psalm 78:7). “But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).

All of the words used in these verses “fear”, “set their hope” and “believe” indicate the possibility of a saving relationship with God. The Bible teaches that where there is true faith—at whatever age—there is salvation.

Experience shows that children can trust Christ. Many Christians date their conversion from childhood. While this has usually been followed by a deepening understanding and a growth in faith and repentance, they have no doubt that justification and regeneration took place at that moment, when as children, they truly believed and were saved. This is the vision we need for child evangelism. We need to see that God can use His Word in the lives of children. He can bring them to repentance and faith. He can bring them into His kingdom. So there are only two kinds of children—those who are saved and those who are lost. There are those who are in God’s kingdom and those who are not, those who are spiritually alive and those who are spiritually dead. Children who have personally trusted Christ as Saviour and Lord need to be built up in their faith. Children who have not trusted Christ need to be evangelised.

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## **God Loves children**

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God showed His deep concern for children by giving many instructions about teaching them in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 4:9, 10; 6:5-7; 11:18, 19; Psalm 34:11; 78:1-8; Proverbs 22:6; Joel 1:3). There are examples in the Old Testament of the Lord at work in the lives of children, like Moses (Exodus 2), Samuel (1 Samuel 3), the little girl in the house of Naaman (2 Kings 5), the widow’s son (1 Kings 17), the Shunammite’s son (2 Kings 4) and Josiah (2 Kings 22). One of the reasons for the institution of the Passover and the Redemption of the first-born, (as well as the placing of the 2 memorials of stones at Jordan) was to allow parents to teach their children (Exodus 12:26; 13:14; Joshua 4:6).

The Lord Jesus showed this deep love and concern for boys and girls. He welcomed them (Mark 10:13); He took them in His arms (Mark 10:16); He accepted their praise (Matthew 21:15, 16). He cared for their physical needs, healing the nobleman’s son (John 4:46-54), raising Jairus’ daughter from the dead (Mark 5:38-43), and then instructing that she should be given food. He did not want them to be offended (Matthew 18:6), rejected (Matthew 18:5), or despised (Matthew 18:10). He invited them to come to Him (Mark 10:14). He wanted them to be saved (Matthew 18:11). He expressed the Father’s will in no uncertain terms “Even so it is

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not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish, , (Matthew 18:14).

What assurance this gives us as we go and teach God's Word to boys and girls!

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## **Children are Open to the Gospel**

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Children are open to anything! They are sensitive, vulnerable, impressionable. This fact is widely recognised. The world knows it and tries to win children to a worldly life. The advertisers develop techniques to influence children. The communists concentrate on indoctrinating children's minds during the early years of their education. The cults and false religions take every opportunity to influence children at a very early age. Unfortunately, the church of Jesus Christ is not always so alert, and opportunities to bring the Gospel to children are often missed.

When an open-air meeting for adults is organised, they will usually show great reluctance about attending. But children will come; they will listen. These are their formative years—the teaching of the Word of God can have a lasting impact on their lives. No doubt, this is why the Bible stresses, “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Paul recognised that Timothy's early instruction in the Scriptures was very significant in his life. “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” (2 Timothy 3:15). There is no doubt that as the years pass people become more hardened, more wayward and more rebellious (Psalm 78:7, 8).

The Psalmist was aware of this. He made a solemn promise to teach the children the Word of God, so that they might not become as their fathers, “a stubborn and rebellious generation” (Psalm 78:8). Humanly speaking, the older a person becomes, the less likely it is for that person to come to Christ.

Furthermore, impressions and influences implanted in childhood are lasting. That is why so many forces are at work to “get the young” Win a child and you win an adult. The Bible recognises this fact: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it,” (Proverbs 22:6).

Evangelise children and the results will be far reaching and positive. Neglect child evangelism, and there will be lasting repercussions which are devastatingly negative.

The fact that children are open to the Gospel, and to any other influence whether for good or bad, does not contradict the fact that they are spiritually dead. There are no degrees of death; so they are as spiritually dead as unsaved adults. Undoubtedly, there is an openness, interest and responsiveness which is not found in most adults. But this should not be confused with spiritual life or saving faith, which come only as God the Holy Spirit works. It takes the same grace to save a child as it does to save an adult.

If we have the opportunity to leave a lasting impression on children, because they are more open, then we must do all we can to reach them with the Gospel. The formative years pass very quickly. This consideration puts urgency into our child evangelism. If we wait, many of those who are children today will have left behind those impressionable years.

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## **A Child Saved is a Life Saved**

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Child evangelism is not only a question of labouring, and praying that the souls of children will be saved. Its goal is also the salvation of lives—whole lives to be lived for the glory of God. Many believers who trusted the Saviour in later years have one regret—that they did not do so earlier. As we read in Lamentations 3:27, “It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth”. The Bible includes testimonies of those who began to walk with God while they were young. David said, “Thou hast taught me from my youth”. “Thou art my trust from my

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youth” (Psalm 71:5). Obadiah declared, “I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth” (1 Kings 18:12). Daniel, Samuel, Joseph, Josiah and Isaac all seem to have started walking with God when still young. Think of the influence and value of such lives, and of many since then who were converted in childhood.

Common sense and experience agree that it is better to come to Christ early in life. It is better to know Christ as Saviour during the years when habits and personality are being formed, rather than after they have been formed. It is better to learn and absorb the Word of God when the mind is open and learning is easy, rather than to try to do so afterwards.

This does not mean, however, that we panic if children in our care become older and still do not trust the Saviour. We should continue to bring the Gospel message with urgency, but resolutely resist any inclination to pressurise them into a profession of faith. We will be concerned when we see children growing up still not saved. We will be deeply burdened for them. But we must leave them in the hands of our Sovereign God.

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## 2. Evangelism

World evangelism is the task entrusted to the Church by the Lord Jesus Christ. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

Every believer must take this commission seriously and be involved in fulfilling it.

World evangelism involves bringing the Gospel to every tribe and nation and also to every age group. Children are included in “every creature”. Every kindred and tongue, every class and age group, need to hear the Gospel. But in order to communicate the message, we must be sure what it is and how to communicate it.

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### The Need for Evangelism

Children are lost. They need salvation. Children are dead. They need life. How can they be saved? How can they receive eternal life, and a new nature? This is the work of the Holy Spirit, but He works in and through the preaching of the Gospel - as we evangelise the children. Our ministry is not to entertain the children, nor even to educate them, but to evangelise them.

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### The Meaning of Evangelism

What does it mean to evangelise children?

It does not just mean the telling of Bible stories. Many Sunday School teachers feel that their responsibility each week is just to tell a Bible story to the boys and girls under their care. This is good and necessary, but it is only the first step in the process of evangelism. The Bible story is not the end; it is the means to the end. It is the foundation upon which we base our evangelism.

Evangelising children does not just mean the teaching of Bible truth. It is necessary to teach the Bible story, as well as teaching Bible truths. Often Bible stories are told without Bible truth being taught. The teacher has taken a big step forward, when he realizes that the Bible story is the vehicle which he uses to teach the Bible truths, which the children need to hear. But this is still not enough.

Evangelism involves the presentation and explanation of those Bible truths which an unsaved child needs to be saved, and the clear and definite application of those truths to his mind, heart and will.

- You need to be saved, because God is Holy, and your sinful nature and acts separate you from Him.
  - You can be saved, because Jesus Christ died for the sin of the world, is risen again, and rules as Lord.
  - You will be saved, if you are willing to turn from your sin, and trust Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour.
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## **The Excitement of Evangelism**

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Evangelism, and especially the evangelism of children, is the most wonderful, thrilling and exciting ministry in the world. Someone has said that evangelism is simply “One beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.” The “beggar” who has found bread is excited about what he has found, and this excitement shows as he shares with those who have not yet found it.

There is special joy in evangelising children. We have the privilege of being able to show them the way of life. We have the thrill of being with them, watching their faces as they listen to the Gospel, and witnessing their interest in the greatest message in the world. The greatest joy of all is that of introducing them to the Lord Jesus Christ and seeing them trust the Saviour.

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## **The Bible is our Source Book**

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The starting point in considering the message we should teach is not, “What can children understand?” or “What do children enjoy?” Our first consideration must be “What does the Bible say we must teach?” The Word of God is our manual for evangelism. The Bible is God’s message to mankind, to every age group.

In the Acts of the Apostles, especially, we see what the Apostles taught and how they evangelised. On the day of Pentecost, Christ was the central theme of Peter’s great sermon. Christ’s death, resurrection, messiahship and exaltation were clearly and fearlessly preached. When Paul evangelised in Athens he “started where the people were” by referring to that with which they were already familiar, their altar to the unknown god. We should search for examples like these and learn about evangelism from them. We do well to make a careful study of the message of salvation as it is revealed throughout the Scriptures.

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## **There is Only One Message**

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In a world where children are becoming more and more aware of different religions, where absolutes are unacceptable, where “one faith is as good as the next”, we must be convinced that there is only one message of salvation. It does not change according to the age group being evangelised. We do not have a short list of truths which are “suitable for children”, a longer one for teenagers and an even longer one for adults. We should endeavour to know and teach that fixed body of truth revealed to the apostles. They were very aware that they must teach this one message in all its purity:

“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8).

Paul instructed the young evangelist Timothy to guard the Gospel, defend it against attack and never allow it to be changed or modified. “That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us” (2 Timothy 1:14).

Of course, the evangelist will consider the age group and background of those to whom he speaks, and this will influence his presentation and application. The message, however, must not be altered or diluted in any way. When working with children we must be careful not to sacrifice truth in the interests of so-called “simplicity”.

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## **The Gospel is an Extensive Message**

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We have been entrusted with the Gospel, and it is our responsibility to teach it to boys and girls. What is the Gospel? Usually in the New Testament the word “Gospel” means the Good News about Jesus Christ. This is absolutely true. The Gospel *is* the good news about Jesus Christ. He is the Gospel, because of who He is and what He has done for sinners. This must always be the theme and goal of our Gospel preaching, just as it was that of the Apostles.

The Apostle Paul reminded the church at Corinth of the Gospel he had preached to them, that they had believed and by which they were saved. “I delivered unto you first of all... 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” (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4).

But if you begin to teach children who know nothing of the Bible, about the death of Jesus Christ, or the fact that He is the Saviour, you will find that they have great difficulty in understanding these truths. The Good News should be preceded by teaching about sin from which the Lord Jesus is the Saviour.

Since sin is rebellion against God, and the breaking of His Law, it cannot be understood without knowing something of the character of God. In addition, the message of salvation must include God’s invitation to come to Christ in repentance and faith. It was this wider view of redemptive truth which Paul had in mind when he told Timothy to “guard the Gospel”.

The message of salvation is an extensive message. It is good for us to think it through systematically and to formulate it so that we can understand it and teach it better. But we should not try to make it into an irreducible minimum. Children can feel that they “know it all” simply because we have reduced the message and use the same stock phrases over and over again.

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## **The Gospel is a Powerful Message**

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Today’s children are constantly being bombarded with anti-Christian, unbiblical concepts. Sometimes it seems that we are fighting a losing battle in trying to bring them the Gospel. From a human standpoint it appears unlikely that any impact can be made, because of the little time and influence we have with them. This is not a new problem. Corinth seemed an unlikely place for the Gospel to find entrance, yet it did. The reason is that the Gospel is not on a par with other messages; it is in a category of its own. The Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth” (Romans 1:16). When this message is brought “not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Corinthians 2:4), lives are transformed. That is why we need not be hesitant or apologetic. We have the greatest and most powerful message that boys and girls can ever hear.

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## **The Gospel is a Doctrinal Message**

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“Preach the Word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine” was Paul’s instruction to the young evangelist, Timothy, in 2 Timothy 4:2. Many of us are alarmed at the prospect of having to teach doctrine, we feel that is a subject for the experts. But this reaction is based on a misunderstanding of what doctrine is; it is simply teaching the great truths of the Scriptures. It is impossible to truly evangelise without teaching doctrines. The apostles preached Christ and in doing so taught the great truths about Him: His humanity (Acts 2:22, 23); His death (Acts 2:23); His resurrection (Acts 2:24); His exaltation (Acts 2:32 - 36); the fact that God has appointed Him the judge of mankind (Acts 17:31). The apostles often taught about God: the Creator (Acts 14:15); the Sovereign One (Acts 17:26); the One who planned salvation (Acts 3:18); the kind and just One (Acts 14:17; 17:31). They urged their hearers to repentance and faith in Christ (Acts 3:19;

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16:31). They taught forgiveness, justification, and the gift of the Spirit for all who would believe (Acts 13:38, 39; 2:38). The evangelism of the apostles certainly was doctrinal. It was not academic theorising but a bold proclamation of glorious truths.

The doctrines of the Gospel message should be taught to children. It is unwise and unbiblical to urge children to come to Christ, when we have not explained to them “Why?” and “What for?” The answers to these questions are the doctrines that must be included in our teaching. It is not sufficient to tell children little stories, and then tag on an evangelistic application. Rather, we should teach doctrine as we evangelise. In other words, we should engage in a teaching evangelism.

There are two extremes that we need to avoid:

- Believing that it is possible to evangelise without teaching.

The truths of the Gospel are not just truths to be stated with the hope that such statements are effective, even if they are not understood. It is the evangelist’s responsibility to explain and clarify these truths as well as he can - praying and trusting that the Holy Spirit will enlighten the child spiritually. The child is led to Christ on the basis of Gospel truths that were well taught to him, as he was being evangelised.

- Believing that an unsaved child must understand all the truths of the Gospel before he can be saved, that his conversion must always be preceded by an extensive period of teaching Gospel truth.

This is not so! The Holy Spirit can save a child without an extensive period of teaching; and to insist on this is denial of His Sovereignty, the experience of several people in the new testament, and the experience of a number of Christians today.

### **Evangelism Should Aim for the Mind, Emotions and Will**

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An evangelism which aims only at the mind is dry and sterile. An evangelism which aims only at the emotions is superficial and temporary. An evangelism which aims only at the will is premature and hasty. As you evangelise children, instruct the mind, praying that God will enlighten it. Involve the emotions, praying that God will stir them. Challenge the will, praying that God will change its direction. Follow the pattern of evangelism to which the believers at Rome responded “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you” (Romans 6:17). These people had heard the doctrine. Their minds were instructed, through it their emotions were stirred and in turn their wills were moved.

If you omit any one, or two, of these from your evangelism, one of two results may follow:

Children may respond, but because the message was inadequate, or the emotions were attacked directly, or the wills bombarded, the results could be spurious.

Children may be truly saved, but because the evangelism was inadequate they could be confused and discouraged, especially in the early days of their new found faith.

### **We Do Not Know How Much a Child Needs to Understand of the Whole Message of Salvation**

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We are not told in the Bible how much a child, or anyone else, needs to understand before they can come to Christ. Obviously there must be some sense of need and conviction of sin. There must also be some understanding of what Jesus Christ has done for them and of how they can come to Him. But some who have very little knowledge are saved, while some with much knowledge remain unsaved: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the

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sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” John 3:8). God is sovereign in salvation. But the fact that some children with a very limited understanding trust the Saviour is not a reason for teaching very little. Our responsibility is to teach children as much as possible of the message of salvation in the time available. When children come to Christ, it is in response to the Word of God.

“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Peter 1:23).

“...faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17).

We must not do minimum sowing and expect maximum reaping, but rather faithfully sow and depend on God for a harvest.

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### **Only God the Holy Spirit can Regenerate**

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It is the Holy Spirit who regenerates and gives spiritual life to a child. When a child receives Christ, he is born “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13). The evangelist cannot give life to spiritually dead children. This is a work that only God can do. No teaching techniques, however perfect; no visual aids, no matter how attractive; no personality, no matter how consecrated, can do anything to bring about spiritual regeneration.

Unless God speaks and works in the child’s life, absolutely nothing can be accomplished. The task of teaching is entrusted to the evangelist. We know that the Spirit uses the Word. But if God does not speak and bless, nothing genuine will happen. There can be human effort, and even human results, but without the gracious, convicting, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, nothing of spiritual significance will happen.

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### **God is Sovereign in Evangelism**

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“No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44).

One child can be deeply convicted of sin, and another remain totally unconcerned, after listening to the same message. One conscientious, faithful teacher may see several children in his class come to Christ; another who is just as faithful may see none trust the Saviour. We need to recognise God’s sovereignty in this. It will save us from sinful pride when children do find the Saviour. It will save us from despair if we do not see results. It will keep us dependent upon the One who is sovereign in evangelism.

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### **God has Committed the Ministry of Evangelism to You and Me**

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The wonderful truth of God’s sovereignty should never make us complacent about evangelism. The Bible plainly teaches that God’s purpose is to use people to bring the Gospel to the world. He “hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:19,20).

Paul was very conscious of his responsibility to bring the message of reconciliation. He took it seriously, saying, “we pray you” or “we implore you”. This was no half-hearted obedience. It was the ready, caring response of a man who had seen that the purpose of God included world evangelism through human messengers.

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## **We Need to Know the Message**

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Our ministry with children can easily slide into sentimentality, entertainment or professionalism:

“The congregation streamed out of church. It had been a special children’s service, and many were commenting on the speaker.

- ‘He really held their attention.,
- ‘He has such a good sense of humour—just what you need for children.,
- ‘Well, there wasn’t a dull moment this morning!,
- ‘Weren’t his visuals superb?’”

The speaker was obviously a success. The criteria for measuring success were the level of laughter, the sophistication of the visuals and the personality of the speaker. This is far removed from New Testament evangelism. Surely we should be asking, “What did he teach?” If we are personally involved we should ask, “What did I teach?” If the answer is hard to find, there is something wrong with our evangelism. As we evangelise children, it is vital that we take a careful look at what we should teach and the way we should teach it.

Our desire, as we evangelise, is that children would come into a personal, living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. But it is impossible to introduce them to the Saviour without explaining who He is. Children need to be taught why He can save. We urge them to come to Christ; but they must understand to whom they are to come. It is impossible to “preach Christ” without teaching about both His Person and His Work. These great truths must be taught in any effort which claims to be evangelism. It is vital that our evangelism is Christ-centred.

No matter where we start, no matter which path we follow, the end goal of all our evangelism must be to bring to the children the great truths concerning Jesus Christ. This was always the practice of the apostles when they evangelised; it has also been characterised by all the great preachers of the Gospel throughout Church history. For example, rarely did Charles Spurgeon, the great preacher and evangelist of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, finish a sermon without somewhere bringing the Lord Jesus Christ before his listeners.

It does not automatically follow that we will teach children about Christ before we teach them anything else. They must be taught why they need a Saviour. This necessitates teaching about God. He is the One against whom they have sinned; He is the One to whom they are responsible; He is the One to whom they must be reconciled. When they understand something of who God is, they will better understand the seriousness of sin and its consequences. Often these truths will be taught in preparation for imparting the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. In practice, these truths are not taught in any strict or particular order. We would not, for example, omit all teaching about Christ until we had taught everything about sin. Rather we teach something about God, something about sin, something about Christ. Over a period of time the children should have an increasing understanding of these areas of truth.

There is another essential area of truth: the way of salvation. It is important that children know what God does for those whom He saves. He makes them new creations (regeneration). He makes them right with Himself (justification). Also, children must know that they should respond to the Gospel message and how they can do so. They need to be taught often that God commands them to turn from sin and to receive Jesus Christ as Saviour.

Thus, taking a very simple, basic approach, it is obvious that there are four areas of truth: God, sin, the Lord Jesus Christ and the way of salvation. This would seem to be the logical order. The extent to which we teach them and the order in which we teach them will vary according to circumstances. Our aim, however, will remain the same. It is not only that children should come to understand truths, it is that they should come to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

Since we need to understand the message we are going to teach, we will examine it in the following chapters. Paradoxically, we must know the message and yet continue to learn it!

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The message of salvation is so simple that a child can understand it, and yet so profound that even at the end of his days a great saint may feel that he is not even beginning to plumb its depths. As our understanding of the message deepens, we should become better teachers, for we can teach only what we know.

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# 3. Teach about the Lord Jesus Christ

Christianity is not just another religion, a code of conduct or an alternative lifestyle. Christianity is Christ. The Gospel is a message about a person—the Lord Jesus Christ. It is He who saves boys and girls, men and women. Salvation is having a personal vital relationship with Him.

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” John 17:3).

“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” (Matthew 11:28, 29).

The Christian is one who has come to know, love and obey the Lord Jesus Christ and has a deepening relationship with Him.

Apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, there is no Gospel. So our evangelism must always be Christ-centred. He is the central theme of the Scriptures, and this should be reflected in our ministries to children. They should not only hear us often teach about Him, they should sense that we speak of One we know and love. Paul and the other apostles, and all great evangelists throughout church history have always taught various truths, but the preaching of Christ was always their main goal. Jesus Christ is the only way to God, the final revelation of truth about God, and the only source of spiritual life. He must therefore be the vital breath of every Gospel presentation, and not some kind of postscript message.

This does not mean that we leave out basic doctrines concerning God and sin. Paul knew he was called to preach Christ among the Gentiles (Galatians 1:16). But he recognised that he must also teach about God and man’s rebellion, in order to fulfil his calling and, at the same time, to prepare the way for the good news of Jesus Christ.

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## The New Testament Evangelists Preached Christ

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This was the great characteristic of apostolic evangelism. All their preaching led to Jesus Christ. While they had different approaches, depending upon the people to whom they were speaking, they always arrived at the great truths concerning Jesus Christ.

These men knew Christ as Lord and Saviour, they were eyewitnesses of His majesty, and their burning desire was that others would know Him too.

When persecution scattered believers in Jerusalem they did not stop their evangelism. “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5). In Acts chapter 10 we find Peter preaching to Cornelius and his household. His message is about Christ “Lord of all”.

“How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree; Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead” (Acts 10:38-40, 42).

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In the synagogue in Thessalonica, Paul expounded 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” (Acts 17:3).

Whatever the background of the hearers, Paul preached Christ. “For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified” (1 Corinthians 1:22, 23).

The apostle’s message contrasted sharply with the dead legalism of the Jews, the endless philosophies of the Greeks, the multiplicity of religions of the Gentiles. Today’s world is filled with different ideas, religions and values. Our children need those who will teach the glorious Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and not merely another religion.

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## **Teach about the Person of Christ**

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It is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who saves. Salvation involves coming to know Him personally. It is impossible to separate Christ from the truths which Scripture reveals concerning Him. There is no other Christ but the One revealed through the truths and doctrines of the Bible. So we must give these careful attention, learn them and make them a vital part of our evangelism.

The Christ we teach must be the Christ of the Scriptures.

### **Jesus Christ is God the Son**

Children who have heard of Jesus Christ often think of Him as “a good man who lived long ago”. To many, He is one among other good men. If that is all He was, He could not be our Saviour. The Bible clearly teaches His deity. This was the reality that Saul of Tarsus had to come to grips with when he encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus.

“And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20).

John wrote, “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him” (1 John 4:15).

This title, “the Son of God”, so often used by the apostles, was obviously understood by them to teach the deity of Jesus Christ. But because we have so many people and cults today which teach that Jesus was *a* Son of God but not truly God, it is good and wise for us, in our teaching, to use and explain the names “God the Son” and “the one and only Son of God”. He is both God the Son and the Son of God.

What’s in a name? The name of the Son of God is very significant. After the resurrection the Apostles usually called Him “Lord”. “Jesus” was His earthly name, and it was not often used on its own after His resurrection. Rather, He was generally called “the Lord Jesus”, “the Lord Jesus Christ”, or “our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”. We would do well to follow this pattern and emphasise His deity even in the Name we call Him.

Children need to know who it is that we are inviting them to trust! How often the Christmas story is told to children in a sentimental way. The fact that the child in the manger was God, is often lost among the glitter and trappings of Christmas. Avoid this mistake and explain carefully that the birth of this baby was different:

“You and I had a human mother and a human father, but the Lord Jesus had only a human mother. God was His Father. He had always been and will always be God; but God worked a miracle so that the little baby born to Mary was God and man.”

Often we miss the golden opportunity of a Christmas lesson to teach that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God . . . “Before He became a baby, the Son of God had always lived in heaven with God, His Father. Even at the beginning of the world He was there, for His life had no beginning.” We want children to know that the Child in the crib was the Creator of the universe.

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Many New Testament stories are comprehensible only if we see this great truth at the heart of them. He healed the sick, raised the dead, calmed the storm, fed 5,000, knew the thoughts of His enemies, accepted the worship of others, forgave sins, gave eternal life. Why? Because He is God—God the son! Sometimes the children are far more familiar with the details of these stories than they are with the great central truth of who Christ is. This is something we must endeavour to put right. Some will hear the miracles “explained away”, so we must try to lay foundations which cannot be undermined. It is even more vital that children realise that the One who died on the cross was the Son of God, for only He could bear the sin of the world.

### **Jesus Christ is man**

In the age of Superman, Spiderman, E.T. and Doctor Who, it is vital that children realise that Jesus Christ is not fictional like any of these. The Son of God became a man. This is no make believe—it is fact. The clear teaching of the New Testament is that He is completely, yet sinlessly, human.

“The Word was made flesh” (John 1:14). This truth was regarded as essential to the Christian faith.

“Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world” (1 John 4:2, 3).

As we teach children about the birth of Christ, it is important that they know He was a real baby needing to be fed and cared for like any other. Show them that He was once their age—6, 7, 8 or whatever. In lessons where Christ is tired, hungry, thirsty, sad, we should use these opportunities to teach His humanity.

But the Man who walked the shores of Galilee was unique. He was sinless Man. His enemies, His friends and His associates could find no fault in Him. He knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). He lived a life of perfect obedience to the law of God, resisting all temptation. This is an essential part of the Gospel message, for it is only as Perfect Man that He could be our sacrifice. Man had sinned and only a man could die for men. He is God so He could die not only for one man, but for many. He, the God-Man, could be a perfect sacrifice for sins for ever. He is still Man—there is a Man at God’s right hand. He is the One who fully understands the problems, feelings and temptations of children as well as of adults.

### **Jesus Christ is both God and Man—our Mediator**

Teach about Jesus Christ, the God-man, being careful to show that He is One person—not two! Children will accept this. You might put it like this: “He is truly a man and also God—at the same time. The Bible doesn’t explain this because it is too difficult for us to understand. But it tells us that it is true.”

Only the God-man, Jesus Christ, could accomplish what He did when here on earth. It is because of who Christ is, and what He has done, that He can save. His Person and His Work should be closely linked in our teaching and our preaching. We will consider His Work in the following chapter.

## 4. Teach about the Work of Christ

“Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. 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” (Philippians 2:6-11)

This is a magnificent summary of the work of Christ, which is an essential part of the Gospel message.

Teaching about His work could include Christ’s incarnation, His sinless life, His perfect obedience to the Father, His victory over Satan and sin, His miracles, His teaching, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, His exaltation, His intercession and His Second Coming. All have an evangelistic application, but there are four aspects of the work of Christ which you ought to emphasise in particular.

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### His Sinless Life

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It is important to teach this truth, for only a sinless man could die for sin. In the Scriptures we meet one Man “who knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Don’t be content with occasional references to “the perfect Son of God”. Carefully teach His perfection. You might do it like this:

“The Lord Jesus was a boy, just like you. I’m sure He played games with His friends in Nazareth. What happens when you think your team is going to lose? Do you try to cheat, or do you lose your temper or think angry thoughts about those on your team who don’t play as well as you? But the Lord Jesus never cheated, or lost His temper, or thought unkind thoughts about others. He never once did anything wrong.”

In this way you “bring home” to the children the perfection of Christ’s life, and at the same time show how far short of God’s standard they come. Show them Christ’s perfect obedience to the Father in the face of fierce temptation in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13).

In the Old Testament God had instructed His people that the animals offered as sacrifices for sin were to be perfect. For example, in Leviticus 4:3 “Let him bring for his sin, which he hath sinned, a young bull without blemish unto the Lord for a sin offering”. These sacrifices were types of Christ’s sacrifice—He being the One who was sinless and without spot. This can be taught to children through several Old Testament stories, for example the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12) and lessons on the tabernacle (Exodus 26-40).

Make sure the children understand that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only sinless one and that, because He was sinless, He could die for the sin of others.

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## His Death

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### **Christ's death is the central theme of the whole Bible.**

The Old Testament Scriptures foretold it, the sacrifices prefigured it. In the New Testament we have the historical details of it, and the Epistles look back to it. In the New Jerusalem as seen in the book of Revelation, the theme of our song, the One we will worship, will be the Lamb who was slain.

### **Christ taught His death**

In the earthly ministry of Christ we see that He had a clear knowledge of the fact that He was going to die at God's appointed time. He taught His disciples about this, but they were slow to learn. Not only did He teach the fact that He would die, but also of the meaning of His death. "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

### **The apostles preached Christ's death**

The death of Christ was preached in all the Gospel sermons found in the Acts of the Apostles. Peter told the Jews that they "killed the Prince of life" (Acts 3:15). "But those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled" (Acts 3:18).

### **The meaning of Christ's death**

We need to give careful attention to the meaning of Christ's death. Why did He die? We must have some understanding of the answer to this question if we are going to evangelise children.

In the Bible there are several different "pictures" or "ideas" used to explain what happened at Calvary. A theme which runs through the whole of the Word of God is that of *propitiation*—averting God's anger by an offering. For those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ the wrath of God has been quenched through His Son's death.

"Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation" (Romans 3:24, 25).

If we teach carefully about God, the children will understand God's consistent reaction to sin and the need for propitiation. To be a propitiation, Christ had to be a *sacrifice* and a *substitute*. Both of these words need to be carefully explained to children. When you teach Old Testament stories in which there are sacrifices for sin, you can show that these are pictures of Christ's sacrifice. Show them that God had said that blood must be shed if sin was to be forgiven. In the meantime, animal sacrifices were to be made, but they only pointed forward to the death of Christ. It is important that children know something of this Old Testament background in order to understand how Christ's death was one sacrifice for sin for ever.

The Bible says that Christ died as our substitute. We deserved to be punished for our sin by being separated from God forever. Christ took that punishment in our place!

"Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

When explaining "substitute", you could use a story of a school boy who took the punishment someone else should have had. Then show how Christ was punished in our place.

Christ's death on the cross was also the paying of a *ransom*. He came "to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). This was the paying of a price to set another free. Children have heard stories of people being kidnapped and a ransom price being paid. You could tell them about slavery in olden days, and how "redemption money" was paid to free a slave.

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Another picture is that of *reconciliation*. Christ made “peace through the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:20). The context is that of two warring parties, the rebellious creature against his Creator. Christ’s death dealt with the cause of the “war”: sin. In Christ, God and man are reconciled or brought together.

Obviously, it would be unwise to confuse the children by using all these pictures, either at the same time, or one after another. But they could be taught over a period of time. Do not be satisfied with saying “Jesus Christ died for you,” “the Lord Jesus died to save us,” “Christ poured out His blood.” Go deeper, and really teach the children these truths. Surely the greatest theme in Scriptures is worthy of careful, thorough explanation in our evangelism! Several Old Testament stories are clear pictures of Christ’s work on the cross, and should be used to teach it. For example, the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12), the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16) or the Brazen Serpent (Numbers 21:4-9). Also, children should often hear about Christ’s crucifixion. They should be taught about how Christ died and about the suffering He endured.

But as you tell the story of the crucifixion, be as discreet as the Gospels are in describing His physical sufferings. These details should never be used to play on the emotions of children. Teach them that the worst suffering of all was the separation from God when the Lord Jesus suffered God’s judgement on sin.

Children must never have the impression that the Lord Jesus was just the victim of a plot, caught and unable to escape. Help them to see that He willingly gave His life. He was not just ‘sent’ and given by the Father. He gave Himself.

Another word of caution—be careful about phrases like “believe that the Lord Jesus died for you, and all your sin will be taken away.” Just believing this with the mind never saved anyone. It is the Christ who died who is the object of saving faith. Remember that His saving work must not be separated from His Person. To be saved the child must put his trust in the One who died for him.

Carefully, earnestly, prayerfully, frequently teach about Christ’s death, but do not stop there—the Apostles didn’t!

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## His Resurrection

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Once the risen Christ had been seen, the news spread like wildfire, and from that time on the certainty of a risen Saviour has been sounded forth in Christian evangelism. In almost every Gospel sermon recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was preached, starting with Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost.

“Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it” (Acts 2:24).

### The fact of the resurrection

Sooner or later some of the children we teach are going to hear that Christ’s bodily resurrection did not take place. We should have prepared them for this. As you teach the resurrection story, point out the evidence for the resurrection: the impossibility of the story that the disciples stole the body, the way in which the grave clothes were left, the fact that Christ was touched by Thomas, the fact that He ate fish and bread, and that the risen Master was seen by more than five hundred people. Also some children will come from a religious background where they often see crucifixes. They need this emphasis—He is risen!

### The results of the resurrection

The resurrection is visible and glorious proof that His death on the cross completely satisfied the righteous demands of God. “He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him . . .” (Philippians 2:8, 9). You might express it like this:

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“Do you ever wonder if what the Lord Jesus did on the cross was enough to take away all our sin for ever? The answer is a big YES! God showed that His Son had paid completely for sin when he raised Him from the dead!”

Or, “ If your mother buys something in a shop she gets a little piece of paper to show she has paid for it. That’s the proof that she paid. God has given us proof that the Lord Jesus paid completely for our sin. The proof is that the Lord Jesus rose from the dead.”

The resurrection made forgiveness, justification and salvation possible. He was “raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25). A dead Saviour could do nothing for us, but all the blessings of the Gospel can be offered in our Risen Lord.

The resurrection assures of an interceding High Priest in heaven: “He ever liveth to make intercession for us” (Hebrews 7:25).

Because He lives, we shall live also. All who are Christ’s will be given a body like His glorious body and will live with Him for ever. “Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20).

All of these blessings, and more, are ours because He lives. We cannot but share these with the children. So we teach children about One whom they can know personally. But it should not only be a matter of telling—this is a reality that should show forth in our lives. The children should see that we know Him, love Him and that the Risen Lord is real to us.

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## His Exaltation

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Teaching the children that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that He is exalted, is an essential part of our evangelism.

### **Dominant in apostolic evangelism**

There was nothing apologetic or half-hearted about the evangelism of the early church. They knew that the Christ they preached was the Exalted One. He had been given a position of absolute lordship by the Father.

“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18).

It is not a matter of His becoming King at a later date, He is King now. He is no longer in the place of humiliation, where he allowed His enemies to mock Him, beat Him and spit on Him. He has the place of honour and authority, at the right hand of the Father.

Little wonder the early evangelists spoke with boldness. They served the King, they proclaimed the King: “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear” (Acts 2:33).

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ”(Acts 2:36).

“Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31).

This glorious theme continues throughout the Epistles—both in relation to the Gospel, and to the instruction of believers. The emphasis was “Jesus Christ is Lord”. Indeed this was one of the earliest Christian confessions of faith.

Paul wrote in Romans 10:9: “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus (literally Jesus as Lord), and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

“For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:12, 13).

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Paul described his ministry as preaching “not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord” (2 Corinthians 4:5).

### **Essential for today's evangelism**

We too, must teach the children that “Jesus Christ is Lord”, He is King. We are not presenting a weak Christ, whom the children can make happy by asking Him into their hearts! They come to a risen, exalted Christ. He is the King of kings, before whom they are to bow the knee. They are to submit their wills to Him. If people do not bow before Christ as their Lord and Saviour in this life, one day they will bow before Him as their Judge in the life to come.

“Every knee should bow,...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:10, 11).

You might say, for example, “Can you think of some of the famous rulers we have? These men think they decide what happens in their countries, when to start wars or stop wars. They think they are in charge—but they are not. The Bible says that Jesus Christ is King over all kings, and they can do nothing but what He allows.”

This great fact should be taught as you teach many of the incidents recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, for example: Peter’s imprisonment and escape (Acts 12); the healing of the lame man (Acts 3); Paul and Silas at Philippi (Acts 16); Paul’s trials before Felix, Festus and Agrippa (Acts 24, 25).

We must ask ourselves, “Is the Christ I teach, the Christ of the Scriptures?” Sometimes children hear only of “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild” (and He is gentle and meek), but we must teach that He is King, Lord of all. If children realise who He is, they will realise that when they trust Him as Saviour, they take the first step of submission to Him as King. They will know that He will take charge of their lives, and that He will make changes in those lives.

Christ is the Lord of Glory, the King of kings, yet He desires that children should come to Him. Listen to His gracious words, “Suffer the little children to come unto me” (Mark 10:14). May the children whom we teach come to realise who He is, and enter into a living relationship with Him.

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## 5. Teach about God in Evangelism

“When I was little I wondered who would be God when God died, I thought I might be God.”

“God has black hair and a black beard; he is old, very old. He has brown eyes and wears a striped cloak like a dress. He has great power.”

These comments from children show that the average child has no conception of the God of the Bible. He is never mentioned at home; most of the adults he meets in his family, neighbourhood and school, live as if God did not exist. Society generally regards those who worship Him as objects of humour and scorn. Even children who attend Sunday school can have a distorted view of Him. Sometimes they have gleaned a little knowledge about Him, and put their imaginative mind to work to interpret these gleanings. Of course, their imaginings are often far removed from the truth:

“God is a great person. He is all white. He created everything, He created the cars, the houses, the trees.”

“God is a Spirit, He has a beard and a cloak.”

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### Teaching about God is the Basis of Evangelism

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Man is prone to idolatry; he constantly fashions a god according to his own ideas. Often we hear people say, “I can’t imagine God being like that.” Paul pinpoints this idolatry at the beginning of Romans.

“And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever” (Romans 1:23, 25)

People in every age group imagine a god. God’s charge “thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself” (Psalm 50:21), is applicable to all. Children, unless taught the character of God as revealed in the Bible, will have a “false god”.

Salvation is turning “to God from idols” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). So it is imperative that children know something about the God to whom they should turn. How tragic it would be if they turned to a god whom they imagined.

Salvation is knowing God, being in fellowship with the true and living God of whom the Scriptures speak. “This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” John 17:3).

The primary goal of the Gospel and of the work of Christ is to bring us to God. “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

So teaching about this “living and true God” is essential in our evangelism. We must teach boys and girls what He has revealed of Himself.

Indeed, the doctrine of God is the background and context of every other doctrine. How can there be any true understanding of the death of Christ without some knowledge of the justice and mercy of God? The incarnation becomes an impossibility if divorced from the

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being and power of God. Unless we know something about the character of God, sin is of no consequence, repentance has no meaning, and faith becomes a mere “leap in the dark”

Remember, too, that the whole plan of salvation began with God. Paul speaks of “the Gospel of God” (Romans 1:1). God took the initiative to save sinners; He gave His Son. Often children get the totally unbiblical idea that God was going to punish us for our sins, and the Lord Jesus intervened to save us. The Gospel begins with God and our evangelism should begin there also.

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## **The Lord Jesus and the Apostles Taught about God when Evangelising**

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Teaching about God the Father is very evident in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. To the woman of Samaria, who had obviously a very limited and inadequate understanding of God, He made that very significant declaration:

“God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ taught both His disciples and the unsaved multitudes that the Father sends sun and rain to both the just and the unjust. He sees in secret, He answers prayers, He rewards, He provides for His children. Time and time again Christ taught that He was sent by the Father. Not only did He teach about God the Father, but He revealed Him:

“He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9).

We must remember that most of the people whom Christ taught were well acquainted with Old Testament teaching about God; so He did not have to start teaching the very basics. Most children today have no such knowledge. It is our responsibility to endeavour to provide them with it.

It is very interesting and helpful to examine the evangelism carried out by the Apostles in the Acts. When they spoke to Jews they assumed, as their Master had done, some basic knowledge of the Old Testament teaching about God. When they ministered to Gentiles, however, they found it necessary to teach them basic doctrines about God.

When Paul and Barnabas visited Lystra, it was obvious the people were devoted to false gods like Zeus and Hermes, for this is who they thought Barnabas and Saul were! The evangelists’ message was we “preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein” (Acts 14:15).

The emphasis was the same when Paul encountered the worshippers of the “unknown god”, the intellectuals of Athens: “Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you” (Acts 17:23). The first three chapters of Paul’s masterly exposition of the Gospel in his letter to the Romans, are full of teaching about God: Creator, Judge, holy, righteous and faithful. If we follow the example of these early evangelists, our evangelism among children will include teaching about God.

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## **There are many Truths to Teach About God**

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What should we teach them about Him? Just about all the attributes of God have an application to unsaved children; so we should never feel that some should necessarily be excluded from evangelism. God’s attributes are ways in which He reveals Himself; we must be careful not to teach them as vague abstractions. Children need to have these truths taught in the context of concrete situations. They will understand God’s omnipresence much better when they see the futility of Jonah’s efforts to escape from Him. As we teach how

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Nebuchadnezzar discovered that God is the Almighty One, they will come to some understanding of that great truth. Do not assume, however, that children will learn these great truths if we simply tell them Bible stories. They need to have their attention focused on God and what He does, in these narratives of Bible history. The teacher must take time to explain the particular truth which is central to the lesson. It is not enough just to say "God is everywhere". Spell out what this means; explain it. Where is "everywhere"? Why can God be everywhere?

Also, these truths should be applied to the lives of the children. Yes, God is everywhere. But what difference should this make in the lives of the children? Answer that question as you teach.

- God is holy (Isaiah 6:3)--you must be made pure before Him
- God is love (John 3:16)--if you turn from sin and come to Him, He will forgive you
- God is everywhere (Psalm 139:7-12)--do not try to get away from Him
- God is all-knowing (Psalm 139:1-6)--be careful about what you do in secret
- God is faithful (Hebrews 10:23)--take heed to His Word for He will always do what He says.

In the following chapters we will deal with attributes of God which ought to be emphasised. This does not imply that others ought to be excluded. But it would be impossible to deal with every attribute in detail! The truths which will be discussed are foundational when teaching the message of salvation. The apostles emphasised them as they presented the Gospel.

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## 6. Teach that God has spoken, and that He is the Creator

The reason why we can know about God and know Him is that He has chosen to reveal Himself. He has shown something of His character through creation and our conscience. This is revelation which all mankind hears. He has, however, spoken more clearly and directly:

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### God has Spoken to us Through the Bible

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#### Establish the authority for your message

Young children accept everything the teacher says. If “teacher” says it, it must be right! In our evangelism it is important that children do not accept our teaching on that basis alone. They should see and understand that we teach the Bible, the Word of God. The Apostles preached the Gospel from the Scriptures. Peter said, “Those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled” (Acts 3:18). In the epistles there is great emphasis on the fact that God’s plan of salvation was according to the Scriptures.

“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; ...and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4).

Children need to see that the message we bring is not our ideas, or someone else’s ideas, but that it is based on the written Word of God. Use phrases like “God says in the Bible” and “the Bible says”. When questions are asked, answer them from the Bible, rather than saying “I think...” The child needs to know that the answers are “God’s answers” rather than just “teacher’s answers”. It is good to teach from an open Bible. This is a continual visual reminder of your authority. Include short quotations from the Bible in your teaching. As children become older you should involve them in finding answers for themselves in the Bible.

#### Explain that the Bible is God’s Word

We should explain that the Bible is different from any other book. It is not just a book about God, it is God’s Word, God’s message to us (2 Timothy 3:16). All the words in the Bible, although written down by men, are exactly the words God wanted them to write. The Bible is God speaking to us, just as much as if He were to speak in a loud voice from the sky. He doesn’t do that, of course, for here in the Bible we have all God wants to say to us. Children will hear the Bible ridiculed and its reliability brought into question. It is important that we prepare them for this. In a regular ministry you should at some time explain how we obtained the Bible. Show the children how to treat the Bible and where necessary, correct them if they are abusing it.

There are several Bible stories which teach the authority of God’s Word: the giving of the Law (Exodus 19, 20); the discovery of the Law during Josiah’s reign (2 Kings 22); the prophecies concerning Christ (Micah 5:2; Psalm 22; Isaiah 53); Ezra reading the Law to the people (Nehemiah 8); King Jehoiakim burning God’s Word (Jeremiah 36).

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Teach children a song, or songs, which clearly show that the Bible is God's Word; for example:

"My God is bigger than I am" (verse 2)

"I have a precious book, it's the Word of God, It's the only book that God has given. As I read, God speaks to me, I see Christ and Calvary, The wonderful Word of God."

(Visualised choruses published by CEF)

Another song, especially suitable for very young children is "I believe the Bible" (Salvation Songs 4 No. 14)

From time to time select and teach a memory verse on the same theme. For example, the first part of 2 Timothy 3:16; Matthew 24:35 and "Thy word is truth" from John 17:17.

Our goal and prayer is that the children will realise that the Bible is the Word of God, and that they should obey all of the Bible all of the time.

### **Exemplify what you teach**

Without ever being told, children will sense that you love the Bible, that you believe it is God's Word, that your life is moulded by it. This will make a deep impression upon the lives of the children you teach. It will speak even louder than what you say. Set them an example in your obedience to and your love and reverence for the Scriptures.

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## **God is Creator**

One of the great fundamental truths of evangelism is the fact that God has created boys and girls, and that they are therefore responsible to Him. This is a truth which has often been neglected in present day evangelism; and we need to be sure that we do not omit it.

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## **Reasons for Teaching about the Creator**

### **This is where the Bible begins**

"In the beginning God created..." These are the very significant opening words of the revelation of God. Sometimes we are in such a hurry to teach the heart of the message of salvation, or to apply the Gospel message, that we omit this important foundational truth. He is the One whom we have a responsibility to worship and obey. As we read on through the Scriptures, the call of the Gospel comes from a position of strength, from the Almighty Creator. God is our Maker and so He has a claim on our lives: we are answerable to Him.

### **This is what the Apostle Paul taught the Gentiles**

The Jews already knew that the Lord God was their Creator, so the Apostles did not have to include this in their message to them. But listen to Paul as he preaches to those who, like so many adults and children today, were ignorant of this truth:

"Ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God which made heaven and earth, the sea and all things that are therein" (Acts 14:15).

"He did good and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons" (Acts 14:17).

"Him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth" (Acts 17:23, 24)

"He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25).

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“In Him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

### **This is what today’s children need to know**

The quiz was in progress. “In whose image was man made?” the teacher asked. Immediately a child raised his hand. He was confident he knew the answer to this question. “He was made like an ape!” was his reply. Children are being taught various evolutionary and humanistic theories. Many of the books they read and the television programmes they see assume acceptance of these theories. The results are very serious. Evolution eliminates man’s accountability to God. If the beginning of things started with a “Big Bang” (or whatever other unbiblical ideas are suggested), God is not our Creator, so we are not responsible to Him. There is an urgent need to teach children that God is Creator. We must begin when the children are very young and continue to teach this great truth in more and more detail as they grow older. They need to know that Almighty God created them; therefore He is the One to whom they must give an account. He is the One they must worship and obey.

“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker” (Psalm 95:6).

Often we bemoan the fact that children are irreverent. Perhaps we are partly to blame, for the God we have taught them about is too small! Children need to see how great their God is before we can hope to see them having awe and reverence. As we teach them about the Creator, they will see how small and dependent on Him they are. As they see His greatness, they will learn that the One who made the universe can be trusted completely for everything.

“Our help is in the Name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 124:8).

We should definitely include this truth in our evangelism. We must teach it, and teach it well. Children need to be introduced to their Creator, a fact underlined in Ecclesiastes 12:1.

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say I have no pleasure in them” (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

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## **How to Teach This Truth to Children**

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### **Teach the truth about creation as found in the early chapters of Genesis**

Make sure the children know and understand Genesis chapters 1-3. Emphasise that God created the universe from nothing. You may find it helpful to ask them “Have you ever made anything?” Discuss the materials they used and how it all turned out in the end! Then show how God made something far more wonderful, out of nothing. As you explain that God made man, it is important to explain that this was the most wonderful part of God’s creation. What does it mean that man was made “in the image of God”? It means that in some ways man was like God. God gave man a mind to think. He gave man a soul, so that he could know, love and obey God. Man’s soul would live for ever.

### **Know your facts**

It is good if you know fascinating little details about God’s creation. You can use these occasionally to show how great our Creator is. You might say something like this: “Did you know that every spider has about 600 silk glands, and is just like a complicated silk making factory?”

The spider can make several different kinds of silk and knows when to use each one for making a web, wrapping up an insect she has caught, protecting eggs or parachuting through the air! We can’t fully understand even a little everyday spider. Doesn’t it show us how great and wonderful her Maker is?”

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From time to time a child may come and ask you to prove that there is a God, or say “My Uncle says there is no God”. You could take off your watch and ask the child how all those little parts came together to make a watch. The answer is obvious; someone made the watch. Similarly new models of cars don’t just “happen”; someone must design them. Our universe is far more complicated, and yet every little part is perfect. Wherever we look in the world, we see clues that everything that exists has infinite power, thought and care behind it.

### **Memorise and sing**

Ask the children to memorise Bible verses, which teach that God is the Creator—Genesis 1:1; Psalm 95:6; Psalm 102:25. Also carefully select songs or hymns which teach this truth and express worship and reverence for the Creator. For example, “Thou art a wonderful God”; “I sing the mighty power of God”; “My God is bigger than I am” (All visualised and published by CEF)

### **Apply the truth**

This truth should be carefully and thoroughly applied to the children, as in the following examples:

“Do you make fun of other boys and girls who are not the same as you are? Do you make fun of someone in school because they are not as clever as you, or because they are a different colour from you, or because they are not as good at sports as you? Remember God made you the way you are, and He made your friends the way they are. Therefore it is sinful for you to make fun of others who are different.”

Or “You may have heard people say ‘It doesn’t matter about God., “ Perhaps you are refusing to let God be in charge of your life. Don’t forget, that because God made you, you must answer to him for everything you do. You might disobey Him, and try to forget about Him, but one day you must meet Him.”

Or “It is a very, very serious thing to disobey the One who made you. He is your Maker, and you should love and obey Him.”

Or “You have heard how God could make the universe from nothing. He can also make disobedient boys and girls into different people...into a new creation. He can change you, and make you into the kind of person He wants you to be.”

Or “Doesn’t God look after everything He has made? He cares for everything in a very wonderful way. And He cares for His children. When you trust Jesus Christ, God the great Creator becomes your loving Heavenly Father.”

In our world more glory is given to the creature than to the Creator. Many children will never know of the One “in whom we live and move and have our being”, unless we tell them. The Creator has revealed Himself through His Word. God has spoken; so we can go to the children with confidence. We know that what we tell them is true, for it is written in His Word.

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# 7. Teach the Holiness and Justice of God

God's holiness means that He is completely pure and perfect. He is apart from all that is impure, all that is false, all that is sinful.

God's justice means that everything He does is right. The demands he makes on mankind are righteous demands. His rewards and punishments will always be consistent with His holy nature: He rewards the good, and punishes the evil.

God's justice is the outworking of His holiness. The two truths are closely linked, so we will consider them together. This does not mean that they will always be taught together.

## Reasons for Teaching the Holiness and Justice of God

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### God's holiness and justice are taught throughout the Bible

These doctrines are often neglected in evangelism. Yet in the Bible more emphasis is probably placed on the holiness and justice of God than any other of God's attributes. Time and time again God is called "The Holy One of Israel".

"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit" (Isaiah 57:15).

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:3).

Peter explained why believers should live holy lives: "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. Because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:15, 16).

The holiness of God will be an eternal theme of the redeemed in the New Jerusalem. "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come" (Revelation 4:8b).

The reality of divine justice shines out from page after page of Bible history. "He cometh to judge . . . the world with righteousness and the people with his truth" (Psalm 96:13).

In the Old Testament, the Tabernacle and the different kinds of sacrifices reminded God's people of the absolute holiness and justice of God. This emphasis is not restricted to the Old Testament. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself often warned of judgement. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).

Modern man does not want to hear these truths, but this is no reason for omitting them from our evangelism. Remember, the Bible is our handbook of evangelism. If the holiness and justice of God are emphasised there, that emphasis should also be found in our teaching.

Perhaps some object that these truths are "unsuitable for children". It was the Law, reflecting very clearly both the holiness and justice of God, which God instructed His people to "teach . . . diligently unto thy children" (Deuteronomy 6:7). The first Old Testament book which Jewish children are taught is Leviticus, the book of the Bible where the word "holy" is most mentioned. God's instruction to His people through the prophet Joel, was that their

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children were to be told of the judgement that had taken place (Joel 1:3). Obviously, we will be careful how we teach these truths, but teach them we must, for God does not cease to be God because of the age group involved.

### **God's holiness and justice were preached by the Apostles**

When the Apostles preached to Jews, they often implied these truths. Implication was sufficient, for the Jews knew what the Old Testament Scriptures revealed of the character of God. When Paul evangelised Gentiles, he taught these truths, for they knew nothing of them. Paul must have regarded these truths as a vital part of his evangelism.

“God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because he hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained” (Acts 17:30, 31).

When Paul wrote to the Romans, he wrote to a church which he, himself, had not founded and visited. This church probably consisted of, for the most part, Gentile believers with a minimum of Old Testament background. He began the letter by emphasising the holy character of God, and the righteousness and justice which were the outworking of God's holiness. He does not present the death of Christ until chapter 3:22.

### **God's holiness and justice show man his sin**

When children learn something of the purity of God, they will see how impure they are. They will begin to see sin as something serious—rebellion against a holy God. It was when Isaiah saw the Lord in His holiness that he said, “Woe is me!...because I am a man of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5). This was also the experience of Moses (Exodus 3), Peter (Luke 5:8) and John (Revelation 1:17).

### **God's holiness and justice explain the cross**

God is holy and therefore a sinner cannot enter His presence, or go to Heaven when he dies. But Jesus Christ became the sinner's substitute and God, in His justice, poured out His wrath and punishment for sin upon His Son. Therefore the death of Christ was necessary for our salvation. If God is not holy, there is no need for salvation. If God is not just, there is no need for the death of Christ.

### **Children today do not understand about holiness and justice**

In the world today, there is very little understanding of what holiness and justice really are. Children are growing up in a world of low moral standards. They see impurity, dishonesty and profanity. Sin is glamorous, crime pays. Biblical standards, which were once respected in Western society, have been warped, trampled on or thrown to the winds. We cannot assume that children already know these attributes of God—they don't! We dare not omit them from our message; if we do, we are less than Biblical.

Even in the home, the child's grasp of what justice is may be warped. In this present age of materialism, parents spend less time with their children and are not so aware of what they get up to. It's easier to “turn a blind eye” and not punish the child's wrong doing. Many children learn to expect this when they do wrong. Mum or Dad most probably will not carry out the threatened punishment. So they learn to think about God's justice in the same way: “God loves me, He won't really keep me out of heaven!”

### **Children must see that being a Christian involves living a holy life**

“Be ye holy, for I am holy” saith the Lord. When we teach that God loves what is good and hates what is evil, that He is pure, that He always does what is right, then there are obvious implications for the children, when they come to faith in Christ. When they are born again into God's kingdom, one of the results will be a desire to live a life pleasing to a Holy God.

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## How to Teach God's Holiness and Justice to Children

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### Teach it simply

Saying “God is holy” or “God is just” is not teaching these truths. First of all, we need to think of other words and phrases which will help communicate this truth. Phrases like “pure”, “perfect”, “everything He does is right”; “God is different from us, God is far above us, God never does anything wrong”; “He loves what is good, He hates what is bad”; “Sin cannot be where God is”. “Sometimes we watch things on television which we would never dream of doing ourselves. We like to watch fighting, or we listen to bad language. But God hates those things. He is so good and pure that He cannot allow sin to be near Him” (Habakkuk 1:13)

We must also illustrate the truth. The following illustration may help. Have three “white” handkerchiefs—one that is grubby and soiled, one that has been washed and washed and has lost its dazzling whiteness, and a new bright white one. Say to the boys and girls, “Maybe you are like this handkerchief (2<sup>nd</sup> one); your life looks quite good and when you think of some boys and girls in your class your life seems very good (hold up grubby handkerchief with the other). They use bad language and you don’t; they steal from the shop if they have a chance—you wouldn’t do that; they never go to church and you do. But it’s different when you think about you and God. He never, never told a lie, but you have. He is always good and kind, you’re not. He can’t have sin near Him, but you like to watch some sinful things or listen to tales about someone. He never, never sins and you sin every day. When you think of how good and pure God is (hold up pure white handkerchief), your life (hold up appropriate one) seems sinful and bad. How different you are from God. The Bible says “All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6).

What about God’s justice? We can explain to children that God is absolutely fair. When He punishes it is the right punishment, when He rewards it is the right reward. No one will ever be able to say to God, “It’s not fair”. Unlike Mums and Dads and teachers (who are not always fair because they do not know all the facts) God always knows all the facts. Also He always has the power to punish and reward; no-one can escape His justice.

### Teach it thoroughly

It is best to explain the truth step by step using this simple kind of language in the context of a Bible story. These truths are so much taught throughout the Bible that it is not difficult to find stories which teach them naturally and forcefully. There are the stories of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3); Noah (Genesis 6, 7, 8); the giving of the Law (Exodus 19, 20); Achan (Joshua 7); teaching about the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle (Exodus 36 - 40); the worshipping of the golden calf (Exodus 32); Isaiah’s vision (Isaiah 6). These are but a few of the many Bible lessons which teach these truths. Throughout the narrative, focus the children’s attention clearly on the truth you are teaching—rather than on some little details in the story.

When you teach about the death of Christ, it is important that children realise that God’s justice demanded that sin must be punished. Because He is holy He had to forsake His Son, because He “became sin for us”. Explain that God does not stop being holy and just when He forgives. The sin which He forgives has already been punished in His Son.

### Teach it frequently

Choose memory verses which teach these truths. For example, “The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works” (Psalm 145:17). Other verses which teach this truth include Isaiah 6:3; Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 24:3-5; Matthew 5:8; Psalm 19:9. Unfortunately, there are very few children’s songs which teach them. Surely this is evidence that this kind of teaching has been neglected! You should, however, carefully select a hymn which teaches this truth in a fairly simple way. The first and third verses of “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty” (found in most hymnbooks) could be used.

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**Teach it by Example**

The example of a teacher who has caught a glimpse of the holiness of God will make an impression on children. This does not mean being sanctimonious or giving the impression that God is so remote that He is not interested in boys and girls. But as the teacher prays, the children should be aware that he is speaking to the Holy One. As he teaches these great truths it should be from a heart that has been gripped by them. A teacher who lives a holy life will certainly be a living testimony to a Holy God.

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## 8. Teach the Love of God

Without God's love, grace and mercy, there would be no Good News. It was love that sent the Son of God to earth, to be our Saviour. It was love that led Him to die for us on Calvary's cross. It was love that saved us, when we were unlovely and had no thought for God and His Word. "He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

The love of God is seen in His care for all His creation. This is sometimes called the goodness of God. "The Lord is good to all and his tender mercies are over all his works" (Psalm 145:9).

Unlike human love, God's love is not the result of something attractive in the one loved. God loves sinners, those who are utterly unworthy and have forfeited all right to His love. The love of God is always bound up with His grace, His favour, undeserved by us.

The mercy of God is an aspect of His love. It describes His feeling and action towards those who sin and suffer. In mercy He restrains and withholds the penalty deserved by the sinner.

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### Reasons for Teaching the Love of God

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#### God's love is taught in the Bible

In the Old Testament we see God's love primarily in His special relationship with His people, His care, protection and provision for them. Even when they were rebellious and ungrateful, His love remained steadfast. We see this very much in those moving verses in Hosea:

"How shall I give thee up Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel...mine heart is turned within me" (Hosea 11:8).

Similarly in Jeremiah we find the same declaration of love for His people: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee" (Jeremiah 31:3).

The children of Israel experienced this love in many ways, not least in God's merciful dealings with them when they were stubborn, rebellious and wayward.

"For the Lord thy God is a merciful God" (Deuteronomy 4:31).

"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not" (Lamentations 3:22).

We see God's love in His gracious invitation to sinners, which is found in the Old Testament as well as the New. "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18).

In the New Testament the love of God is seen supremely in His sending of Jesus Christ to die on the cross as the sinners' substitute. But it is also seen in the salvation of those who believe. If love is measured by what is given, God's love is immeasurable!

"He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:8, 9, 10).

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For the believer there is nothing surer than the love of God for him. This is the love of a Heavenly Father caring for His child. It is a love from which nothing can separate him.

“For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38, 39).

### **The love of God makes salvation possible**

If God had not been loving and merciful towards us, there could never have been salvation and there would be no Gospel to preach. It is important that children realise how much we are indebted to God. In a world where so many are aware of their rights, children should see that salvation is not a right, but a gift of God’s free grace. This is why John 3:16 begins, “For God so loved the world that he gave...”

### **Many children do not know that God is a God of love**

Many are totally ignorant of God—so the concept of a God of love is totally alien to them. Some have been unwisely threatened with God:

“God will get you”. So their concept is of someone with a rod ready to strike when they step out of line. We must teach them that God is a personal God, One who hates sin but loves sinners, One who can be known, worshipped and loved.

### **Many children have no understanding of what love is**

In today’s world, and on today’s media, the very meaning of the word “love” is debased. It has come to mean getting rather than giving, self-gratification rather than wanting the highest good for the one loved. At a very young age children are listening to pop music which conveys what is only a perversion of love. Some experience over-indulgence, others suffer from neglect.

“Many suffer material over-indulgence at home as a substitute for the self-giving love of their parents. This kind of “love” fluctuates with the financial prosperity of the parents. If they are low on finances and there is a need for a new washing machine or a new car, the child cannot have something which he would normally be bought as an expression of the parent’s love. They need to hear about the steadfast, sure, self-giving love of God.”

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## **How to Teach the Love of God**

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### **In the Bible Lessons**

Many, many Bible stories show the love of God in action, and the children’s attention should be centred on what God does, rather than on what certain individual characters do. Do not be satisfied with just saying “this story shows us that God loves sinners”. Really teach the meaning of God’s love and the various aspects of it that are evident in the story. We do not want children to assume that God’s love is similar to the perversions of love which many of them encounter. The following lessons could be used to teach the love of God with particular emphasis on some aspects of it.

- Life of Jacob (Genesis 27-33)..... God’s love is unchanging
  - Life of Joseph (Genesis 37, 39-47)..... God cares for His own
  - Deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 12, 13)..... God’s love is powerful
  - Provision in the wilderness (Exodus 16, 17)..... God is good
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Christmas Story (Matthew 1, 2) ..... God's love is shown in the gift of His Son  
 Prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) ..... God is gracious  
 Samaritan Women (John 4:1-42) ..... God loves the individual  
 Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) ..... God loves the unlovely  
 Conversion of Saul (Acts 9) ..... God is merciful  
 Peter's Vision (Acts 10) ..... God loves all kinds of people

As you teach the death of Christ show that it was because "God so loved the world that He gave." Emphasise the magnitude of the gift and what it cost God to save sinners.

### Through memory verses and songs

There are many Bible verses and passages which teach the love and mercy of God. The following are just a few suggestions of verses which children could memorise: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). The love of God is also clearly taught in Psalm 103:8-10; John 3:16, 17; 1 John 4:10, 19. When choosing hymns about the love of God, try to select those which teach some aspect of this glorious truth rather than songs which are only a subjective response to God's love. "I am so glad that our Father in heaven" (in most hymn books) and "For God so loved the world, He gave His only Son" (Salvation Songs 3 No. 38) teach something of God's love.

### With balance

"God is love" (1 John 4:8) is the best known, yet sometimes most misunderstood, Biblical definition of God. "God is love" is not the entire truth about God. The apostle John who wrote these words also wrote "God is light" (1 John 1:5). So God's acts of love will always be holy acts. His love is a holy love.

It is important to recognise the relationship between God's holiness, and His love in the plan of salvation.

The holiness of God makes salvation necessary, and reveals to the child his sinful heart and rebellion.

The love of God makes salvation possible, and reveals to the child God's answers to the problem of his sin.

The holiness of God therefore is very basic in the teaching of the Gospel, and is, in a real sense, the first and primary attribute of God to be presented to lost children. As the child sees his sinfulness in the light of God's holiness, and is concerned and convicted about his need, he is ready to hear about God's remedy in the cross and resurrection of Christ. This is the message of God's love—the answer to a need created by a glimpse of God's holiness. It is therefore very important to teach the holiness of God and the love of God, with Biblical balance.

On the one hand, it is possible to teach the love of God to the exclusion of His holiness. Such teaching will often find a ready acceptance, even in unregenerate hearts. If God is *only* a God of love, He will overlook many things, and we do not need to worry too much about our sin. This can give a weak picture of God which is not the picture given in the Bible.

On the other hand, we should not swing to the opposite extreme and omit or lessen the wonderful truth that God is a God of love and mercy. This truth is especially taught as we teach the coming, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If we teach that God is *only* a God of holiness, then we give an equally incorrect picture of God.

God *is* a God of love and mercy; but He is *also* a God of holiness and justice. To teach either truth to the exclusion of the other is to move away from the message of the Bible.

**By example**

The teacher needs to have experienced the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost and this love must show in his life. Meditate on 1 Corinthians 13 and ask God to make this love more and more evident in your life. The teacher's life and message must consistently say to boys and girls, "God is love"

**Conclusion**

It is important that we should give careful thought to this matter of teaching children about the character of God. Once convinced that this is part of Biblical evangelism, we must endeavour to include it in our evangelism. Our prayer should be that God will give our children an awareness and fear of Himself and, above all, a knowledge of God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

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## 9. Teach about Sin in Evangelism

“Have you ever done anything wrong?” asked the teacher. One or two children dropped their eyes. One was thinking of a vase which had fallen and broken as she helped her mother with housework. Another thought of the day he had been caught taking money out of his brother’s pocket. One little girl, with big, wide, innocent brown eyes, looked straight at the teacher. “Oh no! Mummy says I’m a good girl!”

All of these children had an inadequate understanding of sin. One felt guilty about something which had actually been an accident, another remembered being caught, another had no consciousness of sin.

We want children to trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, but before they can trust Him as Saviour, they must be aware of the sin from which they need to be saved. So, careful Biblical teaching about sin is an essential part of the evangelist’s message.

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### Sin is Against God

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Society regards sin as a breach of accepted standards of decency, selfishness, hurting other people or harming yourself. Children are moulded by these values and reflect them. Many children don’t know to ask “Is it right?” They have been conditioned to ask “Does it pay?” or “Will I get caught?” They may have a vague awareness that it is wrong to steal, but have no understanding of why it is wrong. Take the following example of a teacher’s explanation of sin. “As mother left the house she told Bobby that he should not take any of the biscuits which were in the container in the cupboard. She knew that Bobby liked biscuits very much! Bobby looked at her with wide open eyes and said that he would certainly not take any of them. After his mother had left, Bobby thought longingly of those biscuits. Then he decided to take a look at them, and see how many there were. As he opened the lid of the container, the smell of the biscuits drifted up to his nose. He could not resist it any more. He took one, and then a second, and then a third. But he heard footsteps coming up the path; so he hurriedly put the lid on the container and put it back in the cupboard.

His mother entered the room. Her first question was, ‘Bobby, did you take any of those biscuits?’ Bobby looked at her with an innocent expression. ‘No mother, I did not. You told me not to, and I obeyed you.’”

“Boys and girls, what has Bobby done? Yes, he has sinned. What do you mean? How did he sin? Yes, he disobeyed his mother, he took something that did not belong to him, and he told a lie. It is wrong to do these things. They are sin. You and I have done things like this also, haven’t we? We all have sinned!”

Is this an adequate illustration? Of course not. Everything is dealt with on a horizontal level. The fact that sin is against God has been omitted. In such an illustration it needs to be pointed out that when Bobby disobeyed his mother, he was breaking God’s command which said “Honour thy father and thy mother”. When he told a lie, he was disobeying God’s command, “Thou shalt not bear false witness”. He had broken God’s Law. Breaking God’s Law is sin.

In our teaching we must not underestimate the gravity of breaking God’s Law, or teach views that are very far removed from what the Bible teaches. We read in the Bible about “transgressions” (Isaiah 43:25), which means rebellion against God; “iniquity” (Isaiah 59:2), which means depravity, something which is warped and twisted; “guile” (Psalm 32:2), which

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means deceit or hypocrisy. The word translated as “sin” in the Bible means “failing to hit a target”, or “failing to reach a standard” (Romans 3:23). It also means “failing to obey an authority” (Nehemiah 9:26), “failing to keep to the correct path” (Exodus 32:8). It is God’s target which is missed, God’s standard which is not reached, God’s authority which is disobeyed, and God’s path which is not kept to.

Now we see how vital it is that children know something about God. You could point out that they might not worry too much if they don’t do what a classmate wishes. But if they don’t do what the headmaster wishes, it is more serious because he is in a position of authority. Then think how serious it is to rebel against God, who is almighty, holy and just!

Incidentally, all these pictures of sin are concrete enough to use when explaining sin to children. They could even be visualised. Do not use them all at once, but take one at a time.

The Bible teaches that sin is primarily against God. When King David committed adultery he sinned against Bathsheba, against Uriah and against his people. Yet in his repentance we see that he acknowledged his sin as being primarily against God—

“Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight” (Psalm 51:4).

Sin is turning one’s back on God. It is the weak, little creature shaking his fist in rebellion against the Almighty Creator. It is exalting yourself against Him. It is withholding the worship due to Him, putting yourself in His place. All people including children, are guilty, for unregenerate man is hostile to God.

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### **Sin is Transgression of the Law**

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One of the most Biblical and effective ways of showing that sin is against God and that it is serious, is to teach God’s Law , given in Exodus 20 and His commandments, given in the New Testament.

“ . . . Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4)

“...by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20)

“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Romans 3:19).

“I had not known sin, but by the law” (Romans 7:7).

In James 1:22- 25 the Word of God is compared to a mirror. A mirror cannot wash your face but it can show you where it needs to be cleaned. In the same way, we cannot be saved or made clean by keeping God’s commands, but they can show us what is wrong and against God’s will in our lives.

In a regular ministry it is good at some stage for the children to memorise the Ten Commandments. The “Ten Commandments Song” (published by European CEF) teaches the law very effectively and includes a gospel application. God’s standards are summed up in the Ten Commandments, as given to us in Exodus 20. Of course, other commandments are also given by God in the New Testament, in addition to the Ten Commandments. The Lord Jesus took each of these ten and restated and even deepened their significance.

When we teach about specific sins, we should show the children why they are wrong. We will not be content with, “You know when you cheat, or tell lies about someone, the Bible calls that sin.” Rather, we will say something like this, “Remember that day you copied the answers from someone else? You didn’t get caught and it helped you pass the exam. But listen to one of God’s commands ‘You shall not steal’. You stole the answers, didn’t you? You disobeyed God. “ When you talk about specific sins always relate them to God’s standards to show why they are sin. It is especially good in this concept to teach the Ten Commandments.

Avoid always referring to the same commandment. The 5<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> are easy to use, but they are not the only commandments which children break! Be comprehensive in this aspect of your teaching.

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“God commands us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength—that just means with every part of us. But just think of the last few days; you thought about your bike, your toys, your T.V. programmes, your friends. You didn’t think about God at all! Many, many times you have disobeyed this command of God.”

Or “The boy next door has a gleaming new bicycle. This morning he flashed past you as you pedalled your rusty bicycle. Do you like that boy? No! Deep inside you wish you had a bike like his, and you don’t like him because he has one. The Bible calls that ‘coveting’, and God’s law says, ‘You shall not covet’.”

In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus made it clear that the law is spiritual. God’s law can be broken in our thought life, for example; angry and hateful thoughts are breaking the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment (Matthew 5:22). Refer to sinful thoughts which children have, and show that these, too, are rebellion against God.

You can show what sin is as you teach the perfect life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Explain that He always kept God’s Law. As the children look at Him they can see the standard God demands. You might say, “If you want to live a life that pleases God, you need to be as good as the Lord Jesus was, but you aren’t, are you?” We want children to be convicted of sin so we must appeal to their consciences by teaching God’s law and His standards as given in the Bible, praying that the Holy Spirit will use this “sharp needle” to bring about real conviction.

The law also helps explain the cross of Christ: the broken law of God demanded the penalty of death. There on the cross the Lord Jesus paid the penalty of a law which was broken by us, when He died as our substitute.

Teaching God’s commands also indicates what kind of life the child will live if he trusts the Saviour—“If you love me, keep my commandments”.

Certainly this must be part of our evangelism. Teaching the Law is not an end in itself, but is essential preparation for the Good News.

“ . . . the law was our schoolmaster (custodian) to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24).

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## Sin must be Punished

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The clear teaching of Scripture is that sin deserves punishment and separation from God.

“...the soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4).

“...the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23)

The Lord Jesus Christ taught more about hell than about heaven. Divine judgement on sin is very much a reality throughout Scripture. So we cannot omit it without detracting from and distorting the message of salvation to the extent that it becomes “another gospel”.

We must, however, be wise in the way in which we teach this solemn truth. We need faithfully and tenderly to warn children of eternal separation and punishment. But we should avoid graphic descriptions of eternal torment which may evoke a purely human fear in the child. This may lead him to a purely human, but false, profession of salvation.

Explain what “death” is. You could, perhaps, explain it like this—“When a person dies he is cut off from everyone he knows. We cannot ‘ talk to him any more, have fun with him any more, or listen to him any more. When God tells us that sin brings death He means that sin cuts us off from Him. He not only means dying and being buried in the ground. He means that sin results in your soul—the real you—being cut off from Him. And if all your sin is not taken away, you will be cut off from God forever and ever.”

Remember those two words we used earlier—*faithfully* and *tenderly* teach about the consequences of sin, warn rather than frighten. \_

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## Sin is Universal

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“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12)

“There is none righteous, no not one” (Romans 3:10).

Sin is absolutely universal, encompassing every nation, age group and culture. Since Adam sinned, it is natural and inevitable for every man to sin. “There is no man that sinneth not” (1 Kings 8:46). Adam sinned and *all* his descendants have followed in his footsteps. You can show the children that if they button the first button of their coat wrongly—all the others will be wrong. So it was with Adam, he sinned and so we *all* sin.

Children need to be taught that they are included in the universality of sin. Sometimes their sins are regarded as unimportant, or as a source of amusement. Yes, they’re “naughty”, some people think, but not sinners! Children can unconsciously adopt this false view of themselves, and it needs to be corrected:

“Everyone disobeys God’s commands. You may tell lies or take something which does not belong to you. But God has told you, “Thou shalt not bear false witness” and “Thou shalt not steal”. I find myself saying hurtful things about others and being jealous of someone who has God something I don’t have, although I know that God says, “Love thy neighbour as thyself”. All of us have sinned. I have done and said and thought many wrong things too, just like you. That’s why we all need the Lord Jesus Christ.”

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## We are Sinners by Nature

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“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?” Jeremiah 17:9).

Although sin is an act, it is not only that. It is a nature, and this nature is the root cause of the act. The child sins because he is a sinner. He is born with a bias towards wrong. We are by nature children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). It is important that children grasp this truth. You might explain it like this:

“When you were little you may have tried to climb out of your high chair. Your mother said ‘No’, and made you sit down. But as soon as she looked away, you got up again! You were only little, but you knew how to be disobedient. No one had to teach you that, for you were born wanting to go your own way rather than God’s way.”

Or “The other day you and your friend were late for class. The teacher asked, ‘Why are you late?’ Immediately you said, ‘We didn’t hear the bell’. It was a lie, for you had heard the bell. Why do you find it so easy to tell lies to get you out of trouble? Why do you find it easy to put yourself before others, when God’s way is to tell the truth and put others first? The reason is that you were born wanting to go your own way, rather than God’s. You were born a sinner.”

If we teach only about specific sins and don’t explain why we sin we may, inadvertently, give children the impression that if they can put these specific things right, all will be well.

Sin has infected every part of human nature.

“Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness” (Ephesians 4:18, 19)

“Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (John 8:34).

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This truth has been explained in the following way, which you might find helpful in teaching older children.

Take a glass of pure water to represent Adam as he was when God created him. Another glass of deadly poison (you could use black ink!) represents Satan. He is “as bad as bad can be”. Pour a drop of poison into the glass of pure water—this now represents Adam when he sinned, and all of us as individuals. The “poison” doesn’t just stay at the top—it spreads right throughout the water. So sin has affected every part of us—mind, heart, will. Because of sin we cannot understand God’s Word, we do not love God, and our wills are rebellious rather than submissive.

If we teach this to children, they will be less likely to think that there is something they can do save themselves. Some children are brought up in a religious background where they are taught that being good, saying prayers and other religious acts help make them right with God. If they see themselves as they really are, it will help them realise that this is a problem which only God can solve.

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### **We are Sinners by Practice**

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Sin is an act which is both the consequence and the proof of a sinful nature. Teach this to children and speak about specific sins. Rather than say, “We are all disobedient to our parents”, it is better to use a specific example:

“One evening you were watching television. Your mother came, ‘Now turn the T.V. off, it’s time for bed’, she said. Did you do it? No—you pretended you did not hear. You disobeyed God for He commands you ‘Honour your father and mother’.”

You do not know exactly what sins each child commits—but it is not hard to guess! Jogging your own memory may help! Use the word “you” in your examples. This makes your teaching much more personal. Try to use different kinds of examples—sins of thought, word and deed, not “doing what is right,” “doing what is wrong” As you talk about specific sins never make them appear funny—they aren’t!

It is interesting that the Lord Jesus pointed out specific sins as he talked with various people. He showed the rich young ruler his love of riches, and compelled the woman of Samaria to think seriously of her adultery. He listed the specific sins which proceed from the heart of man:

“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matthew 15:19).

When someone goes to the doctor with a pain, the doctor tries to put his finger on the sore spot. Why? So that he can provide the remedy. Through the enabling of the Holy Spirit, the teacher points out specific sins in the child’s life, so that the precious remedy of the Blood of Christ may be applied. You are not leading the children to despair, but to find forgiveness and deliverance in Christ, as you have done. Do not leave the child under the guilt of his sin; point to the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”

The following are examples of lessons which could be used to teach these different truths about sin.

- Sin is against God .....Adam and Eve’s disobedience (Genesis 3)
  - Sin is transgression of the law ..... The Golden Calf (Exodus 32)
  - Sin is universal .....Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1- 9)
  - Sin must be punished .....The Flood (Genesis 6, 7)
  - We are sinners by nature ..... Life of Cain (Genesis 4)
  - We are sinners by practice .....Achan (Joshua 7)
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It is the evangelist's responsibility to teach children about sin. But unless the Holy Spirit works and uses the Word which we teach, the children will not really understand the seriousness of their sin. So we must continually pray that God will bring about conviction.

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# 10. Bring God's Invitation to Sinners

“ ‘He's alive' ... the news spread like wildfire. Mary was excited, 'I saw Him, He talked with me! ' Later the disciples could add, 'And we saw Him eat.' Thomas could say, 'I touched Him.' Over 500 people could say, 'I saw Him for myself.' So we can be sure that Jesus Christ is alive today.”

These closing moments of the teacher's Easter Sunday talk had summarised some of the evidences for the resurrection. But something was missing. He had not taught what difference the fact of the resurrection could make to those in his class. Teaching the message of salvation is more than teaching facts and doctrines (although that is involved). It is showing the children what response God expects from them on the basis of those facts and truths. It is teaching them how to be saved. As well as careful teaching of doctrine, there must be a clear presentation of the child's responsibility to repent and believe. The children should be taught what God will do for those who turn from sin and receive Christ. These are integral parts of the Gospel message. To experience salvation, the sinner must obey God's command or invitation and actually come to Christ and trust Him as Lord and Saviour.

Many questions are asked by workers among children about “the invitation”—“What is the invitation?” “Should child evangelists give it?” It is necessary to turn to the Bible to find the answers to these questions. When we find the Biblical answers, we must ensure that all we do and teach is in accord with these answers.

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## What is the Invitation?

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The invitation is a call from God to sinners to come to Him through Jesus Christ in repentance and faith for forgiveness and salvation. The word “command” can be used instead of “invitation”. Coming from God, a command and an invitation are practically identical in meaning.

This invitation from God to sinners, to come to Him, can be found throughout the Old Testament.

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

“Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isaiah 55.1).

When the Lord Jesus Christ was on earth He invited sinners to come to Him.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”(Matthew 11:28).

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” John 6:37).

This is how the Bible ends: “The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). God is still calling the sinner to Himself.

God's invitation includes:

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what the person must do

what God will do.

In other words, it includes man's responsibility (God's command to man) and God's gracious offer (God's promise). These two aspects come out clearly in the way the apostles presented the Gospel in Acts. The Lord Jesus had told the disciples: "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations" (Luke 24:47), and they carried out this commission.

Peter preached this invitation on the Day of Pentecost: "Repent, and be baptised everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:38, 39).

He presented it at the Beautiful Gate of the temple: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19).

In the house of Cornelius he said: "Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43).

Paul presented this invitation in his sermon in the synagogue of Antioch: "Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38, 39).

To the Philippian jailer he said: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

When the Apostles preached the Gospel they challenged their hearers to a heart response. They never asked for a physical response; rather they urged them to repent (Acts 2:38), to believe (Acts 13:39), to come (Hebrews 7:25), to turn (Acts 26:20) and to call (Romans 10:13).

The apostles used these various terms, but each of the words described what a person must do to appropriate God's salvation. They also kept before the hearers the purpose of, and the results of response to God's invitation. It was an invitation to salvation, to deliverance from sin, to new life in Christ. This is the great offer of the Gospel—justification, regeneration, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, a new inheritance through Christ.

This challenge, so obvious in apostolic preaching, is the invitation. This is very much part of the child evangelist's message. Children must be taught the response which God expects and they must be taught what God does for those who accept His invitation. So when you teach children that they must turn from sin, receive Christ, come to Christ, call on Him, and when you teach about what God will do for them, you are bringing them God's invitation.

The invitation is not something to be added on after the message has been given. It is part of the message and has nothing to do with method. It is correct to call it "the invitation" or "God's invitation" or "Christ's invitation" or "the invitation of the Gospel". This is the only invitation found in the Scriptures.

So the Gospel invitation is:

- from God
- through the teacher (who is only the bearer of it)
- to the child
- to come to Jesus Christ for salvation
- in repentance and faith.

It might be expressed like this:

"Do you know that you're just like that boy who went far away. You know you've gone your own way, but are really sorry about it. With all your heart you want to be different. You want to go God's way. Will you tell the Lord Jesus how sorry you are, and trust Him today—right now—to take away all your sin? God says in the Bible: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19).

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Giving this invitation involves therefore:

- letting the children know that they need to trust Christ and how to do so
- emphasising to the children what God will do when they trust Christ
- urging the children to trust Christ today.

The teacher or evangelist who has done these 3 things has given the invitation.

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## **Should We Give This Invitation?**

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Yes—it is a vital part of the Gospel message. It is impossible to evangelise without bringing this invitation. We know that sinful boys and girls may come to Jesus Christ and be saved. Therefore we have a solemn responsibility to include this in our teaching. The children who are listening to us should know of God’s invitation to them and how they should respond to it.

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## **How Should We Give This Invitation?**

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### **Urgently**

Evangelism should never be a dispassionate, detached presentation of a message. We should seek with all our hearts, and in the power of the Spirit, to apply the truth we are teaching. The Bible uses words like dispute (Acts 9:29), reason (Acts 17:2, 18:4), persuade (Acts 18:4; 19:8; 2 Corinthians 5:11), warn (Colossians 1:28), pray (2 Corinthians 5:20) and beseech (2 Corinthians 5:20; 6:1). So there should be a note of earnestness, entreaty and urgency as we bring God’s invitation to children. There should be nothing half-hearted about it.

“We pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Never forget that you are standing before children who are lost, who need to come to Christ *now*. You cannot force children to respond, but you can encourage them to do so.

### **Simply**

Remember that the invitation is the application of the great Bible truths we have been teaching the children. The children need to have some understanding of these truths before they can see what the truths mean for them personally. Sometimes we make the mistake of telling children to “come to the Lord Jesus” or “ask Him to take away your sin” before we have taught the truths of which these statements are the applications. Children do not need to understand everything, but they must see their need and the remedy, before they are shown how the remedy can be theirs. This evangelistic application, the invitation, usually comes at the end of your Bible lesson although it does not have to do so.

### **Naturally**

The invitation should be the natural application of your teaching, and not something tagged on rather awkwardly. There is something wrong if we always couch it in the same words no matter what our Bible lesson is! Different terms and expressions will be used in different lessons, according to the message of each particular lesson. The closing application of the lesson on the wise and foolish builders would be different from one on the Philippian jailer. If you always use the same words, the children will solve the problem for themselves by “switching off”! Try to use one concept throughout one lesson; do not talk about “coming”,

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“receiving” and “believing” all in one lesson. Of course, the children must never think that these are different things which they must do at different times!

### **Authoritatively**

It is important to use a Bible verse as you teach about God’s invitation. There should be a clear link between the verse and the emphasis of your teaching throughout the lesson—it might even be the memory verse for that day. Choose a verse which expresses the invitation in the same way as you are teaching it. For example, if you are talking about receiving Christ, use John 1:12, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” If you are talking about trusting Christ, use Acts 16:31, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” You may use a verse which helps the children to see that Christ is calling them: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink” (John 7:37).

You may use a verse which gives special emphasis to what God will do for those who trust Christ: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13). These verses show both what the child must do and what God will do. Other verses which can be used as you bring God’s invitation include Mark 8:34; John 3:16; Acts 3:19, 10:43; Romans 10:9; Hebrews 7:25).

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## **How Does a Child Respond to the Invitation?**

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The response to the invitation takes place in the child’s heart. The invitation does not need, demand, or necessarily involve any kind of physical or outward response such as raising a hand, coming to the front, or remaining behind after a meeting. Indeed the great danger is that a child might feel that because he has responded in one of these ways, he is automatically saved. The invitation is addressed to the mind, heart and will of the child, and it is in the realm of the mind, heart and will that he turns from sin and trusts Christ. He can do this where he sits, in the counselling time after the meeting, or later in the privacy of his own home.

The following are examples of how God’s invitation to sinners might be taught to children.

“Perhaps you know that, like Zacchaeus, you are lost and away from God. You long for the Lord Jesus to save you and change your life. That is why He came into the world. ‘For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save the lost’ (Luke 19:10). God wants you to trust the Lord Jesus to save you. Won’t you tell Him now, in the quietness of your heart, that you know you are lost in sin? Ask Him to save you and to change your life. If you truly trust the Lord Jesus you will be saved, just as Zacchaeus was . “

Or “It may be that, for the first time ever, you see that your sin cuts you off from God. The Bible tells you what you must do: ‘Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out’ (Acts 3:19). Are you willing to turn from everything you know to be wrong in your life? Will you come to the Lord Jesus now and ask Him to take away your sin? If you do, God promises that every sin will be blotted out.”

Or “Yes, the Lord Jesus died for sinners, but that does not mean that everyone has eternal life. God tells us very clearly in the Bible: ‘For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life’ John 3:16).

Everlasting life is only for those who believe in Him. That means that you must trust Him alone to take away your sin and make you right with God. You no longer think that saying prayers or trying to be good, help bring you to God. You depend on the Lord Jesus alone. Will you put your trust in Him now? If you do, God promises that you will not perish, but you will have everlasting life.”

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It is essential to keep in mind the clear distinction between giving the children God's invitation to come to Christ in repentance and faith, and making yourself available to help children who want further counsel. Making yourself available is not the invitation. It has to do with methods in evangelism, whereas the invitation is part of the message. Making yourself available is not part of your message, and is dealt with in chapter 16. It is important that in our thinking we see the difference between these two things. Only when we understand the difference will we keep them separate in our presentation. In addition, we want to make sure that the children do not confuse the two.

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# 11. Children and Repentance

Biblical obedience to the Gospel necessitates a twofold response. There must be a turning from what is wrong—Repentance—and a turning to God—Faith.

“ . . . ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

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## Repentance as Shown in the Scriptures

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First of all, we need to see from the Scriptures that repentance is part of the Gospel message. If it is, it must be included in our evangelism.

Although the actual word “repent” is seldom used in the Old Testament in relation to men, the concept of turning from sin is very evident:

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:7). “Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit . . . Wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye” (Ezekiel 18:31, 32).

The Old Testament affirms that it is God who gives true repentance. Ephraim said: “Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented” (Jeremiah 31:18, 19). Repentance conveys the idea of leaving something behind, or quitting it. Often in Old Testament times people interpreted repentance very lightly, and felt that God would be impressed by a display of sorrow which was only surface deep. At no time did God countenance this. His reply was, “Rend your heart, and not your garments, and return unto the Lord your God” (Joel 2:13). True repentance is inward, not merely external and superficial. It is a heart response which shows itself in changed attitudes and behaviour. God demanded this response throughout the Old Testament.

In the opening pages of the New Testament, we meet John the Baptist fearlessly preaching this same message. “Repent ye for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). Shortly afterwards the Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed the same message, “The kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the Gospel” (Mark 1:15). Furthermore, He made sure that the disciples would continue to preach this message by giving them specific instructions to do so, in the Great Commission:

“ . . . that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations” (Luke 24:47).

The apostles took their Master’s commission seriously. Listen to Peter and Paul as they preached the Gospel:

“But shewed first unto them at Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:20).

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).

“God . . . now commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

“When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).

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“Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21).

The foundation of the Christian life is “repentance from dead works” and “faith toward God” (Hebrews 6:1).

Repentance is part of the Gospel message. God’s clear command to sinners is to repent.

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## Repentance Defined

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Repentance is not tears and extreme emotions, although these can be involved. A child can shed tears when he has been found out for doing wrong, but that is not repentance. It is not anguish, distress, loss of appetite and sleeplessness, although these can happen, especially with some adults. It is not conviction of or sorrow for sin, although without some measure of these there can be no repentance. It is not a work which one does for salvation, for repentance is granted by God (Acts 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25). Nor is it another word which is interchangeable with the word “faith”. We have already seen that Christ told the people to “repent and believe the Gospel”. Paul described his Gospel ministry as “Testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks repentance towards God *and* faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21).

Repentance is much more than admitting you are a sinner or feeling sorry. In the New Testament the word translated “repent” means to change one’s mind. It is a change of mind and attitude towards sin, and towards God, which leads to a change of direction and behaviour. A change of mind which does not lead to a change of direction is not a genuine change of mind.

Repentance involves firstly the mind—knowing what is right and wrong, knowing what sin is, knowing that I have sinned personally. It means that in my mind I agree with God about sin. Repentance involves secondly the emotions—being truly sorry for my sin. It also involves thirdly the will—being willing to turn from sin and wanting to change the direction of my life. There must be no compromise here—we cannot follow Christ if we are not willing to forsake sin.

We can see these various elements involved in repentance in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The Prodigal “came to himself”—he came to understand what he had done. He saw his sin in its true light. This was a change of mind. There was real conviction when he said: “I have sinned”. His will was submissive for “he arose and came”. He turned from his sin, he changed his direction, and came home.

Of course there are degrees of repentance. It may be small, but it must be there. It may not be much understood, but it must take place.

Repentance does not end at conversion—a Christian lives a life of repentance, just as he lives a life of faith. Both deepen as the believer (child or adult) makes progress in his Christian life. But repentance must be there, to some extent, at conversion.

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## Teaching Repentance to Children

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The doctrine of repentance cannot be separated from other truths which we dealt with earlier—truths about God and sin. Teach the children that, because God is holy and just, He cannot excuse sin. Teach them that God and sin cannot be together and that God alone can take away their sin.

Teach what sin is. It is vital that children come to understand that wrong doing is sin against God, that they have turned to their own way.

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Teach that each one is a sinner. Each child needs to come to a conviction that he personally is a sinner. Appeal to the conscience of the child—obviously you cannot truly awaken his conscience, only the Holy Spirit can do this.

Teach that he must be willing to turn from sin. Having seen what sin is, and having been convinced that he personally is a sinner, the child must be prepared to turn from his sin to God. Children have gone their own way. In order to be saved they must be ready to change the direction of their lives and to turn from their own way to God. The following examples may help you teach this important truth to the children:

“Can you think back to times you cheated in school, or told lies to get out of trouble? Doing those things didn’t worry you at all. But now it’s different. You see that you have been disobedient to God and that your life is displeasing to Him, and you are worried about this. If you want to be right with God, the first step is to be willing to turn from everything in your life that you know to be wrong. You know the wrong things in your life—are you willing to be finished with them and put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ?”

Or “Mike had listened carefully to the Bible teaching, he knew he had broken God’s Law and sometimes he lay awake at night thinking about it. The teacher had said, “If you want to be a child of God, you must be willing and ready to turn from everything you know to be wrong. Mike thought of a model racing car that was in his toy box.

One day a boy in his class had it at school, and Mike had brought it home and kept it. He knew he had broken God’s commands, he knew he was a sinner. He tossed and turned in bed. “I want to keep that car, and I will.” Mike wasn’t prepared to turn from sin. He did not want the changes which he knew God would make. So he was not yet ready to trust the Lord Jesus as his Saviour.”

Or “Yes, you’ve gone your own way, not God’s. That’s why you find it so easy to think unkind thoughts, to put yourself before others. Are you so sorry that you’ve gone your own way, that you want to go God’s way instead? If that’s how it is with you, tell the Lord Jesus about it; ask Him to forgive you for going your own way and tell Him that you want to go God’s way.”

Or “We have been learning that to repent means to be sorry that you’ve sinned against God, and to be willing to turn from sin. I want to tell you about two children—which one, do you think, repented? Alice looked around. No one was watching. Quickly she slipped a bar of chocolate into her pocket. Then as if nothing had happened, she walked towards the door. Just as she was going out a lady said, “Excuse me, I’d like to see what’s in your pocket.” Of course she found the chocolate. They telephoned her mother, and she came to collect a sobbing daughter. She was so upset . . . ‘If I’d known she was watching I’d never have done it,’ she groaned.”

“Philip walked slowly home from school. He wasn’t too happy about himself. He knew his life wasn’t right. He knew he didn’t please God. He really wanted to be different . . . he knew some of his friends would laugh if he stopped doing some of the wrong things they did together. But somehow, to be living in a way that would please God seemed more important than anything. So, on the way home Philip told God how sorry he was, that he wanted to be different. He asked God to forgive him, and to take over and be in charge of him.”

Questions like these can be used as you apply teaching on repentance

“Are you willing to be finished with those things that you know to be wrong and displeasing to God?”

“Do you really want to quit your bad, disobedient ways?” “Do you know that being a Christian will mean living in obedience to the Lord Jesus, and leaving sin behind?”

“Will you tell the Lord Jesus that you have been sinning against Him, and that you want to be different?”

“You can tell Him, ‘Lord, I have been living for myself, but now I want to live for you.’ “If you become a Christian, you will need to turn away from sins like lying, bad temper and disobedience. Are you willing to do so?” Repentance can be taught in Bible lessons where the main character repents. For example, you can show how Saul of Tarsus turned from his own way to God’s way (Acts 9:1-22); how Zacchaeus showed that he had repented by making

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restitution (Luke 19:1-10); the Prodigal Son lesson (Luke 15:11-32) is excellent for teaching children the meaning of repentance.

Also memory verses such as the following can be taught:

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19).

“. . . there is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:10).

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return unto the Lord” (Isaiah 55:7).

Whatever the means, make sure the boys and girls are taught this truth, for there is no salvation without repentance. As we teach, we will be praying that the Holy Spirit will bring children to that place where they are prepared to turn from sin to God.

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### **“Problems” in Teaching Repentance to Children**

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Teaching repentance in evangelism has been the practice of the church down the centuries. It is a message, however, which has not gone unchallenged. We want to look at some of the objections to teaching repentance to children.

*“Including repentance sacrifices simplicity, and makes the way of salvation too complicated for boys and girls.”*

There is no doubt that it is more difficult to teach it than to leave it out. It requires careful thought to simplify this doctrine so that children will understand. But truth must never be sacrificed on the grounds of simplicity or expediency. Our first priority is to find out exactly what the Bible teaches. Then we must work out how we can communicate that to the children.

*“Fewer children will respond.”*

If fewer children respond because our teaching has become more Biblical, we need to look carefully at what we were doing beforehand, and at what kind of “results” we were getting! One of the old Puritans used to say, “We must weigh our converts, not count them.” Concern for results should never influence us to alter or weaken our message. We must be faithful to the Scriptures and, indeed, to the children. We can leave the results in God’s hands.

*“The child will not understand how to repent.”*

We could just as well assert that the child will not understand how to believe. No child or adult can repent or believe until the Holy Spirit works in his life. If the child is old enough to understand that he has gone his own way, he is old enough to be taught that he must turn from that way to God. But he cannot and will not do so until God grants “repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).

*“You are putting obstacles in the way of children coming to Christ.”*

When we are teaching that repentance is necessary, we are not putting a stumbling block in the way of children, but rather a stepping stone. It is very important to teach the message of salvation which the Bible teaches. The Bible plainly teaches that repentance is an integral part of conversion.

Avoid, however, giving the child the impression that he must reform his life or perform good works before coming to Christ. He must come as he is, with his sin, casting himself on the mercy of God. But there must be a desire to turn from the wrong in his life, otherwise he does not see what he needs to be saved from.

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# 12. Children and Faith

Repentance and faith are twin doctrines which cannot be separated. They do not mean the same. Repentance is not faith, faith is not repentance. The two words are not interchangeable. The Lord Jesus Christ made this clear when he preached, “Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

When a person truly repents, he will turn in faith to God. Where there is true faith, there is also real repentance. True faith includes repentance. Both are present in true conversion. Someone has well said, “We are saved by faith alone, but the faith which saves is never alone.”

We must keep this in mind as we consider the great tenet that we are saved through faith alone in Christ alone. We are not saved by repentance, but we cannot be saved without it. When a person *truly* believes, he is, at the same time, repentant.

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## Faith as Shown in the Scriptures

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The need for faith is taught throughout the Old Testament.

“Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established...” (2 Chronicles 20:20).

“The just shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4)

Furthermore, men of God, from Genesis to Malachi, were men of faith—a fact highlighted in Hebrews chapter 11. When God promised Abram an heir and that his seed would be as the stars, Abram “believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

We can often teach children about these men, and we can use illustrations from their lives to help children understand what faith is. In Romans and Galatians, Paul strongly refutes the argument that salvation is ever by works: the Old Testament saints were saved by faith in the Saviour God had promised would come.

In the New Testament, the theme of faith is continued and developed. The Lord Jesus Christ taught the necessity for faith or saving belief: “Verily, verily I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life . . .” (John 5:24).

We read, “whosoever *believeth*” in John 3:16, and “he that *believeth* on me shall never thirst” in John 6:35. When Christ saw true faith, He rejoiced (Matthew 8:10). In the Great Commission, the Lord Jesus Christ taught that “he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). Faith is vital. This was the Apostles’ conviction and message. Peter told Cornelius and his household, “Whosoever believeth in Him (the Lord Jesus Christ), shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43). Paul fearlessly explained and defended this doctrine, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Paul rejected outright any adding to faith—salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 2:16).

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## Faith Defined

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What is faith? It means believing—but “believing” can have several meanings. For example, Mrs Smith finds herself in difficult circumstances, and Mrs Brown gives a word of

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encouragement: “Don’t get depressed—just believe that everything will work out.” This is blind optimism, which the world mistakenly calls faith. Nor is faith “a leap in the dark”: Mr Jones is looking for a certain house. He has no idea where it is, but as he drives along he turns right then left, and right again. He has a “leap in the dark” outlook, for he takes certain actions without any information or reasons as a basis for doing so. Biblical faith is not like that. True saving faith is that act by which a person is enabled by the Holy Spirit to depend on Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Faith, like repentance, involves the mind, the emotions and the will.

### **Knowledge**

Before a child, or anyone, can have faith, he must know about God and about Jesus Christ. All trust is ultimately dependent on knowledge. So it is important that we teach children about the One whom we are inviting them to trust. We need to teach them why He can save. Our evangelism should have a doctrinal emphasis. But head knowledge alone will never save; knowing is not having faith. Even the devils believe—they have head knowledge about Jesus Christ (James 2:19).

### **Assent**

There is an emotional element in faith—an assent and conviction that what God has revealed is true. Faith is more than assent, but it is never less. This emotional element is essential and included in saving faith. The sinner’s heart needs to be touched, so that he is convinced about what he has heard concerning God and His Son. These truths have gripped him. But this still falls short of saving faith. Remember, not only do the devils believe, they also tremble—their emotions are affected (James 2:19).

### **Trust**

There must be a reliance upon Christ; the will is submissive and surrendered. Having some understanding about God’s answer to his need, being convinced of the truth of what he understands, the sinner puts his trust and confidence in Christ alone as his personal Lord and Saviour.

The New Testament emphasises the concept of “believing unto”—one’s confidence being placed in One outside of oneself. It means relying on Christ as the source of pardon and everlasting life. The acrostic:

**F**orsaking

**A**ll

**I**

**T**rust

**H**im

puts it perfectly.

This threefold response is possible only as the Holy Spirit works in hearts. Faith is a gift of God. This does not mean that God believes for the sinners. Rather the sinner himself believes and trusts, but as enabled to by God. It needs to be emphasised over and over again that it is

not enough to exhort children just to believe that Jesus Christ died for them to be saved. They need to actively and consciously put their trust in Jesus Christ, on the basis of what He has done for them on the cross.

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## Teaching about Faith to Children

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We must think about the words we use. If we talk only about “believing”, the children will get the impression that head knowledge is sufficient. Use words like trust, rely on, depend on, give yourself over to Him, receive Him. Explain the concepts that are used. When teaching about men of faith, show what their faith was: acting upon the Word of God. Abel offered the right sacrifice (Genesis 4:1-16); Noah built an ark to save his family (Genesis 6, 7, 8); Abram left Ur (Genesis 12); the children of Israel killed the Passover lamb and applied the blood to the door posts (Exodus 12, 13); they looked to the brazen serpent to be healed (Numbers 21:1-9). All of them did so because they believed God.

The following may be of some help in explaining what faith is:

“Boys and girls, faith is not just believing with your head, that there is a God and that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for you. Faith is not just knowing for sure that God loves you and wants to save you from sin. Faith is more than that. It means coming sincerely to the Lord Jesus and trusting Him to make you clean. It means trusting Him as your Saviour now and for ever.”

Or “Suppose I was very sick and went to the doctor. The doctor gave me medicine and said, “Take this, it will make you better. I take the medicine home, I look at it, I know it will make me well. But I leave it on the table. Will I get better? Of course not! Not until I take it. Perhaps you know you’re a sinner, you’re sure Jesus Christ can take away sin and change your life. But knowing that will not change anything. You have to ask Him to take away your sin and to change you. If you don’t, you will not be a Christian, even though you know so much about the Lord Jesus.”

Or “Boys and girls, look at this chair. I’m thinking of sitting down on it. I wonder if I should? I know it is a good strong chair. Others have sat on it. I know it would hold me up. Now, tell me when the chair is some use to me, and when am I really trusting it?” (Put your hand on the back, ask the children if you’re trusting the chair. Sit, but don’t let your weight rest on it. Repeat the question. Sit properly on the chair, and ask the question again). “The chair is no use to me until I actually trust myself to it, and sit on it. You can know that the Lord

*Jesus is the only Saviour, and not be saved. Only when you depend on Him to save you, will He be your Saviour.”*

Or “Mary was sure that she was better than most of the girls in her class. She said her prayers, was honest, went to church, did not swear. She was sure that God was more pleased with her than with others. She was trying to become a Christian. But what was she doing? She was depending upon what she did, and what she was. This is not faith; this is works. Faith is depending upon someone else, and the only One that we can depend upon for salvation is the Lord Jesus Christ. Only He can make us right with God and acceptable to God.”

Some children (and adults) can remember the exact date when they first put their faith in Jesus Christ. Others cannot. The important thing is to know that they are now trusting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Children need to realise that the initial trusting in Christ is the beginning of a life of faith. Their faith will deepen and grow, as they understand more of God’s Word and are obedient to it.

God’s clear command to sinners is to believe. A child cannot be saved without having saving faith in Christ. So we should take great care to teach what faith is, and earnestly pray that God will enable many of the children we teach to put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only as God works in the hearts of the children that they are able to do this.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

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# 13. The Work of God in the Life of a Child

What happens in a child's life when he comes to the Lord Jesus Christ? What does God promise to do for all who come to Him in repentance and faith? What is salvation? Children should be taught the answers to these questions, even before they are saved, as part of our evangelism. This was the practice of the apostles. Peter, preaching to Cornelius and his household, taught, "Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43). When preaching to Jews too, Peter told them what God would do for all who repented and believed:

"Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

Paul followed a similar pattern. In Antioch he declared, "by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39).

God gives many blessings to those who come to Christ. We shall consider some of these.

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## Justification

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Justification is a legal term dealing with our standing before God the Judge; it means the opposite of condemnation. Condemnation means to declare a person guilty, justification means to declare a person to be innocent. This is what happens when a person trusts Jesus Christ. God declares him right before Him.

There are two aspects to this great truth. The first is forgiveness of sins. When a sinner comes to Christ, his sin is put away ever, it is forgiven and forgotten by God. This is the aspect of justification which Peter referred to when he said, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19).

David wrote of this experience in Psalm 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us!" Such forgiveness is possible because Christ took our sin, it was credited to Him and He took the punishment for it. On the cross He was punished as if He had committed that sin.

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

We should teach children that when they come to Christ their sin is no longer held against them, it is gone and forgotten forever. It might be taught like this:

"Alan was really upset. His cricket ball had smashed the glass in his aunt's front door. He had been careless and he knew it was his fault. He went to tell what had happened. 'I'm really sorry,' he said, and he was. 'That's all right Alan,' his aunt replied. 'I'll pay for it. Forget it ever happened.' That was real forgiveness, wasn't it? It is just a little picture of God's forgiveness. When we come to Him, truly sorry that we have been disobedient, it is as if He says, 'I forgive you, I have paid for your disobedience.' He did—when His Son died on the cross. And He will never hold your sin against you. In Jeremiah 31:34 He says He will remember it no more."

The second aspect of justification is that Christ's righteousness is credited to the sinner who repents and believes. The word the Bible uses is "impute" which means to put to the

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account of, or to credit to. When a sinner is justified, Christ's righteousness is put to the account of the sinner, and so the sinner can stand before God on a righteous basis. God treats the sinner as if he had kept all His holy Laws perfectly, for Christ did just that on the sinner's behalf. The sinner is now "in Christ", dressed in His Righteousness.

"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Romans 5:19).

"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21)

It is very important to teach this great truth often to boys and girls.

Explain that when they trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, God sees them as pure as Christ in His sight. The following illustration may be useful:

"Malcolm knew what his school report would be like. The teacher would write 'Poor work', 'Could do better', 'A very poor result'. He wished he could have a report with top marks all the way! If God were writing a report on your life would it be like this: 'Disobedient to God's Law', 'Goes his own way', 'Thinks angry thoughts', 'Self is first? With a report like that you could never, never please God. If your life is to please God, the report would have to say, 'Perfect every day of his life.' There is only one person who could have a report like that—the Lord Jesus Christ. But the wonderful thing is that from the moment you trust Him as your Saviour, God takes away your sin and looks on you as if you had that perfect report!"

The white page of the Wordless Book teaches this great doctrine. The narrative often used with the white page is the resurrection of Christ. He was "raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25). The white page represents the believer's position before God—pure in Christ's righteousness. It does not teach about our condition or victory over sin. Also, there is an interesting little story in Zechariah 3:3- 5 which could be used as a picture of justification.

Believing children often think that they need to be "saved" again, if they sin even once. Teaching the meaning of justification is the best way to deal with this problem. It is important that the children understand that justification does not change them or make them perfect, but that it changes their position and makes them right before God. Justification has saved them from the penalty of sin.

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## Regeneration

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When God saves a child He creates a new person: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Regeneration means being born from above: "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Without this change within, a person cannot be a believer. And it is a radical change—as radical as being raised from the dead! "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1).

This radical change is not the remaking of the old nature. God gives a new nature: His own nature (1 Peter 1:4). The old nature is not eliminated, but the new will be more and more evident.

Children need to realise that when they come to faith in Christ they are "born again" God changes them from being someone who wanted to go their own way to someone who wants to go God's way. This change will be evident in their lives. Just as a child born into a family will cry, walk and talk; so someone born into God's family will "cry"—they will want to talk to God. They will "walk", albeit stumbling at first, as they walk in obedience to God's commands. They will talk—to others about their faith.

Children must know that there will be changes in their lives because they will be new people. We can show that the people converted in the Bible times were new people, for

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example, Paul, Zacchaeus or the Philippian jailer. Also we should teach and explain the Lord's conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:1-15). We must be careful not to give the impression that we expect children to behave as adult Christians. But they should know that regeneration is part of salvation. Then as they see evidence of the new nature, it will strengthen their assurance that they are truly born again.

No one is ever justified who is not regenerated. No one is ever regenerated who is not justified. When someone comes to Christ, their position before God is changed from being condemned to being justified. But not only does that individual have a changed position, he is also a changed person, with a new nature.

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## Salvation

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We often talk of being saved, and it is a word often used in the Bible:

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).

The meaning is to be “rescued” or “delivered” from sin. The word “salvation” covers the whole work of God in delivering us from the penalty, power and presence of sin.” By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8,9).

“...behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

This salvation was accomplished for us once and for all at Calvary. Through His atoning work on the cross, Christ obtained our salvation. When a child trusts in Christ, this saving work becomes effective for him personally. For the believer, salvation is in 3 phases:

The past—God has saved us from the condemnation and slavery of sin (justification and regeneration). God “hath saved us and called us with an holy calling” (2 Timothy 1:9).

The present—God is saving us from the power of sin (sanctification). “Unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12, 13).

The future—God will save us from the possibility and presence of sin (glorification). “Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed” (Romans 13:11).

Children can pick up the phrase and use it without having any understanding of what it means. If they do not understand “saved”, they will not understand “Saviour”. The meaning of “saved” is “rescued” or “delivered”. You might use an illustration like this:

“A man was standing peering into a deep well. Splash! He had fallen in. He couldn't swim, but he splashed and struggled. He tried to clutch the walls, but they were steep and slimy. Down, down, down he went into the dark water. He couldn't do a thing to help himself. He was in real danger. He was drowning!

It is just like that with the sin in your life. Sin keeps you away from God and you are in great danger: the danger of being separated from God for ever. Sin is so strong that you cannot do anything to rescue yourself—just as the man in the well could not save himself. He cried for help, but would anyone hear him?

Yes, another man did. He ran to the well, reached down and pulled the drowning man to safety. He had saved him from the water.

You need someone to save, or rescue, you from sin. There is only one Person who can save you—the Lord Jesus Christ . When you cry to Him to rescue you from sin, He will. He will save you from the grip sin has on your life. The Bible says “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13). He will save you from the punishment you

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deserve. Then when He takes you to heaven you will be without sin and you will never sin again.”

All of these aspects of salvation need to be emphasised. Children often realise that they are saved from punishment, but have not been taught that the grip, or reign, of sin is broken, although sin still indwells them until they are glorified.

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## **Eternal Life**

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“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

“And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (1 John 5:11).

“Eternal life” is a phrase which we often use in our evangelism. It occurs in many hymns and choruses. But what does it mean? “Life that goes on for ever and ever” is the explanation which most children will give. This explanation is true but inadequate. It emphasises the duration of eternal life, but says nothing of the quality. Eternal life also means being alive to God:

“And this is life eternal that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

The word to “know” means to be united with, to live in close personal relationship with God. Instead of being separated from God we are united with Him forever.

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## **The Gift of the Holy Spirit**

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“Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Romans 8:9). It is important that children realise that the Christian life is not lived out in our own strength, but that God the Holy Spirit indwells all who believe. Sometimes children long to trust the Saviour, but feel they could never live the Christian life. They need to be taught that the Holy Spirit will live in them and will enable them to live for God.

### **Being Placed in the Family of God**

“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12).

Each one who believes is given the right to be called a child of God. What a wonderful truth to teach children. They should know that each one who trusts Christ becomes a child of God and God is his heavenly Father. This means that the believer can come to God, as a child comes to his father. He can share all his problems and joys with his Heavenly Father, and experience His love and constant care.

When a person is regenerated he is born into the family of God. Through adoption, which takes place at the same moment, he receives all the freedom and privileges of adult sonship: “Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15).

In Christ we have “all spiritual blessings”. If our salvation thrills us, this will be obvious to the children. We should urge children to come to Christ so that these blessings might be theirs. Over a period of time we will teach all of these truths to children but we should not try to do so all at once! They should be taught as they are found in the text or Bible lesson being used.

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# 14. Salvation—the Beginning of a Life of Obedience

The Bible makes it clear that when a person, old or young, becomes a Christian there will be a change of direction in his life. He will not be perfect; but he will be different. He will not be all he should be, but he will not be what he used to be!

The child evangelist may ask questions about this:

*“Should I tell unsaved children that if they trust Christ as their Saviour, God will expect to see a change in their lives?”*

*“Should I teach unsaved children that, while becoming a Christian is the most wonderful thing which can happen to them, living as a Christian will not be easy?”*

*“Is the step of trusting Christ one that unsaved children should be encouraged to think carefully about, and weigh thoroughly before taking it?”*

An examination of New Testament teaching on this subject leads to the conclusion that the answer to all of these questions is unreservedly “Yes.”

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## The Ministry of the Lord Jesus

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When unsaved people came to Him and spoke about starting to follow Him, He explained to them carefully all that would be involved:

In Mark chapter 10:17 the rich young ruler came to the Lord Jesus seeking eternal life. He was an earnest enquirer whom the Lord Jesus loved. The Lord put His finger on the sin in this young man’s life, to show him that he was not really keeping God’s commandments. He did not love his neighbour as himself, because he was not willing to see what he had and give it to the poor. His riches were more important to him than God and eternal life. He went away grieved because he was not willing to give Jesus Christ first place in his life.

In John 4:15 the Samaritan woman was very enthusiastic in asking for the “water” Jesus Christ offered. But the Lord Jesus put His finger on something in her life that she would first have to be willing to deal with: “Go, call thy husband, and come hither” (verse 16). She had to realise that receiving the “water” had far-reaching implications.

In Luke 9:57-62, three different people spoke to the Lord Jesus about following him. In all three cases, He made it very clear to them that there would be sacrifices if they were to take such a step (verses 58, 59, 62).

In Luke 14:25-33, the Lord Jesus emphasised to the multitudes who were listening to Him how essential it was to weigh up carefully and think about clearly, all that was involved in taking the step of following Him—before starting to do so.

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## The Ministry of the Apostles

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When the Apostles were evangelising, they often underlined the importance of baptism. “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). In

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response to this message, those who were saved were then baptised (Acts 2:41; 8:6,12, 36; 9:18; 10:47; 16:15,33; 18:8; 22:16). The Apostles' primary purpose was to show their listeners beforehand that if they trusted Christ, He would expect them to confess Him publicly before others—no matter what it cost. They were letting them know that they were not being called to secret discipleship—they had to be prepared to be known as Christians.

In their evangelism the Apostles made no secret of the fact that those who trusted in Christ would, at the same time, “turn from these vanities” (Acts 14:15), and that the Lord Jesus would turn “away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:26). Those who listened to the early evangelists knew that believing in Christ would mean a stand being taken, and a price being paid.

It is obvious also from what Paul wrote in his Epistles, that he had warned his listeners concerning the possible sufferings involved in taking a stand as a Christian. “For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know” (1 Thessalonians 3:4).

## **Some of the Words Used With Regard to Becoming a Christian**

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### **Conversion**

The Lord Jesus said, “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be *converted*, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3). “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” (Acts 3:19).

“And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the *conversion* of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren” (Acts 15:3). “For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye *turned* to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

This word means “to turn around”, “to go in the opposite direction”; and it was used in evangelism to indicate clearly that trusting Christ would involve a complete turn around.

### **Obedience**

In many places in the Bible it is clearly taught that coming to Christ is a step of obedience—the first step in a life of obedience; and that those who come to Christ for salvation come on bended knee. Salvation is the *first* step in submission to Jesus Christ as Lord, and confession of Him as Lord.

We can see this in many parts of the New Testament:

The Gospel (the truth, or faith, which saves) demands obedience: “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that *obey not the Gospel* of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:8). “For the time is come that judgement must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that *obey not the Gospel* of God?” (1 Peter 4:17).

“By whom we have received grace and apostleship, *for obedience to the faith* among all nations, for His name” (Romans 1:5).

“But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (Romans 16:26).

“Seeing ye have purified your souls in *obeying the truth* through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Peter 1:22).

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Jesus Christ is preached to unsaved people—not just as a Saviour to trust, but as a Lord to obey. “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both *Lord* and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

“Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a *Prince* and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31).

“The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (He is *Lord* of all :)” (Acts 10:36).

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the *Lord* Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same *Lord* over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the *name of the Lord* shall be saved” (Romans 10:9,10,12,13).

“For we preach not ourselves, but *Christ Jesus the Lord*; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Corinthians 4:5). “As ye have therefore *received Christ Jesus the Lord*, so walk ye in Him :” (Colossians 2:6). “And they said, Believe on the *Lord* Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31).

Salvation is obeying the truth we have heard—“Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants *to obey*, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of *obedience* unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye *have obeyed* from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you” (Romans 6:16, 17) .

The Christian life is a life of increasing and progressive submission to Jesus Christ as Lord; but the first step in that submission, be it ever so small, is taken when the child obeys the command of Jesus Christ and trusts Him as Saviour.

## **Disciple**

The word “disciple” means “learner” or “follower of another’s teaching”. “A disciple was not only a pupil; but an adherent” (W E Vine). It is used interchangeably in the Acts of the Apostles with the word “Christian”. Notice especially Acts 11:26, “The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch”. In other words, a child who becomes a Christian becomes at the same time, a disciple or follower of Jesus Christ.

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## **The Honesty of the Evangelist**

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It is but fair and honest that the evangelist should make clear to the child all that is involved in trusting Jesus Christ as His Saviour, before he does so. The child who takes this step, does so with his eyes open. We do not want children to be disillusioned, disappointed or embittered when they realise there are problems in the Christian life, and they have not been prepared for them. It is obvious from what has been outlined above that there is a cost involved in trusting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and in following Him. (See Luke 14:25 - 33).

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## **What Does This Mean for a Child, and How Does it Affect our Message of Salvation?**

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Let us think back to the three questions asked at the beginning of this chapter. In the light of what we have learned, we can come to three conclusions:

The unsaved child needs to know that God will operate changes in his life, if he trusts Jesus Christ as his Saviour. If he is not willing for these changes, he is not ready to trust

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Christ. He needs to understand that trusting Christ is the first step in a life of obedience to the Lord Jesus. Getting up a few minutes early to talk to God, making an effort to be helpful at home, letting others choose a game rather than himself, could all be involved later in following the Lord.

The unsaved child needs to realise that the Christian life is not free of problems, and that it can involve difficulties.

The unsaved child needs to consider carefully the step of trusting Christ, so that he is fully aware of what he is doing. He will need to think about what the Lord Jesus would want him to do, be willing to obey him and be prepared to be known as a Christian. "It might be that when your friends find out that you are a Christian, they will say 'We're not going to be your friends any more.' This is "taking up his Cross"

However, we must be balanced in our evangelism. We must be careful not to give the impression to the children that, if they come to the Lord Jesus, they will be "happy all the time", or that "their problems will all be solved". We also need to tell children, with authority and confidence, what God will freely do for them when they come to Him through Christ. The Holy Spirit will come to live in them, and He will give them joy, and the strength necessary to take their stand, as well as the power to live a life pleasing to God. (Matthew 10:32,33).

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# 15. Use the Whole Programme

If children come for one hour each week to your Sunday school, or to your children's meeting, you have them 1/168 of their time! Many of them spend the rest of their time in an environment in which God is not recognised, and where anti-Christian influences are rampant. So it is vital that you make the most of every minute of that hour you spend with the children. Try to use all of your programme to teach and evangelise.

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## Songs

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Teach songs which have a clear, accurate and true to Scripture Gospel message. Sometimes you will choose a song which reinforces the truth you are emphasising in the Bible lesson. Other songs you select will teach an aspect of the message of salvation which has not been emphasised in the Bible lesson. Carefully plan what you will sing, and think about why you choose particular songs. Some songs which teach different aspects of the Gospel include

- Do you know that you've been born again?
- Love, Love L - O - V - E
- I believe the Bible
- One way God said to get to heaven
- Good News

*(All visualised and published by CEF)*

For God so loved the world (Salvation Songs 3 No. 38j Long before I knew Him (Salvation Songs 3 No. 42)

Do not have a random selection from week to week! Be careful not to choose songs which, although they have an attractive tune, teach very little.

It is wise to limit the number of songs you sing over a period of time. You want the children to learn those which you sing—they find this impossible if you inundate them with new ones. Remember that these “musical messages” will be sung in many homes where the Gospel message might not otherwise be heard. We want the children to know the songs well, and the ones they sing should have a good Gospel message.

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## Memory verses

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Memorising Scripture is a very important part of evangelism among children. They may forget much of what is said, but well taught Bible verses will remain with them forever. If some reject or neglect the rest of what they have been taught, it is a great comfort to know that they still have in their minds those verses of the Word of God, which is “quick, powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12). Obviously, this means taking time during the programme to teach carefully selected Bible verses. Do not depend upon the children learning them at home. Encourage them to do so, but recognise the fact that not all will. Stay

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with the same memory verse until you are satisfied that all the children know it. It is better that they know one or two well than merely know snippets of four or five.

Select Bible verses which teach an important truth, rather than verses which are narrative in emphasis. The following suggestions of verses in the four areas of truth may be helpful:

God—Genesis 1:1; Psalm 145:17; Psalm 103:8; 1 Chronicles 29:11; John 3:16; Romans 5:8, 10, 12.

Man's Sin—Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23; 1 John 3:4; Isaiah 59:2; James 2:10; Jeremiah 17:9.

Lord Jesus Christ—Matthew 16:16b; Matthew 1:21; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 Peter 3:18a; Revelation 1:18; Philippians 2:9, 10.

The Way of Salvation—Acts 3:19; Acts 11:31; Romans 10:13; John 1:12; Romans 5:1; 2 Corinthians 5:17.

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## Review

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Review is an important part of teaching; we do not really teach unless we review. After teaching an important truth, review it. Ask the children thought-provoking questions about it. Questions and answers give you a good opportunity to assess how much the children have learned, to clear up misunderstandings and to reinforce your teaching. Perhaps you have been singing and explaining a particular song; take time to ask the children about the meaning of certain words.

There are two approaches to review. You can review during the teaching hour, when you review truth which was taught earlier in the programme. Or you can review from week to week.

Review can take the form of a quiz—always popular with children! Quizzes are often regarded as the entertaining part of the programme. But they should be much more. Quizzes can be a valuable teaching tool provided the questions are based upon teaching that has already taken place. The questions should not all be on the narrative. Ask questions on the truths you have been teaching. For example: why is there no sin in heaven? Why is it wrong to steal? Why did the Son of God become a man? Where did the Son of God live before coming to earth? What does the word “repent” mean? If a child gives a wrong or inadequate answer, use the opportunity to briefly reinforce what you had previously taught.

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## Doctrine lessons

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Some teachers find it helpful to include in some of their classes short five-minute presentations of systematic Bible doctrine. These can be very worthwhile in evangelism, helping the children to understand the doctrinal basis of the Gospel. They should be short, deal with one subject and have ample illustration and application. They should be attractive, and taught in language a child can understand. The following are examples of subjects which might be taught in brief doctrinal lessons:

What is sin? God is holy. Who is Jesus Christ? Why Christ died. Repentance. Faith. Justification. Regeneration.

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## Missionary stories

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From time to time, especially in a regular ministry, it is good to relate examples of how God called, blessed and used missionaries. Missionary biographies can be very interesting and

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exciting to children. They will show how the missionary came to know the Saviour, and how others came to know Him through the missionary's ministry.

Keep in mind the concept of 60 - minute teaching. This does not mean that you cram so much into the programme that the children cannot cope. It does mean that the programme is carefully planned; that every part is useful. Remember, each moment is precious!

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# 16. Evangelise through the Bible Lesson

The Bible lesson provides the opportunity to do the most thorough teaching of the message of salvation. But the message of salvation is very extensive, and perhaps you are asking: “What truth should I teach in the Bible lesson?” “Should I try to teach all these truths in every Bible lesson?” “Am I evangelising if I leave some of these truths out of my lesson?”

Of course it is impossible to teach all the truths of salvation in every Bible lesson! But there must always be “Gospel truth” in your lesson if it is to be an evangelistic lesson. The following principles will guide you as you consider what truths you should teach in an evangelistic lesson.

## Teach According to the Natural meaning of the Passage

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The responsibility of anyone teaching a passage of Scripture is to teach what that particular passage says. When preparing, pray for an understanding of what God is saying through that portion of His Word. Never use a passage of Scripture to teach truths which it does not naturally teach. Rather, rightly divide the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

In a regular ministry you will teach different Bible narratives each week. It follows that, as you explain these stories, you will teach different Bible truths. Obviously there will be some overlap, but there is something seriously wrong with your handling of the lessons if you find yourself teaching exactly the same truths week after week!

Basically there are two approaches: you may start with the Bible narrative and teach the truths which emerge from it. Alternatively, you may want to teach a specific truth, so you select a lesson in which this truth is a dominant theme.

## Teach as Thoroughly as Possible

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The number of truths you can teach in one lesson is limited. It is possible to include many truths and teach none of them; this is totally unsatisfactory. Rather, find out the truth or truths which you are going to teach. Then, as you teach that particular truth, keep to it and whatever must be included in order to explain it adequately. Simplify it, explain it, develop it, apply it and repeat it in your lesson. Keep asking yourself, “Am I teaching this truth in such a way that all the children will know it as they go home?” It is important, as far as possible in every situation, to adhere to good teaching principles. As you look at your Bible lesson and indeed, your whole programme, realise that there are truths, or a truth, which you will *teach*. Others, you will *mention* without dealing with them in depth: perhaps you have taught them before and you are reinforcing them. Perhaps you find that there are truths which you must mention in order to teach the main truth in the lesson. Others you will *omit*: they have no relationship with the main truth you are trying to teach, and if you included them it would be difficult for the children to learn the main truth in the lesson.

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## Teach According to the Time Available

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Sometimes you may have five minutes to speak to a group of children, sometimes you are responsible for an entire hour.

A short five minutes' talk certainly necessitates that you attempt to teach only one thing. Get to the heart of your message quickly, use short examples, illustrations and applications.

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## Adapt to Your Circumstances

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Sometimes you speak to a group of children which you will probably never see again. Or, perhaps, you have a regular ministry with the same children week by week. Or, perhaps, you have basically the same children for a limited period. These are very different situations which require very different approaches.

### A regular ministry.

If you are teaching basically the same children week by week, this is the ideal opportunity for a teaching evangelism. In each lesson you should teach one main truth, the "central truth." Many of these truths are "Gospel" truths which are directly applicable to unsaved children.

Thus over a period of time you will teach the message or salvation comprehensively and in depth.

It is wise to follow a teaching plan which includes lessons from the Old and New Testaments. You could take a Bible character or book, and teach chronologically. For example, if you taught the life of Peter, you might teach as follows:

<b>Lesson</b> _____	<b>Central Truth</b>
The Lord Jesus calls Peter (John 1:35-42; Luke 5:1-11) .....	Follow the Lord Jesus
The Lord Jesus stills the storm (Matthew 14:22-36).....	The Lord Jesus is almighty
Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36) .....	The Lord Jesus is the eternal Son of God
Peter's denial (Mark 14:27-31; 66-72).....	The Lord Jesus knows all things
Peter at Pentecost (Acts 2) .....	God the Holy Spirit changes lives
Peter delivered from prison (Acts 12:1-19) .....	God rules over all
<i>This series of lessons "The Life of Peter" is published by CEF Press for use on the flannelgraph board.</i>	

Or you could take a doctrine and plan a series of lessons around it. For example, you could teach about God, and your programme might be as follows:

<b>Lesson</b> _____	<b>Central Truth</b>
Creation (Genesis 1, 2) .....	God is almighty
The giving of the Law (Exodus 19, 20) .....	God is holy
Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21) .....	God is just
Jonah (Jonah 1-4) .....	God is everywhere
The crucifixion (Matthew 27:27-41) .....	God is love
Conversion of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1-19) .....	God is merciful

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The following are suggestions of lessons to teach about the Person and work of Christ.

**Lesson** \_\_\_\_\_ **Central Truth**

The changing of water into wine (John 2) ..... Jesus Christ is God

Jesus, 12 years old, visits the temple (Luke 2)..... Jesus Christ is man

The temptations in the wilderness (Matthew 4)..... Jesus Christ lived a perfect life

The crucifixion (Matthew 27) ..... Jesus Christ died for sinners

The resurrection (John 20)..... Jesus Christ rose again

The ascension (Acts 1)..... Jesus Christ went back to heaven

*The above lessons are published by CEF Press, for use on the flannelgraph board, in the series "Life of Christ".*

All the above truths can be taught with a clear application to unsaved children.

### A 'one-time' evangelistic meeting

There are often opportunities to reach and teach children in a "one-time" situation. It may be in an open air-meeting, a rally, a beach mission or a children's day service. Any occasion where you have one single opportunity to speak to children demands thoughtful, prayerful preparation.

What type of lesson should be taught on these occasions? Obviously, if you gathered a group of unchurched children for one open-air meeting, you would not teach them a lesson such as the search for a bride for Isaac (Genesis 24), or the Gibeonites (Joshua 9). These children need very basic teaching. They need to hear about their need, the remedy and how that remedy can be theirs. Not every Bible lesson is suitable for this purpose. Therefore choose a lesson which naturally teaches these truths, a special evangelistic lesson. Lessons which lend themselves to such a simple, clear Gospel presentation include:

- The lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7)
- Naaman (2 Kings 5)
- The conversion of Saul (Acts 9:1-19)
- The brazen serpent (Numbers 21:1-9)
- Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)

It is good that the Gospel is presented in a logical, reasoned way emerging naturally from the narrative. Avoid presenting several truths which have no obvious connection with each other. Often the Gospel lesson will have a special emphasis which will be developed throughout it. This special emphasis is a Gospel truth which unfolds naturally throughout the lesson and so is dealt with more thoroughly than any other truth which may also be part of the lesson. The following are good individual evangelistic messages and each has a special emphasis.

**Lesson** \_\_\_\_\_ **Possible special emphasis**

Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) .....Repentance

The Passover Lamb (Exodus 11, 12, 13) ..... Christ's substitutionary death

Noah (Genesis 6, 7, 8) ..... Safety from judgement

The Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:16-40) ..... Faith

Nicodemus (John 3:1-18) ..... The new birth

Alternatively you may select a truth which you wish to teach, for example, justification, or the broad and narrow ways. Then build a lesson around the truth, using explanation, illustration and application. Thus your lesson is not one single story through which you teach the Gospel. Rather, you start with the truth you wish to teach, and build up a lesson which is interesting and challenging.

The Wordless Book can be used to bring a simple direct Gospel message. The children’s curiosity can be aroused by showing a book with no words and no pictures. Then explain the meaning of each page:

- Gold is for God, the King of kings.
- The dark page is for sin which separates us from God.
- Red is for the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- White is for justification.
- Green is for Christian growth.

We should always endeavour to make the most of every opportunity to evangelise, praying that the children will hear words whereby they might be saved.

Whatever approach you take (it is probably best to include both kinds of lesson in a year’s programme) it is important to plan to teach systematically. Keep a record of the truths you teach, so that you can make sure that you are not teaching a “lopsided” Gospel.

**A series of evangelistic meetings**

Another type of regular ministry occurs when you have basically the same children for a number of consecutive days, as in a children’s mission, a Holiday Bible Club, or a 5-Day Club. These ministries require a careful choice of lessons, so that each lesson has an emphasis on one particular aspect of the message of salvation. And these emphases are related to one another, and together make up a whole. Your lessons for the week might be:

- God the Creator ..... Creation (Genesis 1, 2)
- The justice of God ..... Noah (Genesis 6, 7, 8)
- The love of God ..... Death of Christ (Matthew 27:27-41)
- Forgiveness ..... The Lord Jesus and the Paralytic man(Mark 2:1-39)
- A changed life ..... Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)

The following lessons are built around various road signs:

No Entry	Sin separates from God	Achan(Joshua 7)
One Way	Christ the only way to God	Passover Lamb (Exodus 11, 12, 13)
U Turn	Repentance	Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)
Cross-roads	Conversion	Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1-19)
Be Ready (amber traffic light)	Christ’s return	Christ’s Ascension and Second Coming (Acts 1:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

**Consider the Children’s Background and Needs**

One teacher may be starting a regular ministry in her neighbourhood, to children who are totally ignorant of the Gospel. They have never seen a Bible, they have never heard of Jesus Christ. Another teacher may be involved in open air work among children from a Moslem background. A third teacher may be the guest speaker at a children’s service in an evangelical church. All three will evangelise, but their approach will vary. All would have to consider the background of the children. The apostles evangelised in a great variety of situations. They

never changed their basic message but always took the people's background into consideration.

It is important to recognise that when you are commencing a ministry to children who know nothing, you need to "make haste slowly", choosing your lessons carefully and building your teaching in such a way that you start with the very basic truths. Often you will have to ask yourself, "Have these children misconceptions which must be put right? Have they been brought up in error, which must be corrected?" You need to think about the words you use. Could they be completely misinterpreted because of the background of the children? The better we know the children, their background and needs, the better we will be able to communicate the Gospel to them.

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### **Teach Many Truths Over a Period of Time**

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The Gospel is an extensive message and no attempt should be made to reduce it to a minimal formula which we teach to the exclusion of everything else. It is not possible to teach every aspect of the message of salvation at one time to the children. But over a period of time in a regular ministry, endeavour to thoroughly teach the many truths which are part of the message of salvation.

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### **Conclusion**

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The Bible lesson should be interesting. If it is not, you will teach very little for the children simply will not listen. But it must be more than interesting, it must be instructive. Every Bible lesson should teach the children some Bible truth or truths, and, if possible, should include evangelistic application of that truth. (This subject is dealt with in detail in the book "Teaching a Bible lesson", published by European Child Evangelism Fellowship).

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# 17. The Manner of our Evangelism

God has left us in no doubt about the message we must bring to a lost world. The great source book on evangelism, the Bible, makes the message very clear. It does not stop there, however, for it also shows us how we should evangelise. The manner in which New Testament evangelism was carried out is just as striking as its bold, clear message. This is hardly surprising, as it is a known fact that the way in which we present a message conveys a lot about the message. This is true in everyday life. If, for example, your neighbour knocked your door and placidly said, "Excuse me, we think we have lost our little daughter. Perhaps when it is convenient you would help us look for her," you would not be alarmed immediately and hurry to search! If, on the other hand, your neighbour entreated, "Our daughter is lost. Come now and help us find her," you would go to help at once. So it is in evangelism; you communicate a lot by the way in which you bring the message of salvation.

If you teach in a detached manner, with little enthusiasm, apologetically, with little authority or in a light-hearted way, the children will draw their own conclusions about the Gospel. In fact, these approaches are inconsistent with the message we are bringing. What then should characterise the way in which we evangelise?

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## Seriousness

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From beginning to end the Scriptures make it clear that, when a prophet, evangelist or teacher brought a message, there was always a solemn consciousness that it was a message from God. Their approach was never light-hearted; their aim was never entertainment. If there is continuous laughter, it is unlikely that there will be much conviction of sin. In evangelism the issues with which we deal are vital, serious ones; we deal with the never - dying souls of boys and girls. There is a place for humour and laughter, but they should never be dominant. Let us always be careful to avoid an emphasis on entertainment and fun which will inadvertently convey to children that the Gospel is not to be taken seriously.

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## Persuasiveness

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As Paul preached he was often disputing, discussing and reasoning with his hearers. "Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him" (Acts 17:17).

The same word is used in Acts 19:9 and Acts 24:25. It means to present an argument, to present one case against another. By doing so the evangelist is encouraging his hearers to think for themselves and to see that they are wrong. Child evangelists should also be encouraging children to think, obviously on their level. As the Gospel is presented it should be a simple, well-reasoned case.

But his evangelism went a step further. He sought to persuade people.

We read in Acts 18:4 about Paul in Corinth: "He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks."

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The thought here is that of winning over the hearers. It is not only presenting a well reasoned case, it is more. It is asking “Will you not trust Him;” “Why won’t you believe and be saved?” This same word is translated “persuade” in Acts 26:28; Acts 28:32; and 2 Corinthians 5:11

Perhaps you are teaching a lesson on the broad and narrow way. There should be reasoning and persuasion as you teach: “Think of where the broad way is leading. Think of where you will go if you are on the narrow way. Is it not better to be on the narrow way? Which way are you on? If you are on the broad way, why should you stay on it? Listen to the words of the Lord Jesus “Enter in at the strait, or narrow gate . . .only a few find it. “ What must you do? You must want to leave the broad way. You must trust the Lord Jesus to rescue you from it and to bring you through the narrow gate. Oh, leave the broad way today. Won’t you come to the narrow gate, by coming and trusting Jesus Christ? “

We should ask searching questions as we evangelise. We are not looking for a verbal response but we do want the children to think through the message and its implications. We are endeavouring to convince them that they must be saved. Our manner as well as our message should contribute to this persuasion in our evangelism.

There are other words used to describe apostolic preaching which underline the fact that our approach as well as the content of our message is very important. They warned (Colossians 1:28); they beseeched (2 Corinthians 5:20); they convinced (Acts 18:28). They were not, of course, using human means to get a decision. They were not manipulating the people to obtain an outward response. But everything about New Testament evangelism sought to convince the hearers of the truth of the Gospel, of the utter foolishness of rejecting it, and to persuade people to respond in their hearts to God’s invitation.

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### **Warmth and Concern**

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The evangelist does not present his message like a history or geography lesson. The message has gripped him, it is part of him and, in a sense, he is part of the message. As he evangelises he is conscious that there are serious issues at stake. Richard Baxter, an English puritan, had the heart of an evangelist. He said that when he preached, he preached as one who would not preach again; a dying man to dying men. Paul could say to the believers in Ephesus:

“Watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears” (Acts 20:31).

We can see the same concern in Paul’s reply when Agrippa said that he was almost persuaded to be a Christian: “I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds” (Acts 26:29).

The true child evangelist cannot bring the message in a detached, matter of fact way. His Bible lesson will not be an impersonal presentation. He loves the Gospel message and this is obvious as he teaches. He loves and is concerned for those who listen. He longs that they would trust the Saviour. This too is seen in his whole approach to children.

This concern will keep harshness out of our evangelism. We will not coldly announce, “If you go on in your sin, you will go to hell.” Yes, we will teach this solemn truth, but with tenderness and entreaty.

Entreaty means “making earnest request”. We should evangelise with a burdened, caring, warm heart.

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## Urgency

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Urgency is that quality in our evangelism which conveys to the children that they must consider the Gospel invitation and that they should do so now. This was certainly evident in New Testament evangelism. People were urged to turn to God at once: "Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Hebrews 3:7, 8).

"Now then we are Ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God...behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (II Corinthians 5:25, 6:2).

Perhaps this is the aspect of evangelism which is in most danger of being lost in work among the young. Children have their whole lives ahead of them and even subconsciously we can adopt the attitude: "They have plenty of time;" or "We'll sow the seed, there'll be a harvest when they grow up." The Bible gives no ground for such complacency in any type of evangelism. Realising these basic facts: the uncertainty of life; the reality that people can come to Christ only when the Spirit draws them; that God demands prompt obedience, we must sound that note of urgency.

This means that we will try to impress upon children that now is the time to trust the Lord. We will show them their peril. Words like "now" and "today" will be used in our teaching. This will be especially true as we bring the invitation, often towards the end of the Bible lesson. The end of the Bible lesson should not be merely the tying up of the loose ends of the story, but should include a clear, urgent, concerned challenge to obey God today.

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# 18. Make Yourself Available

The child evangelist's main responsibility is to teach the message of salvation as thoroughly as possible. This must include clear explanation of how the children can trust Christ. The teacher should be praying that the Holy Spirit will be working, and that in the quietness of their hearts children will trust the Saviour. Children often do come to Him in repentance and faith, as they sit in a meeting, others have come to Him in their own home. Others having heard the message were apparently unmoved, but in later years came to trust Christ. All of these underline the necessity to teach children how they can come to Christ—this is an integral part of the evangelist's message. But there are other children who need personal help and counselling; and that brings us to a new subject. We are going to consider how the teacher can make himself available to concerned children.

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## Why make Yourself Available

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When you have taught a Bible lesson or closed the meeting, do not assume that your ministry to the children is finished for another week. Personal work and counselling are an important part of the teacher's ministry. Be ready, at all times, to help on a personal basis.

There may be unsaved children listening who want and need help and counsel. The teaching they have received has aroused questions in the children's minds. Some have individual, particular problems with which they need help. Sometimes children from another faith may want to talk on a one to one basis, once or many times, before they are ready to trust Christ. There may be children who are concerned about their sin, but have not grasped the way of salvation and want to know more. Some children are shy, and would never take the initiative in talking about a spiritual problem. For the sake of all these children, it is good that you let them know that you are willing to help them and where they can speak with you.

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## What it Means to Make Yourself Available

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Making yourself available is not part of the message of salvation. This should be very clear in the evangelist's mind, and also evident in his practice. Make sure that there is no confusion in the minds of the children. They should not think that "staying behind" is a necessary step for salvation. You must never give children the impression that they *must* come to you if they want to be saved.

A child can respond to the invitation without speaking to the teacher. Conversely, waiting behind does not mean that the child will be saved. When you let the children know that they may come and talk with you if they wish, you are simply "opening the door" for them to receive further help—that's all!

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## How to Make Yourself Available

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### **Be careful**

When you make yourself available you are simply giving information to the children. The passion and urgency which should be obvious as you give the invitation will not be present as you tell the children that they can come and talk with you if they wish.

Of course you will be kind and approachable in your manner, but there should be no pressure, no playing on emotions, no use of fear or man's persuasive powers. Remember that children are sensitive and vulnerable, and can be influenced against their will. So you would never say, "I was really disappointed that no one stayed behind last evening" or "Don't go away until you've talked to me about receiving the Lord Jesus. You don't know what will happen when you leave. You might get knocked down by a car on the way home, and then it will be too late." Do not pray in your closing prayer that children will stay behind; rather, pray that children will trust the Lord. Also, it is generally unwise to approach individual children and ask, "Did you think of staying behind?"

### **Be clear**

Specify a certain place where you will meet the child after the meeting. You could say that anyone who wants to talk further should come after the meeting and sit in one of the seats at the front. If a child does, you will know that he wants to talk with you. Or you could say that those who want further help will find you standing by the piano, or by the flannelgraph board. He can come to you there and say, "I want to know more about how to be saved." In a large rally, or at children's camp, you might find it useful to ask concerned children who want to come and talk to go to a particular room when the other children are leaving. Make sure they know where the room is! If you are involved in open air evangelism, you could tell the children that after the meeting you will be standing by a certain tree, and that the children who want to talk should go there. In a small Sunday school class a child could simply stay in his seat when the others have gone.

When you make yourself available, make sure that you go to the place where you said you would be! It is easy to forget this in the hustle and bustle of finishing a meeting, and tidying up afterwards. Also, make sure that other workers know not to come and talk with you at that time.

The children should know exactly what to do if they want further help. Avoid vague statements like, "If you have questions come and talk to me afterwards."

Also it is good to explain the purpose in a child coming to speak to the teacher. You could say, for example, "If you are not saved and really want to know more about how to be . . ." Or "If you are not saved, and would like to be—but are still not sure how to be—and you would like me to explain it to you, then..." Always emphasise that you cannot save, and that just because a child speaks with you, it does not mean that he is saved.

### **Be brief**

There is no need to labour the point. A few sentences are sufficient to tell the children that you are ready and willing to help. If you keep referring to this throughout the programme, it may amount to pressure.

Sometimes people feel that making yourself available in itself is putting pressure upon children. If you are wise and sensitive in how you do it, this will not be the case. You simply "open the door" for counselling, you never try to push children through.

### **Be personal**

Use the word "you", rather than "someone", or "all of you". Each child should know that the teacher is willing to help him. So you would say, "Do you have questions that are

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bothering you about becoming a Christian...” or “would you like to talk more with me about how to be saved...”

### **Be varied**

Don't always use the same words at the same time in your programme, or it will get to the stage where the children will no longer hear you.

The following are examples of how you might make yourself available:

“If you really want to be saved from sin, but aren't sure how, I will be glad to talk to you after the meeting and show you from the Bible how you can be saved. I will be standing here beside the piano when the meeting is finished. Come and say, 'I would like to talk about being a Christian.' Or “Do you have questions about what you have been hearing here during these last weeks? Those questions are bothering you, and you really want to know the answers. I will be glad to answer your questions. If you want to come and talk, just come and sit in one of the front seats when the meeting is over. Then I'll know you want to talk with me.”

Or “Do you really want to live for the Lord Jesus, but you don't know how to come to Him? I will be glad to explain it from the Bible; come and see me. I'll be standing by that tree when the meeting is over. Remember, I can't take away your sin. Only the Lord Jesus can do that. But I will be glad to help you understand better how you can come to Him. Just come and sit with me under the tree.”

### **Offer help to children who have trusted Christ**

Children who trust the Saviour on their own, without being counselled, often profit from telling the teacher about this and receiving encouragement. From time to time it is good to say something like this:

“If you have trusted the Lord Jesus as your Saviour and you have never told me about it, please let me know. I'll be standing beside the piano after the meeting is finished. I would like to know that you too have trusted the Lord Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, so that I can pray for you and perhaps help you.”

A talk with the teacher often helps clarify things in the child's mind. It also helps you to pray for and follow up children.

Have a good relationship with the children

Children will come and talk more readily if they regard the teacher as a friend whom they trust. Build up a good relationship with them by showing interest in each one. Chat with them as they arrive. Have an approachable manner. It is easier to have a good trusting relationship in a regular ministry, but we should make this our aim in every ministry. In a situation where a teacher has the same small Sunday school class every week, it is important that the children *always* know that he is available. He does not need to formally say so in each class. He will tell the children that he is available, and from time to time, remind the children about this. But, if the teacher builds the kind of friendship that it is possible to have with children in that situation, they will feel free to come and talk with him whenever they need to. In a single, isolated meeting where you do not have a regular ministry to the children, do not assume that they know they can come and talk with you. You need to tell them so.

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## **When to Make Yourself Available**

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### **During the programme**

You can make yourself available at any time during the programme. Usually when there is more than one person involved it is the person who teaches the Bible lesson who makes himself available and counsels concerned children. He may, of course, involve others in

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counselling if several children need help. The teacher could make himself available after teaching the memory verse. Perhaps the memory verse was Luke 19:10. After you have taught it you might add “Perhaps you know you are lost, and you are very concerned about this. If, at the end of the meeting, you are still not sure how you can be saved, don’t be afraid to come and speak to me, and I will explain it from the Bible. I’ll be standing by the flannelgraph board.”

Perhaps you sang the chorus, “Love, Love, L-O-V-E”. When you sang the third verse (“come, come, c-o-m-e”) you might say, “It may be that you really want to come to the Lord Jesus, but don’t know how. At the end of the meeting you can come and talk with me about it. I’ll be glad to show you from the Bible how you can come to Him. I’ll know that you want to speak with me if you come and sit in a seat in the front row.”

If you were teaching the lesson on Nicodemus you might include something like this: “Nicodemus had many questions, perhaps you are like him. You have been thinking about becoming a Christian. God has been speaking to your heart. But you have questions, or you’re not sure how you can become a true Christian. If you want to talk with me at the end of the meeting, just come and sit in the front row here. I’ll know why you are there and will be glad to talk with you.”

It may be that you have a moment for important announcements during your programme. From time to time you may want to mention then that you are available for counselling after the class, and how a child should let you know if he wants to speak with you.

### **Separate from the invitation**

It is essential to keep in mind the clear distinction between two separate and completely different things:

- giving the children the invitation to come to Christ in repentance and faith. This is part of the Gospel message. A child responds to this invitation in his heart when he obeys God. Nothing physical is involved.
- making yourself available to help children who want to come to Christ, but who are not sure how to. This is not part of the Gospel message, but part of your method. Making yourself available is the communication of information to the children. It is not challenge or teaching—it is just letting the children know what they should do if they want help.

These two concepts should be completely separated in our thinking, in our preparation and in our presentation, so that the children also will see them as two completely separate things.

So when you are urging children to trust the Saviour, do not make yourself available at the same time. Children can be easily confused, and we don’t ever want them to think that we have a part in their salvation. You should never want the children to feel that their coming to you was the same as coming to Jesus Christ. So it is best not to make yourself available at the end of your Bible lesson, if at that time you are inviting children to come to Christ.

### **When you have taught something.**

Normally you will not make yourself available until you have done some teaching which may have provoked concern and questions.

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## **Conclusion**

There are two extremes we must avoid; Firstly, that of being so zealous to see “results” that we put too much emphasis on telling the children they may come and talk. We can sometimes get to the place where we feel that children cannot be saved unless we have counselled them. We should not in any way give the children the impression, consciously or unconsciously, that this is so, nor should we have the attitude that we would prefer that they

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talked with us and then trusted the Lord, rather than doing so on their own. Secondly, we can be so cautious that we never let the children know that we are available to help them. So children go on unnecessarily with burdens and questions which one to one conversation, centred on the Word of God, would solve. Sometimes fear of not being able to cope with a counselling situation can make us reluctant to offer this help to children. We should do what we can to prepare ourselves to counsel and depend on the Holy Spirit. We learn such things as counselling by doing them!

Children often need help to understand how they can come to Christ for salvation, and also with the question of assurance of salvation. The counselling time can be very important, when firstly the teacher seeks to lead the child to Christ, and then points him to a verse in God's Word on which he can base his assurance. Many saved children have suffered from this lack of assurance, because no one had ever explained to them personally from the Bible how to come to Christ, and trust God's promises for salvation. Their faith was not based upon a sure word from God. (This subject is dealt with in more detail in the book "Counselling Children", published by European CEF).

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# 19. The Responsibility for Evangelism

About one-third of the population of every continent consists of children. Most of them are not saved, the vast majority have never been evangelised. Some children are far more privileged than others, they have Christian parents or attend a Christian church. Yet they too need to be evangelised. Every child needs to hear the Gospel.

## Evangelising Children in the Christian Home

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In the Old Testament, God intended that His people should teach their own children. They were to be taught the law of God: “And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gate” (Deuteronomy 6:7-9).

The law of the Lord was to have a central place in the home; the children were to be taught it and to be exposed to it constantly. It was to be seen, heard and taught in Jewish homes.

In the New Testament, Paul underlined the parents’ responsibility for the children. “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

Christian parents are responsible for the upbringing and teaching of their children. “Nurture” is a general word including all that is involved in rearing a child. “Admonition” refers to spoken instruction. In the Christian home, the general upbringing and instruction should be distinctive. It should be “of the Lord”. This is something which non-Christians cannot do. It is something which believing parents are called to do. The thought that the children are to be brought to a knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, should be dominant in the minds of Christian parents. This should be their desire and ambition for their children and their supreme task.

This great responsibility must be carried out by the parents and not passed on to anyone else, be they pastor, Sunday school teacher, relative or day school teacher. It is quite clear from the Bible that the task of teaching children the Word of God and leading them to a knowledge of Christ is primarily the responsibility of parents.

### Carrying out this responsibility

Realising that they have a responsibility to evangelise their own children, believing parents often ask, “How can we do this?” This is a big subject on which we can only give guidelines. (The subject is dealt with in greater detail in the book “Guidelines for the Christian Family” published by European CEF).

#### *By example*

One of the greatest influences in a child’s life can be the example of godly parents. Children need to see in the lives of their parents what a true Christian is. Parents should show their children that being a Christian and having communion with God is the most wonderful thing in the world. When they see this, they may long to have that privilege too.

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It is important that Christian values permeate every aspect of home life: your relationships with those inside and outside the family, your attitude to work, money and leisure, and so on. Children will soon see that there is a great difference between their home and that of their non-Christian friends.

Children who see this difference will ask questions. This will provide opportunities to explain more of the Christian message.

Parents whose life-style is inconsistent with their profession of faith can be a great stumbling block to their children who often resolve to have nothing to do with the Christian faith.

#### *By answering questions*

Children will ask questions like these: “What is God like?” “What happens when you die?” “Why are you praying?” “When will I die?” “Is the Lord Jesus here now?” They ask questions like these, and many less profound ones? It is important to answer these questions, when they are asked, if possible. Answer truthfully, and at their level. Make sure you know the answers and, in a natural way, without preaching at the children, give the information they have asked for.

The Jews were instructed to keep the feast of the Passover and to explain it to their children when they asked what it meant. (Exodus 12:26, 27). Similarly, today children will have lots of questions to ask about Christian worship and practices, for example, the communion service, if they are present. It is good that they see these things, for their questions can provide opportunities to explain more Gospel truth.

#### *By careful instruction*

A godly example and honest answers to children’s questions must be coupled with careful instruction in the Gospel. Christian parents, like Old Testament Jewish parents, must teach their children diligently. Such instruction should be planned for in the family’s normal day.

It is good that at some time during the day there should be family worship. A short passage of Scripture is read, a short explanation is given, and a family member prays. During this time, the parents will make sure that various Gospel truths are read, explained and applied to their children.

Also, many parents find it valuable to spend time with each individual child before they go to bed. This too will be a time for teaching. The parent and child may look together at a passage of Scripture, or work together on the child’s Bible reading notes.

It is vital that there should be this daily time of teaching in every Christian home, in order that the parents can carry out their God-given responsibility to evangelise their own children. Of course they should also take their children with them to a local church where they will hear the Gospel preached.

#### *By being available to them on a personal level*

When the Holy Spirit is working in the life of a child, that child may well come to his father or mother saying that he wants to be saved. The parent should explain clearly how he can be saved. If the child understands, and is in earnest about trusting the Saviour, the parent can point his own child to Christ. This is a wonderful joy and privilege for any parent to have. But it is good for parents from time to time to let their children know that they should always feel free to come and speak with them concerning any questions or problems they might have. They should also tell the children that if they are not saved and would like to be, but are not sure how, they would always be ready to speak with them personally about this—but at their request only.

Parents should never exert pressure on their children to make a profession of faith. This will do untold damage and lead to disillusionment in later years. Children will sense that their parents long for their salvation, but they must never feel this is something they must do in order to please their parents, or to be sure of their love and acceptance.

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Christian parents should surround their children with prayer that God would work in their lives and bring them to know, love and obey the Lord Jesus Christ.

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## **Evangelising Children in the Church**

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Children of Christian parents will be found in the church, but there will be other children there as well. Often there are the children of parents who attend the church and are not believers. Sometimes children from the neighbourhood attend without their parents. All of these children need to be evangelised, and it is obviously the responsibility of the local church to evangelise them. Great care should be taken not to approach these children as if they are Christians, just because they are in the church. If they have not personally trusted Christ as Saviour and Lord, they are not believers and need to be taught the Gospel. There are many opportunities to evangelise them.

Those who teach in the local church have a responsibility to evangelise those who are unsaved, including the young. The main responsibility will fall on pastors and Sunday school teachers.

### **In church services**

It is good that pastors remember that there are children in their congregation. Spurgeon had a constant reminder of this—several rows of orphanage children sat just in front of him. This did not mean that his messages became childish, rather he made sure they were simple. There is no contradiction between simplicity and depth. When the pastor is applying the Gospel, it is good to keep the young as well as adults in mind.

In some local churches a time is set aside for a special children's talk. This provides an ideal opportunity for simple, clear Gospel teaching. It is good that from week to week different aspects of the Gospel are taught and applied in a systematic way.

### **In Sunday school**

Sunday school teachers have the responsibility of making sure that every child in their class knows the Gospel message and how to be saved. It is sad that children can go through Sunday school and learn Bible stories but know little of Gospel truth.

Sunday school teachers should follow a Bible-centred programme of systematic teaching, so that the children learn more and more Gospel truth. If they hear the message of salvation expressed in the same terms week after week, they will become hardened to it. But there is no need for this to happen, for the Gospel is an extensive message and as teachers follow a teaching programme they will find that each lesson emphasises a different aspect of it. Teachers should ask themselves, "What truth will I teach to my class this Sunday?" They should have a clear, concise answer to that question so that the children are not only told a story but also taught a truth which is in that story. This truth should then be carefully applied to the unsaved as well as to the saved. When making the applications, the teacher should make it clear to whom he is speaking—to the believing child or to the unbeliever. In the overall programme of Sunday school it is good to include evangelistic songs and memory verses, as well as having songs and Bible verses which will help, encourage and guide the Christian children.

In organising a Sunday school it is best to divide the children into small groups according to age, if teachers are available to teach these groups. This enables the teachers to adapt the teaching to one particular age group. Also, it is easier for the teacher to build up a good relationship with each child.

Sunday school must endeavour to meet the spiritual needs of the children who attend. There will be some, perhaps many, who have not trusted Jesus Christ, so they need to be evangelised. This is one of the responsibilities of every Sunday school teacher.

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### **In Holiday Bible Clubs and camps**

Sometimes churches organise a special week for their children, especially during holiday time. In Holiday Bible Clubs the children come to the church for two hours or more. Games may be organised, followed by refreshments. Then the children have a programme of singing, memory work, quizzes and Bible teaching. Finally they are divided into age groups to do handwork related to the Bible teaching. It is important not to teach the children as if all of them were Christians. By all means minister to the believing children, but do bring the challenge of the Gospel to those who are not saved.

If the children are taken away for a weekend camp or a camp week it is important that the Bible teaching is given its rightful place. It should not be a little ten minute message at the end of the day when the children are exhausted. Plan to give plenty of time to the teaching of the Word of God. Think of the spiritual needs of the children and suit the teaching to meet these needs. It is good, too, that each day the children should have a devotional time. This can be done in small groups, each with a counsellor. Together they read and learn from a short passage of Scripture. Many children have come to know the Lord through camp. It is a wonderful opportunity for evangelism. It should, however, be remembered that it is easy for children to feel under pressure to be saved, in the whole atmosphere of camp. Care should be taken to avoid this.

## **Evangelising Children Outside the Home and the Church**

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The vast majority of children do not have the privilege of a Christian home and never attend church. They have no contact whatsoever with Christian things. Whose responsibility is it to evangelise these children?

### **The responsibility of the local church**

Christ committed the task of evangelism to his church. In the New Testament, the local church was the centre of evangelism. This did not mean that they waited for local people to come in so that they could hear the Gospel. The local church often sent out evangelists. The believers themselves “gossiped” the Gospel to their friends and neighbours.

The responsibility of evangelism, whether it be to old or young, whether it be to the neighbourhood or the far flung corners of the earth, is still with the local church. It is primarily the responsibility of the local church to bring the Gospel to the multitudes of children who are still unreached. The local church can make a real effort through visitation and publicity, to ask some of these children to come to Sunday school or a Holiday Bible Club. When they do come, teachers need to remember that they know little or nothing of the Word of God and so need very basic Gospel teaching. Often churches find it more effective to go to the children, rather than expecting them to come to the church. A church could perhaps, hire a hall or community centre in a housing area and have a special children’s mission for the children in that particular area. When the children come it is vital that they hear basic Gospel teaching with a clear challenge to trust the Lord Jesus Christ. For some of these children this might be their only contact with the Gospel. But it is much better that they have that contact than have none at all. Some of the children reached in this way can be channelled into the Sunday school.

There are other ways for the church to reach unreached children. Perhaps the most effective is the **Good News Club**.

This is a weekly meeting for children held in a home. The children from the neighbourhood often come into a home more readily than into a church building. In the home they are taught by volunteer teachers. The programme consists of singing, memory work, a quiz, some teaching on missionary work and a Bible lesson. The Bible teaching is systematic; each year the children are taught some lessons from the Old Testament and some from the New. The local church prays for this outreach, provides the people to lead it, and sometimes

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provides the finances for the visuals used. Often this has been the means of channelling children, and eventually their parents, into the local church.

In the summertime **5-Day Clubs** can be organised. These are open air children's meetings—held on five consecutive days on a green, in a park or anywhere children can be found. This is a good way to reach children in areas where there are no homes available for Good News Clubs. The programme includes singing, memory work, competitions and Bible teaching. This is an excellent way to reach children who might not otherwise ever hear the Gospel. Obviously it is the kind of ministry which can be carried out by a local church.

Another way to reach children is that of **tract distribution**. On special festivals or holidays, in shopping centres and fun fairs, there are often many, many children. Teams can distribute children's tracts. It is good to make sure that the tract is attractive, and that it clearly explains the way of salvation.

### **The responsibility of children's organisations**

God has raised up several organisations and missionary societies which aim to reach unreached children. One of these is Child Evangelism Fellowship. Child Evangelism Fellowship endeavours to help and work with the local church to reach unreached children. Its different outreaches can be, and often are, organised by a local church. There are, however, many places where there is no local church to reach the children, or where the local church is not doing so. Child Evangelism Fellowship feels a sense of responsibility to reach these children too. Where the children are not being reached, Child Evangelism Fellowship itself organises 5-Day Clubs, Good News Clubs and other outreaches. It also provides training for those involved in 5-Day Clubs and Good News Clubs, whether they are church based or directly organised by the Fellowship.

Other CEF efforts to reach children include beach missions, radio, T.V., telephone, video and cassette ministries, taking a caravan or trailer to shows and fun fairs and having a special evangelistic programme there.

It is important to see that there are still multitudes of children who are unevangelized. It is easier to reach them now, than when they are older, so it is an urgent task. Like Paul, we need to be prepared to make a real effort to reach out, "that I might by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

## 20. Essentials for the Children's Evangelist

An extrovert personality, wittiness, liveliness, artistic ability, a good story teller, a sense of humour—no, these are not the primary qualifications of those who are involved in bringing the message of salvation to children. God uses all kinds of personalities in this ministry. He uses people who are very capable and those who have little natural ability. But every child evangelist, whether he be a Sunday school teacher teaching four children, or a missionary teaching several hundred, has certain basic qualifications.

Many of us will be conscious that these qualities are not present in our lives to the extent that we would wish. We need to keep praying that they will be more and more evident in our lives and ministries.

### Vision

“There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Romans 3:11, 12).

This is God's verdict on mankind, including the children. But we find it difficult to see children as God sees them. We are so prone to see them naturally rather than spiritually. We look on them as innocent, fun-loving, carefree, mischievous. But we need vision to see them as eternal souls. We need to think, long and often, over what God has told us about them in His Word, so that we will see them through God's eyes, and not our own.

### Compassion

“But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (Matthew 9:36).

Our God is “full of compassion”, and we His ambassadors need that compassion. The Lord Jesus possessed this quality completely and perfectly. When He saw a crowd He understood and was deeply concerned about their spiritual needs. When He saw an individual need, for example, that of the Samaritan woman, His reaction was the same (John 4:4). The word “compassion” used in Matthew 9:36 is a strong one, meaning that He was moved to the depths of His being.

Children recognise this love; this is a language which they all understand. The children who were brought to Christ (Mark 10:13-16), sensed His compassion and readily consented to being in His arms. When He needed a child as a visual aid in Matthew 18:1-14, the little one came to Him. Children recognised the compassion of the Saviour, it drew them to Him. It will have similar results when that divine compassion is evident in our life and ministry. This is not something we have naturally, or can work up. We must depend on the One who is “full of compassion” to fill us, so that we really care and are concerned about the children we teach. Guard against professionalism which is content to have a good, sound, attractive programme. Love for the children must always be at the heart of your work. Our ministry is that of compassionate evangelism.

### Prayer

“Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” (Romans 10:1).

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Prayerless evangelism will be barren, powerless evangelism. We need to pray earnestly for God's guidance as we prepare, so that the message we bring will be from Him. We need to pray that the Holy Spirit will bathe our words with power. It is important to pray for the children—for individual children and their needs. Evangelism is a battle, but in many senses, the victories are won in secret as the evangelist prays. Be as conscientious in talking to God about the children, as you are in talking to the children about God.

It will prove a real blessing in your ministry if you involve others in praying for you and for the children you teach. Try to enlist several other people—perhaps elderly people who feel they can no longer be actively engaged in evangelism. With these, “helping together by prayer”, you will be encouraged, strengthened and blessed.

### **Passion**

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Paul felt a deep burden for lost souls; this moved him to preach with all his heart. Passionate preaching is the outworking of a compassionate heart. Being very conscious in his heart of the lost condition of children, the child evangelist will have a sense of urgency in his ministry. He will be burdened for the children to whom he brings the Gospel, which he knows is the only answer to their need. He will never bring the message in a detached matter of fact manner, but will urge his hearers to obey God today. God alone can give this passion and will do so as the evangelist meditates on the glory of God, the plight of mankind and God's plan of salvation.

### **Wisdom**

“If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him” (James 1:5).

The child evangelist needs wisdom in his choice of words, so that children will understand the message. He needs discernment to recognise what is merely human and what is the work of the Spirit. Children are so impressionable and pliable, he needs wisdom so that he does not violate the personality of the child. He needs to know how to urge children to come to Christ. He needs to know how to avoid pressure in his evangelism. These, and a lot more, require wisdom.

### **Power**

“And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:4, 5).

Sometimes this is misunderstood and we get the idea that powerful preaching or teaching is loud, forthright oratory, but this is not necessarily so. A teacher can be quiet spoken and rather shy, and yet speak with power and authority. Powerful evangelism is when the Holy Spirit controls and guides what the evangelist says. This power is essential. The Lord Jesus Christ told the disciples that the Holy Ghost would give them power (Acts 17:8). He is the Source of powerful, authoritative teaching. We cannot work it up, we cannot create it, but we should be dependent on the Holy Spirit to give us the power and authority we need.

### **Perseverance**

“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:2).

At times we can work for weeks or longer and seem to be getting nowhere. In a regular ministry with children we need “stickability”, being content to leave the outcome with the Lord of the Harvest. Sometimes we are the last link in the chain which brings a child to Christ. Sometimes we are the first link or an intermediate one. Results or lack of them should

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never be a deciding factor. God is looking for child evangelists who will be faithful and persevering, no matter what happens.

May God raise up many evangelists who possess these qualities to bring the Gospel to boys and girls around the world.

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