



ISSUES IN EVANGELIZING CHILDREN

Dealing with children evangelistically is very challenging! We do not wish to mislead a child into believing he is a believer when, in reality, he may simply be agreeing with us as we share the gospel.

Let these words encourage you from the old-time Methodist preacher John R. Church. “I was definitely converted in an old-fashioned Methodist revival when I was about nine years of age. My conversion was very clear and unmistakable. I have never had any doubt about my conversion. Some people say that children do not know what they are doing at that age, but I want to testify that I knew what I was doing, and I feel certain that my sins were forgiven and that I became a child of God at that time.”

I often reflect on the hour I placed my faith in Christ as a little nine-year-old boy. It occurred on a Thursday evening in a revival meeting in my home church. I don't recall anything about the sermon or the music, but I do recall yielding my heart and receiving Christ as the one and only Savior. He became mine and I became His at nine o'clock p.m. on January 14, 1965.

Lydia Boekell, long-time staff member of Child Evangelism Fellowship, testifies, “I was saved at the age of three. I was in my bedroom and mom was putting me to bed. I knew I was a sinner and I would not go to heaven if I died unless I accepted Jesus as my Savior. So that night I asked Jesus to be my Savior. I was not baptized until I was age eleven. The night before I was baptized the thought went through my mind that if I really was not saved, I needed to make sure I was saved before baptism. So that night I prayed and told the Lord that if I really did not mean it when I was three, I meant it then. But I know now that I was saved at the age of three. I believe Satan was trying to make me doubt my salvation.”

Thank God, a person, even a child, can KNOW he has more than religion! He can know that He has Christ! “Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (John 5:24).

Dealing with children is, in most ways, no different than dealing with an adult. The Holy Spirit does the most important teaching of making the sinner aware of his sin, future judgment for that sin, and the solution for his sin: the death of Jesus Christ as payment for all sin. If a person CANNOT comprehend those three facts he cannot be saved REGARDLESS of his age. Indeed, if he cannot accept items one and two, there is no reason in his mind for him to trust in a Savior. Therefore, what does the sinner (including the child) know and accept as fact?

I always suggest asking open ended questions rather than questions requiring a mere “yes” or “no” answer. Let the seeker explain what they know. For example, “What is sin? Have you sinned? What is the penalty for sin? Who is Jesus? Why did Jesus die? What happened to Jesus after He died? What can you do to save yourself from hell?”

James D. Price draws our attention to the opening words in the Great Commission. “The significant word in Mathew 28:19 is the Greek word ‘matheteusate’ which means ‘make a disciple’ or ‘teach.’ The KJV translated the word as ‘teach’ two times (Matt. 28:19; Acts 14:21), as ‘instruct’ once (Matt. 13:52), and as ‘be a disciple’ once (Matt. 27:57). The concept of ‘make disciples’ infers ‘teach to the point of discipleship’ where the person comes to personal faith in Jesus and is ready for baptism.”

Thus, does the person know enough to exercise faith in the Savior? Some do in our first discussion while others do not. In the latter case we need to “teach to the point of discipleship.” Such teaching takes time and must be targeted to their need. (Missionaries follow this process in foreign cultures. Our culture is becoming more foreign all the time.)

Last, we have always relied upon God’s providence to handle any mistakes we make. For example, if we erroneously tell a child he is forgiven it is likely God will continue His work in the child’s life and at some future time bring that awareness to the more mature person. Every minister has baptized adults that made a profession of faith as a child but later determined the profession was lacking. In time God brought those people to such an awareness, they established their personal faith in Christ as Savior, and in most cases they became strong Christians.

God bless you with wisdom to “instruct to the point of belief.”