

## **Lesson #5: God has given us the job of praying, nurturing, and educating children, but it is He who brings the fruit of saving faith.**

Oh, how we love our children! Oh, how we desire for them to know the Lord and to be saved from their sins! This leads us to pray for our children, to teach our children, to catechize our children and talk to our children. This is a great blessing to the children, to their families and to those here at church who work with their children. How wonderful it is to work with children who are so well taught!

### **The Caution**

But with all this diligence, there is an important word of warning we give to both the parents and the teachers of these children: **Doing all these things educates the children and fertilizes their souls with the great things of God, but they neither guarantee nor bring about conversion! It is God who brings the fruit of saving knowledge of and faith in Him, in His way and in His timing.**

Sometimes our small, pea-sized minds and anxious, un-trusting hearts are not too happy about this fact. This may be a temptation especially among those whose children get older and older and still show little or no desire for God. But the truth is, God is far wiser and good than we are. We can rest in Him... or at times, fight to rest in Him... even about the salvation of our children. It is certainly very important that we, as parents and as teachers, do the best job we can of training up the children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. But, it is just as important that we are on our knees, asking for God to work, in His perfect timing, in the hearts of those children. And it is important for God to work in us, right now, a restful, hopeful, trusting, joyful spirit that acknowledges Him as the good, powerful Giver of faith. We should ask Him to show us our heart concerning these matters...and grow them in all of these graces.

Yes, conversion is a work of the Holy Spirit alone! There is no "to-do list" which, when completed, guarantees that their children will come to a saving knowledge of God. Nor are there any certain, three behaviors, if cultivated enough by faithful teachers and parents, will guarantee that the children will become followers of Christ and will godly lives. And unfortunately, sometimes knowledge of more facts--even Bible facts and Bible verses-- can breed arrogance, just as much as lack of facts can lead to ignorance. And good behavior--even good, Christian behavior--can breed legalism, just as lack of discipline can breed selfishness and foolishness.

So what do we do? Do we hold back on how much we teach the children about God because we can't know that it will produce the desired effect? No! Believing comes through hearing and hearing through the word of Christ! We will teach and pray that God works in their hearts through His Word! Do we stop trying to build good, godly character in their lives, because there's no guarantee that we can make it "stick"? Of course not! God calls us to be faithful teachers of His ways and beckon everyone--including children--to turn to Him and live for Him. Let's us fully use the means God typically uses to convert people! But, let us rest in God in our good God who alone can change their hearts!

Another way parents' and teachers' strong desire for salvation assurance comes out in the form of baptism pressure. That is, baptizing children at their early signs of spiritual interest, but before the child is truly converted. At CHBC, we have prospective members share their testimony with the elders before being put forward for membership. Too many times, the testimony includes the story of how they "made a profession of faith as a child and were baptized, but then "fell away from the Lord" for years. And now, just recently, sought the Lord and desire to walk with Him truly now"—or something like that. Was the child truly converted back then, or only now, as an adult who is bearing the fruit of true conversion? Only God knows...and we certainly never question a person's childhood experience. But, it has caused our church leaders to help our teachers and Children's Ministry team learn to both encourage children on towards trusting faith in Christ, while also being patient to wait for fruit of true conversion before baptism takes place. Baptism is a command for the converted, but it does not mean someone is converted. In our eagerness, we may wind up actually creating greater difficulty for our children by baptizing them too soon. If they think they are converted when they are not, then they think that have tasted all there is to a relationship with God, when in truth, they have never tasted it at all.

God made children to want to please their parents. What pleases a Christian parent more than a child's decision for the Lord? "Hallelujah! My child is safe!" I know those feelings all too well. But, we have come to recognize that if we can encourage the child's desire and teach them what it means for them to be a disciple who loves the Lord and lives for Him...but wait until he/she is older and shows signs of true conversion to the congregation at large and in his life as he feels the tug of the world and says "no" to it, that we are far more likely to have less of these false decisions. This is so important for everyone involved. It is important for the church to look like Jesus by, as closely as we can, recognizing, baptizing and including in membership those who truly have repented of their sins and trusted in Jesus as their Savior. And for the children, baptizing them too early, maybe before they truly have become Christians makes them think they know what life with God really is. There are so many people in the world who think they are Christians because they made a decision as a child, often at VBS it seems, were baptized and hardly ever darken the door of a church again or think about living a Christ-honoring life. Jesus spoke of the fruit being the best indication of a type of tree. That's simply what we have chosen to do here at CHBC for our children.

Do we put pressure on ourselves or on our children to do more or say more to help "force" them to make a decision that is not much more than a façade? What the world needs now is not more hypocrites. Be faithful. Be prayerful. Point them to Christ in your words and your life. Encourage them where you see signs of life. Teach them as you sit and as you rise. As you walk, and as you wait in carpool. But watch your heart! Keep watching your heart!

For more information on our elders' decision about the baptism of children, see Appendix C.

## **Lesson #5: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting:**

1. What are ways you as a parent or as a teacher can raise up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?
2. What have been effective means of doing this? (examples: worship services or Sunday School classes at church, catechisms and other memory work, music, family devotions, etc.)
3. Where do you see symptoms of worry or pressure from parents/teachers for their children to make a profession of faith?
4. How do your church leaders think through the baptism of children?
5. If you are a baptistic church that baptizes young children frequently, do you find these children straying away as they grow up? Or, do you find many wanting to be "re-baptized" when they are young adults because they felt the first baptism (at the younger age) didn't "count"? How does this affect the witness of the church and what true Christians look like? How does this confuse these children concerning their spiritual state? What could you do to help with these issues?
6. What signs of conversion do you look for in children before proceeding with baptism?
7. How can you encourage the children who seem to be seeking the Lord and may have actually been converted, even if you do choose to wait for them to grow up and show fruit across their lives?
8. How do you talk to parents when they want their child baptized? How can you help them to understand what it means for the child to be baptized and why you might choose to have them wait for clear fruit to be borne?