

“SUFFER THE CHILDREN: (The tragic legacies of Finney & Bushnell)”

Matthew 19.14

By John S. Waldrip

No one lives in isolation. Everyone functions in an environment formed by what has occurred in the past. Have you considered how child evangelism radically differs from past generations? Are you aware of the past influence of specific individuals on how the Gospel is presented to children? I will introduce you to two men, whom many of you have never heard of before, who had a negative impact on presenting the Gospel to children. It is also likely that these influential men are unknown to your pastor. This book begins to set the record straight so parents and pastors will not inadvertently become barriers rather than escorts of children coming to the Savior.

Part One – A Little More Than Half A Century Ago



The Supreme Court of the United States, January 1973

On January 22, 1973, the United States Supreme Court violated the United States Constitution they had sworn to uphold by handing down the *Roe v. Wade* decision. Below is a portion of the Wikipedia free online encyclopedia entry for *Roe v. Wade*:

Roe v. Wade, 410 U.S. 113 (1973), is a landmark judicial opinion regarding abortion in the United States. According to the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Roe* decision, most laws against abortion violate a constitutional right to privacy under the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The decision overturned all state and federal laws outlawing or restricting abortion that were inconsistent with its holdings. It is one of the most controversial and politically significant cases in U.S. Supreme Court history, and its lesser-known companion case was decided at the same time: *Doe v. Bolton*, 410 U.S. 179 (1973).

The central holding of *Roe v. Wade* was that abortions are permissible for any reason a woman chooses, up until the “point at which the fetus becomes ‘viable,’ that is, potentially able to live outside the mother’s womb, albeit with artificial aid. Viability is usually placed at about seven months (28 weeks) but may occur earlier, even at 24 weeks.” The decision prompted national debate that continues to this day over whether terminating pregnancies should be legal (or more precisely, whether a state can choose to deem the act *illegal*), the role of the Supreme Court in constitutional adjudication, and the role of religious and moral views in the political sphere. *Roe v. Wade* reshaped national politics, dividing much of the nation into “pro-choice” and “pro-life” camps, and inspiring grassroots activism on both sides.

Critics describe *Roe* as illegitimate for straying from the text and history of the Constitution, and for imposing abortion policy on the states and Congress contrarily to American principles of federalism and democracy. Some critics of *Roe* also believe in the personhood of fetal human life, beginning either at conception or later.

Supporters describe *Roe* as necessary to preserve women’s equality, personal freedom, privacy, and the primacy of individual rights, although the opposition to *Roe* often references the primacy of the individual when referring to the fetus.¹

Of course, Christians do not rely on Supreme Court decisions as a guide for right and wrong or as an indication of moral uprightness. Neither are laws passed by legislatures and signed by presidents and governors helpful to us in such matters. Our guide is the Bible. Let us remember the tragic Dred Scott

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roe_v._Wade 1/19/2007

Supreme Court decision upholding the legality of slavery to illustrate. Just because a majority of Supreme Court Justices insisted that taking the life of an unborn child is a legal right or that depriving a woman of the means to end her pregnancy is sexist or enslaving does not affect our Bible-based position.²

My firm conviction demands that I resort to the Bible for guidance in matters of right and wrong. I seek to bring clarity and focus to this and related issues. *Roe v. Wade* was a ruling that opened the floodgates for the greatest mass murder in America's history. The resulting assault on our children would have resulted in a nuclear war had another nation done this to us (instead of the mothers of our country doing this to their own children).

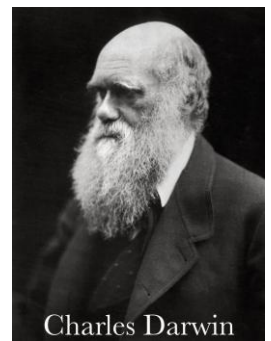
Two essential principles need to be established before we go any further: First, we need to acknowledge when life begins, an issue science was unqualified to speak to when the Supreme Court handed down *Roe v. Wade*, but about which the Bible has always been clear. Second, we need to recognize the sanctity of human life so that we might know God's judgment concerning killing a child, whether that child has passed through the birth canal or not.

The reason these two principles need to be recognized should be evident to all but the youngest reader. Some people think abortion is not wrong since they believe no child is murdered in the mother's womb. However, discovering when life begins will reveal whether abortion does or does not end a child's life. An increasing number of people think it does not matter when life begins because they place such a low value on life. They believe killing people (even unborn or infant children) is natural and necessary for need or convenience.

I will address one principle at a time and start with the beginning of life. My source of truth is God's infallible Word, the Bible. Why resort to the Bible? For two reasons, God's Word is true and without error. When the Lord Jesus prayed His High Priestly intercessory prayer, He said these words to His heavenly Father in John 17:17: "Thy word is truth." Thus, it is no reach for me to cling to the conviction that the God Who is truth has given me a true Book. It reflects His character as a God of truth. King David wrote, "Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." He was declaring its usefulness as a truthful beacon, clearly showing life's travelers not only where we presently are but also where we should next place our feet to journey in safety to the safe harbor at the end of this life on earth.

The *second* reason I resort to the Bible is its vast superiority to science in spiritual matters. Keep in mind that science is a work in progress, while the Bible is a complete work. It is the completed revelation from God. Additionally, the scope of the Bible extends far beyond the scope of even the most advanced science.

When Charles Darwin formulated his theory of evolution, he speculated that microscopic cells were merely blobs of protoplasm. Science has since discovered that cells are astonishingly complex feats of applied physics, chemistry, and engineering. On the other hand, the Bible is the final word on spiritual matters, needing no further development. As well, consider this about science and the Bible. Though it is difficult for many in this science-worshipping era to admit, science is limited and is relevant only in the realm of physical events that are reproducible and observable. Observations might be made using accurate instruments, but nothing which cannot, in some way, be observed is within the grasp of science.



However, there is a universe of relevant truth in the Bible that is wholly beyond the reach of science. Therefore, I will turn to the Bible. The Bible has always been accurate. Science is error-prone, ever-changing its views of things, and scientists are by no means automatically worthy of being credited with impartiality, accuracy, or honesty (as the revelations of cloning fraud in Korea have shown us).³ History establishes the safety of relying on God's Word. For further evidence concerning scientists' unreliability,

² <https://www.britannica.com/event/Dred-Scott-decision>

³ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/disgraced-korean-cloning-expert-convicted/> 1/9/2021

see Michael Fumento's *Science Under Siege*, Broad and Wade's *Betrayers Of The Truth: Fraud and Deceit in the Halls of Science*, and Horace Freeland Judson's *The Great Betrayal: Fraud in Science*.⁴

What does the Bible show me that would allow me to conclude the beginning of human life occurs in the reproductive cycle? To phrase it another way, what Scriptural evidence suggests when life begins for an unborn child? Does life begin at conception? Does life start when there is a heartbeat? Does life start when blood is formed in the developing child? Does life begin when there is brain wave activity? Or does life begin when the baby is no longer attached to the mother by the umbilical cord?

Though it is accurate and factual in every way, remember that the Bible is not a physiology text. It is not *Grey's Anatomy*.⁵ That being the case, one will not find a statement anywhere in the Bible that says, "Life begins at this point." To arrive at the Bible's truth, I must study it and interpret it.

Genesis 2.7 showed when Adam's life began: "And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." However, Adam and Eve became living beings via supernatural creation. I am interested in determining when life comes into existence using natural sexual reproduction. When did your life begin, and when did my life begin? Three passages are significant in making this determination from Biblical evidence: Psalm 51.5, Psalm 139.13, and Jeremiah 1.5:

Psalm 51.5: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me."

Psalm 139.13: "For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb."

Jeremiah 1.5: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; *and* before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."

Thus, **David** was conceived by his mother, not something that later became David. **He** was covered in his mother's womb, not something that developed into him. Finally, **Jeremiah** was formed in his mother's belly, not some blob that came to be Jeremiah. Particularly in Psalm 51.5 and Jeremiah 1.5, those two men's identities can be traced to the earliest moments in their mother's wombs, when conception occurred. Their lives began at their conceptions.

When reference is made to the sanctity of life, what is being referred to is the sacredness of life, the importance of life, and the value of every person's life. In these days in which we live, a shift in thinking has taken place away from valuing the sanctity of a person's life to what might be termed valuing the quality of a person's life. The result of this shift in thinking is a simultaneous alteration in people's thinking about the wrongness of terminating someone's life.

Some think terminating a person who is not enjoying life or snuffing the life of an older adult whose life is not believed to be of high quality is perfectly acceptable. They would argue that it is better to be dead than live an unenjoyable, unpleasant, unhappy, or inconvenient life. They are convinced that it is better for others to be dead than for them to endure prolonged suffering. Many who hold such opinions about others do not hold such views about themselves.

Such people also argue that an unborn child's life does not measure up to the required quality of life considerations to justify allowing the child to live. They maintain no sanctity of life and no essential sacredness that prohibits mothers from killing their unborn children. These people insist that it is of no importance that life begins at conception because life is not necessarily meaningful or because the child's life is not nearly as important as the mother's quality of life (i.e., convenience).

⁴ Michael Fumento, *Science Under Siege: Balancing Technology and the Environment*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1993), William Broad and Nicholas Wade, *Betrayers Of The Truth*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), and Horace Freeland Judson, *The Great Betrayal: Fraud In Science*, (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2004).

⁵ Henry Gray, Edited by T. Pickering Pick and Robert Howden, *Anatomy, Descriptive And Surgical*, (Philadelphia: Running Press, 1901 Edition)

Again, I turn to the Bible. Is life important? Does every person's life possess some inherent value just because it is life possessed by a member of the human race? If so, why? Genesis 1.26-27 reveals something interesting about the essential nature of Adam and Eve:

- ²⁶ And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.
- ²⁷ So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

The image of God is not as essential to us in this book as is God creating Adam and Eve to be His image-bearers. Being image-bearers of God, they were, for that reason, valuable. That fact established the sanctity of their lives. However, some argue that Adam and Eve sinned, and humanity no longer bears God's image in their fallen state. Genesis 9.6 addresses that false assertion.

After the Fall of Adam and Eve into sin, and even after God judged the human race through the worldwide Flood, we read God's pronouncement concerning those who bear God's image and the consequences of taking someone's life: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man, shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."⁶

Therefore, the matter of importance is not the quality of one's life but the sanctity of one's life. Though one might be disabled and another malformed, though one may be terminally ill and another mentally handicapped, each in some way bears God's image and bears the mark of God. For that reason, each person's life has value, and God pronounced the death penalty for any intentional unauthorized ending of a person's life.

However, there are still people who are not satisfied that the Bible has sufficiently spoken about the issue of abortion. They resist the logical conclusions that right-thinking people draw from an objective consideration of Bible facts. In doing so, they cling to the notion that abortion is somehow acceptable, despite the virtual admission of an act's wickedness by the insistence that a euphemism is used to describe it.⁷ After all, what could be more important than a woman's right to choose? Exodus 21.22-25 addresses this concern:



- ²² If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart *from her*, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges *determine*.
- ²³ And if *any* mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life,
- ²⁴ Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,
- ²⁵ Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

This passage establishes a hypothetical scenario in which two men fight each other with a pregnant woman standing nearby. During the fight, one of the combatants knocks the pregnant woman down, and she goes into labor and miscarries. If the baby is born healthy, the Law of Moses demanded that the combatant who caused the miscarriage be punished in a manner that satisfied her husband and the judges' ruling at his trial.

However, what did the Law of Moses call for in the case of a baby who was not born healthy because of the two foolish combatants' accident? Verse 23 shows that a loss of life punished a loss of life. In other words, if the unborn baby the woman was carrying died, the man who caused the miscarriage forfeited his life as well.

⁶ Genesis 9.6

⁷ "Abortion" replaces infant murder and "the right to choose" replaces "the freedom to end the life of an unborn innocent."

Think about this. Under Moses's Law, an accidental abortion (and the word abortion means to cause a miscarriage)⁸ that resulted in the child's death was a crime punishable by death. So precious is the life of an unborn child that God called for the most severe punishment of any man so foolish that he would fight with another man and accidentally cause such a thing to happen.

Is it not evident, then, what kind of a crime it is for a mother *intentionally* to abort her child or for a physician *intentionally* to abort a child to cause that child's death? If God demanded the death penalty for the **accidental** abortion of an unborn child, imagine the punishment for the **intentional** abortion of an unborn child. That, too, would be a capital offense, would it not?

To this point, then, I have established several doctrines found in the Bible. *First*, I have confirmed that life begins at conception. A person is a person from the moment of conception and not later on. God deems each of you to be who you are from the moment you were conceived. People can fuss about that all day long and argue about the scientific merits of different positions, but the Bible is clear on this issue and always has been clear. Life begins at conception.

God's will is evident concerning the appropriate punishment for someone who willfully took another person's life. Additionally, the Bible speaks very clearly about this matter of life's sanctity versus the quality of life. Because the slain person bore the image of God, and not because of anything he is or had done, or concerning the so-called quality of his life, anyone who slew him should pay for it with his life, "for in the image of God made He man."

Speaking directly about abortion, which has claimed so many lives in our country since January 22, 1973, the Bible is obvious. The Old Testament called for the death penalty for someone who accidentally caused what we would designate as an abortion. Therefore, if the punishment for an accidental abortion was death, then the penalty for an intentional abortion would certainly also have been death.

That said, the United States of America is not the covenant nation of Israel, and God does not rule our country using a theocracy through the Law of Moses. Therefore, unlike some denominations, conservative Christians have always understood that our charter as Christians is not to seek the implementation of a theocracy in any country (though I hope we can muster the influence to end legalized abortion throughout the USA once and for all). However, we should not hesitate to call abortion what it most certainly is, the murder of the unborn.

How could the Supreme Court get away with deciding, by a 7-2 margin, with only Justice William Rehnquist and Justice Byron White opposing, that the murder of the unborn should be legal? The ruling reflected the opinions of many people in the country. The few people who opposed the coming slaughter of the unborn were marginalized by the media, the intelligentsia, and the theologically liberal mainline Christian denominations. Many others were apathetic about the murder of the unborn.

Why were so many people in the United States, who were seemingly so decent and law-abiding in their lives, so apathetic about this ruling from the highest court in the land? My opinion is that our national attitude toward children has been changing for decades because of the great culture war that has been raging for a long time. Things had gone so far downhill with the nation's attitude toward children that this last step was simply the logical conclusion to what most people had been moving toward in their lives anyway.

Let me step back just a bit to explain what I mean. God is a God of consequences. Just as in the physical realm, where we observe an equal and opposite reaction for every action, there are always consequences for every decision made and action taken in the spiritual realm. For example, did God not warn Adam that a consequence would result from the disobedience of eating the forbidden fruit? Yes. God promised Adam in Genesis 2.17, "... of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

Of course, Adam and Eve did eat the forbidden fruit. True to His Word, God responded by expelling them from the Garden of Eden that day, resulting in their spiritual death. Following many years later,

⁸ *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1996), page 5.

their physical death was another consequence of their decision and action. The Fall of our entire race into sin was yet a third consequence of their decision and action. There are *always* consequences. So it has been ever since.

With each decision and action, there are consequences of various kinds. However, since the human race has become sinful, it has protested and reacted against the concept of consequences for decisions and actions. To illustrate, a child will lie but does not want to face the consequences of his lies. A thief will steal but does not wish to be punished for his crime. A sinful man always tries to avoid the consequences he does not anticipate enjoying. Even in the case of people committed to doing right, their sinfulness can lead them to react against the appropriate consequences of their decisions and actions.

May I interject an important point here? Many parents are thoroughly confused about their role with their children concerning consequences. Many modern parents think their job is to shield their children from the consequences of their actions when the Bible clearly shows that good parenting involves making sure children face the consequences of their decisions and actions. May God give each mom and dad the wisdom to discern God's will for rearing children to reflect Bible truth.

The basis for this book is Matthew 19.14: "But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

I intended my initial remarks to alert you to some forces that seek to push us in a direction we should not go with our children. For convenience's sake, the context will reveal that our Lord's disciples blocked the access He wanted little children to have to Him. This verse shows His displeasure when someone interferes with a child coming to Christ.

Perhaps you have children or grandchildren. Do you love them? Are you sure you love them? Are you sure you have not been affected by our dead culture's hatred of little children? Are you sure our convenience-based society's refusal to deal correctly with our children has not affected you in some unrecognized way? I regret that I have discovered that I have been adversely affected by our perverse culture. Could the same be true of you? Are you sure you have explored every option and attempted every measure to encourage your child to want to come to Christ?

Why are so few of our children coming to Christ? Why do fewer children seem to come to Christ at a young age? Have you ever asked those questions? Do you love your children enough to face some of the answers? We begin addressing those questions in Part Two. Before starting to read Part Two, I suggest that you consider asking God to bless your life so that your children will want to walk with God, as you do, and will wish to know the Savior you love and will hunger for the fruit of the Spirit they see in you.

Part Two – A Bit More Than A Century and A Half Ago

Once more, Matthew 19.14 reads, "But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Let me take you farther back in time than the 1973 Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision. To give you a sense of perspective, read this great insight from a book titled *Today's Apostasy*:

Pilgrim's Progress Shows How Modern Evangelism Changed

John Bunyan (1628-1688) is undoubtedly the most widely read Baptist of all time. The only book in English which has passed his *Pilgrim's Progress* in sales is the *King James Bible*. Bunyan's book is considered the finest allegory ever written. An allegory is not fiction, but a story which uses symbols or images to represent something which is true. In *Pilgrim's Progress* Bunyan pictures a man going through his life on earth as a journey. This character, named Christian, passes through various trials and difficulties as he travels from the City of Destruction, through the world, on his way to the Celestial City.



The story begins with Christian crying out, "What must I do to be saved?" He awakes the next morning filled with great heaviness of mind. He walks about the fields in distress. At last he meets a man named Evangelist who tells him, "Fly from the wrath to come." He asks, "Which way must I fly?" Evangelist says, "Do you see that narrow [Wicket] gate?" Christian says, "No." "Do you see that light?" He then says, "I think I do." "Keep that light in your eye," says Evangelist, "and go straight up to it; so shall you see the gate, at which when you knock, it shall be told you what you are to do."

Christian leaves the City of Destruction to find the narrow gate so he can enter through it and be saved. Notice that Evangelist does not have this man say a sinner's prayer, learn the plan of salvation, or make a Lordship commitment. Instead, the Evangelist points him to Jesus, Himself.

Christian is now off on his search for Jesus. He carries a great load on his back, which symbolizes the weight of sin. His wife and children try to stop him as he leaves home to find Jesus. They give a loud wail and beg him to come back to the City of Destruction, but he runs away crying, life! Life! Friends of his wife come after him and try to persuade him to turn back with them to the city. One of them is named Obstinate. He scoffs at Christian's search for Christ. His companion, named Pliable, says that if the joys and blessings Christian speaks of are true, they appear to be worth searching for. Obstinate cries, "What! More fools, still! Go back, go back, and be wise." When Pliable joins Christian in his search for Jesus, Obstinate declares, "I will go back to my place; I will not be one of such vain folks."

Christian and Pliable go off on their search for Jesus. Soon the road they are travelling goes through a slough (*sloo*, a swampy marsh). Here they lay for some time, stuck in the mud, and sinking more and more in the mire. Pliable says this wallowing in mire has not brought him the happiness Christian spoke about, so he leaves Christian in the mud and goes back to the City of Destruction.

Wallowing in the slough, Christian is at last greeted by a man named Help, who tells him what the muddy marsh means. "When a man wakes up to a sense of his own lost state, doubts and fears rise up in his soul, and all of them drain down and sink into this place." He then tells Christian how to get out of the mire and return to his search for Christ.

Next Christian meets Worldly Wiseman, a person only interested in earthly pleasures. This man gives worldly advice to Christian. He tells him, "I have seen more of the world than you. In the way you go, you will meet with pain. Pay no attention to what Evangelist tells you." Then Worldly Wiseman tells him to go to a town called Morality and speak to a man named Legality and his son, Civility, and they will tell him how to get the load of sin off of his back without going through the narrow gate (i.e. without coming to Christ). So Christian goes out of the way to find Mr. Legality's house to seek help in removing his heavy burden. He meets Evangelist on the way. Evangelist says, "What doest thou here, Christian?" Christian cannot answer. Evangelist goes on, "Art not thou the man that I heard cry in the City of Destruction?"

Christian: "Yes, dear sir, I am that man."

Evangelist: "Did not I point out to thee the way to the Narrow Gate?" (Christ).

Christian: "Yes, you did, Sir."

Evangelist: "How is it, then, that thou hast so soon gone out of the way?"

Christian: "When I had got out the Slough of Despond I met a man who told me that in a town near, I might find one who could take off my load. He got me at last to yield; so I came here."

When Evangelist had heard from Christian all that took place, he said, "The just shall live by faith, but if a man draw back, my soul shall have no joy in him. Is not this the case with thee? Hast not thou drawn back thy feet from the way of peace? Give more heed to the things that I shall tell thee of. The Lord says, 'Strive to go in at the strait gate to which I send thee, for strait is the gate that leads to life, and few there be that find it.' Why didst thou disregard the Word of God and listen to Mr. Worldly Wiseman? The man whom he sent thee to, Legality, could not set thee free; no man has got rid of his load through him; he could only show thee the way to woe, for by the deeds of the law no man can get rid of his load."

Christian to Evangelist: "Sir, what do you think? Is there hope? May I now go back, and strive to reach the Narrow Gate?"

Evangelist: "Thy sin is great, for thou hast gone from the way that is good, to tread false paths, yet will the man at the gate let thee through, for he has love and good will for all men. But be careful that thou turn not to the right hand or to the left."

So he went on in haste, and could by no means feel safe till he was in the path which he had left. In time he got up to the gate. He gave three knocks and said, "May I go in here?"

The gatekeeper said, "Who is there? Where did you come from, and what do you want?"

Christian: "I come from the City of Destruction with a load of sins on my back; but I am on my way to Mount Zion, that I might be free from the wrath to come; and as I have been told that my way is through this gate, I would know, Sir, if you will let me in."

The gatekeeper then flung back the gate as Christian went in. He then ran till he drew near to a place on which stood a cross, and at the foot of it a tomb. Just as Christian came up to the cross, his load slid from his back. Then Christian was glad, and said, "He gives me rest by his grief, and life by his death."

The Great Baptist Author Speaks on Conversion

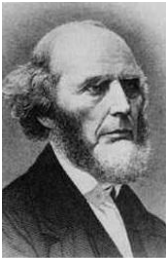
This sketch of "Christian's" conversion has been simplified and reduced to a bare outline of what Bunyan gave in *Pilgrim's Progress*. Originally "Christian's" conversion experience covers about one-fourth of the book. It has been outlined here to show how the idea of conversion has been changed to mere decisionism in evangelical thought today.

If a lost person were trying to leave the City of Destruction and find relief from his burden of sin, what evangelical evangelist in our time would advise him the way Evangelist did in *Pilgrim's Progress*? Few, if any, I fear, would point such a man to Jesus, Himself, who is the narrow gate to eternal life. Few, if any, evangelical evangelists would continue to point a man to Jesus, though the man's family and friends pulled him back, though he went astray in a period of depression and hopelessness (the slough), though he were given false advice by the lost. Who, through all these events, would continue to point a lost man to Jesus? The vast majority of evangelical evangelists today would just have him say a quick prayer, or learn a couple of verses, or make a Lordship commitment.

Pilgrim's Progress shows us that today's "conversions" are quite different from those in the time of John Bunyan, in the seventeenth century. Read this classic again and ask yourself if you have anyone in your church with a testimony like "Christian's," or ***if you have ever even met anyone with such a testimony***. Think over the fact that testimonies like this were common in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries. Then ask yourself, ***what caused this change if it wasn't Finney's decisionism?***

One ought to remember that *Pilgrim's Progress* consistently outsold all books but the Bible for two hundred years. It was read and loved by Wesleyans as well as Calvinists. All branches of evangelicalism embraced it as a correct explanation of Christian conversion. Why? Because salvation experiences like this were quite common before Finney changed conversion into decisionism.

What evangelical evangelist today would give the kind of advice, over a considerable period of time, that the evangelist gave in *Pilgrim's Progress*? The evangelists of our day have largely turned away from the old paths. As a result, almost no one today has a conversion similar to Christian's.



Charles G. Finney

While we do not think that every convert must go through an extended period of doubt and uncertainty, we can know for sure, by the long popularity of Bunyan's book, that this was quite often the case before Finney changed the meaning of conversion. Today, evangelical evangelists would pray instantly with the man in the story, or tell him that he had already been saved. Today, the average evangelical evangelist would demand a decision right then, on the spot, regardless of the man's spiritual state. He would then give the man some false assurance, and leave him unconverted, awaiting Hell.

Thus, by reading Richard Baxter's *Treatise on Conversion* and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, one can see how conversion was changed into a mere decision by Finney and his followers in the mid-nineteenth century.⁹

To verify that this approach to the subject of conversion was applied even to little children before Finney's dreadful influence was felt, I commend your reading ***A Token for Children: Being an Exact Account of the Conversion, Holy and Exemplary Lives, and Joyful Deaths of Several Young Children, in Two Parts***. Though it is only 141 pages, it is a combined reprint of two volumes published long before Finney's terrible effect on Christian evangelism in America. An English pastor named James Janeway wrote the first volume, an exact account of several young children's conversion experiences, lives, and joyful deaths. The very influential Boston pastor, Cotton Mather, wrote the second volume, virtually the same short biographical account of children's conversions in New England written by Janeway. Janeway died in 1674, and Mather died in 1728, about 100 years before Charles Finney entered the scene.

As I read about those precious children's conversion experiences, I realized that such conversions are so rare these days that few pastors have ever witnessed such things even after years of ministry. I must ask, why is it that child evangelism is so different these days? From Janeway and Mather's accounts, I learned of children who were just as conscious of their sinfulness as any adult convicted by the Holy

⁹ R. L. Hymers, Jr. and Christopher Cagan, *Today's Apostasy*, (Oklahoma City: Hearthstone Publishing, Ltd., 1999), pages 67-71.

Spirit and just as willing to strive to enter at the strait gate. They are just as committed to prayer and holiness after conversion as the most committed adult Christian I have ever known or read about.

How could this be? There are several factors: One of the elements would be technology. Imagine the attitudes of children centuries ago exposed to sickness and death. As recently as one hundred years ago, many children had brothers or sisters taken from them by childhood diseases such as polio, whooping cough, diphtheria, influenza, tuberculosis, and smallpox. In those days, children were familiar with death and dying, and they knew there was no guarantee that they would live to adulthood.

In those days, with the state of medical care, sick children were not so quickly removed from their families to hospitals as they are today. Therefore, most children would have seen a brother, a sister, or a friend who was sick and dying. Death and the uncertainty of life were no abstraction to children then, as is the case today. Therefore, when you said to a child, "The soul that sinneth shall surely die," the youngsters of those days had no difficulty envisioning such things. Another is the desensitizing effect of violent media on children, especially video games.¹⁰

However, the most critical reason we see such a change in childhood conversions and the lack of seriousness toward spiritual matters these days has to do with the radical shift in theology that has taken place. As one of *Today's Apostasy* authors suggests, Charles G. Finney's tragic impact on evangelism cannot be overstated. Since the fourth-century heretic Pelagius in ancient times, there has not been a more energetic advocate and a more effective spokesman for the unscriptural notion of self-salvation using a decision as Finney.

To illustrate, what orthodox Gospel minister would write these words?

"The atonement did not consist in the literal payment of the debt of sinners. It was not true that Christ suffered just what those for whom He died deserved to suffer ... not that which cancelled sin in the sense of literally paying the indebtedness of sinners."¹¹

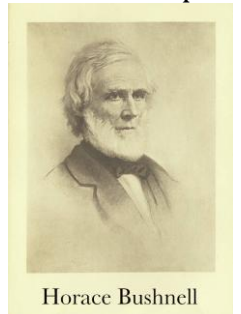
"Justification is not found in Christ's literally suffering the exact penalty of the law for them (sinners), and in this sense literally purchasing their justification and eternal salvation."¹²

"For sinners to be forensically (legally) pronounced just, is impossible and absurd."¹³

Yet Charles G. Finney did write those words.

Finney focused on evangelism in general and other men's training to follow in his errant footsteps of leading sinners to false professions of faith and giving them false hopes of Heaven. The other man who was particularly influential in changing Christian America's approach to evangelizing young children attending churches was Horace Bushnell (1802-1876).

Bushnell greatly affected orthodox views of children's nature and the suitable materials for their spiritual instruction. Throughout his career, he was particularly interested in ministry to children. His writings directly attacked and, to a significant degree, overthrew the biblical approach to evangelizing children represented by Janeway and Mather.



Bushnell disapproved of the "revivalism" of the Calvinists (their emphasis on crisis conversion after becoming awakened to their sinfulness and alarmed about their spiritual condition). He also opposed Finney's decisionism (because of its shallowness and tendency to produce results that did not last). Ironically, Finney's decisionism prepared Christian America's spiritual soil to be receptive to Bushnell's influence.

¹⁰ Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, *Assassination Generation*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2016)

¹¹ Charles G. Finney, *An Autobiography*, (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1876), pages 50-51.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Charles G. Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1994 reprint of 1878 edition), page 373.

Thus, coming along on Charles Finney's heels, Bushnell developed his church growth method, which he elaborated on in his profoundly influential book ***Christian Nurture***. The basic idea of ***Christian Nurture*** is "That the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise."¹⁴ What a startling departure from Bible truth, but one that still resonates in almost every Sunday School classroom and church auditorium in America. Bushnell first published ***Christian Nurture*** in 1847. A revised and enlarged edition appeared in 1861.

Bushnell's promoter, Luther Weigle, praised the book as a classic of American religious literature unrivaled except perhaps by some of Jonathan Edwards' writings. Weigle's discernment was lacking, but there is no question that ***Christian Nurture*** was one of the most influential books in American religious history. I do not exaggerate when I insist that almost every youth ministry and Sunday School in the English-speaking world suffers from Christian Nurture's unrecognized influence.

Bushnell's rejection of original sin and total depravity swept the liberal circles of his day. That does not surprise us. However, it is shocking that many orthodox evangelicals, including the famous Princeton theologian Charles Hodge (1797-1878), expressed a qualified approval for the book.¹⁵ No doubt, Hodge's and others' qualified approval undercut other conservative Christians' ability to resist the onslaught of Bushnell's war against Christian orthodoxy. With such support for ***Christian Nurture***, Bushnell "became instrumental in inaugurating the modern era of religious education."¹⁶ In his work, Bushnell opposed children's evangelizing by pressing upon them their sinfulness, spiritual deadness, and need for thorough conversion. Bushnell also opposed books like ***A Token For Children***, intended to evangelize such children.

No wonder, then, that Bushnell encouraged so many to grow up in formalistic delusion, thinking themselves saved when they were not. Ruth Bell Graham was a sad example that illustrates the effect of Bushnell. I recollect an interview where she was asked when she became a Christian. Though she grew up the daughter of medical missionaries to China, she responded that she felt she had always been a Christian.

So much for the necessity of the new birth. So much for the inherited sin nature. "This is not to say that Horace Bushnell is responsible for all the evil in America today. He had a much larger role in promoting the wickedly destructive force of theological liberalism than is usually realized today. The bitter fruits of Bushnell's works like ***Christian Nurture*** were certainly not desired or expected by those evangelicals who endorsed some of his ideas. They were likely influenced by the Victorian era's sentimentality about children, which blinded them to some degree to the liberalism implicit in Bushnell's chief book."¹⁷

Do you challenge my assertion about the impact of Bushnell's book on contemporary approaches to evangelizing children? The ***New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*** identifies Bushnell as an influential force in American 19th-century religious thought with Sabellian affinities.¹⁸ In his ***First Steps In Christian Theology***, the anointed Irish preacher and theologian, Peter Connolly, wrote these words in his section titled Erroneous Conceptions:

"Sabellianism: Sabellius was a presbyter of Ptolmais [sic] Egypt who was excommunicated 261 A. D. He taught that the Trinity of the Godhead was not a



Peter Connolly

¹⁴ Horace Bushnell, ***Christian Nurture***, (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1994, reprinted from the 1861 edition published by Charles Scribner), page 10.

¹⁵ Quoted in the Introduction of James Janeway and Cotton Mather, ***A Token For Children***, (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1995), page xv.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ ***New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge***, Vol. 2, page 318.

Trinity of persons, but of manifestations.... This same view was held by Horace Bushnell of Hartford, Connecticut, 1802-1867 A. D.”¹⁹

I wonder why so many children walked to the front of the church auditorium with smiles on their faces after hearing Gospel sermons and responding to the invitations given in days gone by. Do you? Did it never cause you any concern that children who were supposedly convicted of their sins and wanted to be converted to Christ were so often flippant and smiling as they so proudly walked the aisle to the “old fashioned altar” at the front of the auditorium? Such behavior would have been alarming to pastors in days gone by.

In His parable of the soils, the Lord Jesus said these words about one category of false professor in Matthew 13:

²⁰ But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;

²¹ Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

“With joy receiveth it.” Why are Sunday School teachers, altar workers, and pastors no longer alarmed at even the possibility that such a reaction from a child might indicate either a failure to comprehend the seriousness of his spiritual condition or a presumption concerning his supposed conversion to Christ? Granted, some sinners who recently came to Christ rejoice and are exuberant. However, exhibiting joy is no necessary indication of conversion if our Lord is to be correctly understood. He was so understood before the days of Bushnell’s and Finney’s impact on American Christianity.

Here is another consideration. Despite comments about “picking green fruit” and the danger of being premature in urging someone to close with Christ, when was the last time you heard of a Sunday School teacher being cautioned by a pastor to go slower and more deliberately when dealing with youngsters?

We know a child will do almost anything a kindly and trusted grownup suggests. Why is there no concern about hasty sinner’s prayers and the resultant false professions prevalent among children? As well, why do so many pastors typically assign the most inexperienced ministers (very young youth workers, fresh out of Bible college) in the church to the most challenging people to minister to (the church’s young people)?

Additionally, when was the last time you heard of a youth pastor exercising wisdom and patience in dealing with a lost kid under profound conviction? Some pastors provide intensive training and hands-on supervision of youth workers to reach teens for Christ, but I do not know many pastors who exercise such caution for souls. Typically, they quickly challenge teens to pray the sinner’s prayer (without considering the need to verify the youngster’s understanding of the Gospel he or she is urged to embrace) that might leave the young sinner lost.

To prove to you that Bushnell is the man responsible for this tragic turn of events that has resulted in us teaching our lost children to say, “I love Jesus,” when the Bible declares that they do not, I will point out just a few of Bushnell’s comments from *Christian Nurture*.

On page 15 of his book, Bushnell argues that there is nothing worse than believing and teaching a child that he is incapable of loving God in his lost condition. Further, Bushnell challenges the authority of anyone who thinks otherwise.

However, Romans 3.23 declares, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”? As well, Psalm 58.3 teaches us that children “go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies”? Bushnell understood his Bible quite differently from Jonathan Edwards and Asahel Nettleton before him, and seemed blind to David’s light in the Psalms and the Apostle Paul in his epistles.

¹⁹ Peter Connolly, *First Steps In Christian Theology*, (Shreveport, LA: LinWel, 1963), page 157.

Consider this quote from page 17: “Now, it is the very character and mark of all unchristian education, that brings up the child for future conversion.” Therefore, you see, Bushnell was opposed to conversion and the need for repentance. It is Bushnell’s views of evangelizing children that prevail in our day. How many parents will suffer their children to endure deep and prolonged conviction of sin without doing everything in their power to cut short the unpleasantness?

On page 21, Bushnell argues against teaching children that they are sinners who need Christ. Ponder this quote concerning instructions that ought to be given to children: “He is not to be told that he must have a new heart and exercise faith in Christ’s atonement.” Bushnell’s sentiments fly in the face of Bible truth and historic Christian orthodoxy.

Most of us are familiar with Romans 5.12, where Paul comments on our inherited sinful nature: “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.” Now reflect on what Bushnell writes in opposition to that on page 22: “For it is not sin which he derives from his parents; at least, not sin in any sense which imports blame, but only some prejudice to the perfect harmony of this mold, some kind of pravity (sic) or obliquity which inclines him to evil.”

Though he granted that children get something from their parents, Bushnell denied that it is worthy of blame. This is the heresy of Pelagius coming back to us again, denying the full impact of the Fall.

From the Bible, we know that we love God in response to His love for us, First John 4.19, which we begin to apprehend from the moment of conversion. Thus, the unconverted cannot love God in the sense that we find it in John’s epistle. Bushnell advocated **teaching** children to love God. On page 25, he speaks of the child who “learned to love him so early.” However, conversion **is not** learning. You do not **learn** to love God. You learn that you **should** love God.

A Christian can learn to love God more fully. However, loving God is not something that is **learned**, just as it precisely is not something that can be **taught**. You teach children they should love God, which is different than teaching them to love God. The lost cannot be taught to love God.

The final example is found on pages 36-37 of **Christian Nurture**. Here is what Bushnell wrote as a criticism of the understanding of evangelism we orthodox Christians have: “Our very theory of religion is, that men are to grow up in evil and be dragged into the church of God by conquest. The world is to lie in halves, and the kingdom of God is to stretch itself side by side with the kingdom of darkness, making sallies into it, and taking captive those who are sufficiently hardened and bronzed in guiltiness to be converted!”

Of course, Bushnell misrepresents the spirit of biblical evangelism by insisting sinners must be hardened and bronzed before conversion when the opposite is true. Still, he is correct in his understanding that the kingdom of God makes sallies into the kingdom of darkness to take captive those who respond to the Gospel. He goes wrong due to his liberalism in his refusal to admit that our children are sinners who are just as needy of Christ as adults and that the Holy Spirit’s convicting work, though unpleasant to be experienced, is yet glorious in its results.

Bushnell’s basic assumption was that the children of Christian parents are innocent and are only corrupted by their parents’ ignorance and inconsistency. While children are seriously affected by their parents’ sins, the Bible shows them to be as much sinners as anyone and desperately needing God’s saving grace as the worst sinner.

There are two real issues for parents concerning their own children’s conversion, as I see them: *First*, are you willing to grant that your children are as sinful as the Bible says they are, with a heart that is as desperately wicked and prone to lying as Jeremiah 17.9 declares? Many parents accept this in theory but find it difficult to put such views into practice.

Secondly, are you willing to observe your child suffering the convicting work of the Holy Spirit without trying to cut the process short? Many parents find it hard to see their child agonizing over personal sins and guiltiness in the sight of God without interfering with the Spirit’s convicting work to

ease the child's discomfort. This is because parents' souls are tormented when they see their beloved child agonizing about the wrath of God and their punishment in the lake of fire.

Mom? Dad? Are you willing to stand back while the Spirit of God convicts deeply and pricks the heart painfully and stand on the Lord's side of the issue while your child remains in their sins? Bushnell's liberalism expressed itself in sentimentalism that could not tolerate such a thing. Many parents have been so affected by Bushnell's influence that they, too, cannot tolerate such a thing.

Sadly, the impact of his unbelief and his deliberate misinterpretation of clear Bible passages to justify his distortion of the truth is felt in almost every home and church in America. I believe it is the main reason we do not see the kinds of conversions of children these days that were so prominent in the days of John Bunyan, James Janeway, and Cotton Mather.

Part Three – More Than Twenty Centuries Ago

Matthew 19.13-15:

- 13 Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put *his* hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.
- 14 But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of Heaven.
- 15 And he laid *his* hands on them, and departed thence.

Mark 10.13-16:

- 13 And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and *his* disciples rebuked those that brought *them*.
- 14 But when Jesus saw *it*, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.
- 15 Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.
- 16 And he took them up in his arms, put *his* hands upon them, and blessed them.

Luke 18.15-17:

- 15 And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when *his* disciples saw *it*, they rebuked them.
- 16 But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.
- 17 Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.

I trust that you have gathered, so far in your reading, that I am attempting to instill a more Biblical understanding of child evangelism into each reader. I seek to do this because of the serious problems I see in both our culture and churches in America today when reaching our next generation for Christ.

On the one hand, we live in a culture that denigrates children's value by murdering so many before they are born or preventing their conception using various birth control devices. To one degree or another, those involved in such measures are playing God when they employ methods to control the outcome of their behavior and shield themselves against God-ordained consequences of sexual activity, even those who are married. His father told one of my relatives that he loved him, to which the son angrily replied, "Love me? You love me? If you loved me, you would not have gotten a vasectomy to make sure you had no more like me." What do we communicate to children about their value to us and our love

for them when we take steps to have so few of them or none of them?

On the other hand, we see those who love children, who place great value on their souls, and want to see youngsters converted to Christ. But contemporary Christianity has been so much influenced by Horace Bushnell, whom I introduced you to in Part Two, that those who love children and highly value their souls are still disservice by not seeing them realistically in the light of the truth of Scripture.

We must take a high view of God's Word and greatly value the little ones God has loaned us to raise. No disservice is done to any child by recognizing that child's true nature as revealed in the Bible and seeking the child's conversion to Christ by means outlined in God's Holy Word. The Bible way is always the best way to attempt to bring a child to Christ.

Let me now focus your attention on the Lord Jesus Christ's willingness to save sinners. The reason for this is because there are so many who are not fully persuaded the Savior wants to save sinners, particularly young sinners.

If their behavior is any indication, too many parents profess to be Christians who do not act like the Lord Jesus is willing to save their children. As well, most sinners do not think about the Savior's willingness to save them. I would be delighted to change those misconceptions.

THE WILLINGNESS OF JESUS TO SAVE SINNERS, EVEN CHILDREN

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Triune Godhead, the eternal Son of the living God, is willing to save children. In Second Peter 3.9, we read that "The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." The context of that verse shows the Lord Jesus Christ to be the one Peter was referring to when he was inspired to write those words.

So, the Lord Jesus Christ is willing to save children from their sins. In God's Word, we see various ways in which His willingness to save is demonstrated:

First, there is His eternal decree. I cite Lewis Sperry Chafer's *Systematic Theology*:

The term *decree of God* appears first in the singular, since God has but one all-inclusive plan. He sees all things at a glance. For convenience, the separate features of this plan may be called the decrees of God; but there should be no implication in this that the infinite understanding of God advances by steps or in a train. And there is no possibility that the one plan will be altered by omissions or additions. Nor is it true that God sustains a distinct and unrelated purpose concerning each aspect of His one intention. With God there is one immutable decree embracing in itself every detail, even the falling of a sparrow. It is the divine cognition from all eternity. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18).

It should be observed that God formed His decree in eternity, though its execution is in time. The decree being eternal, all its parts are, in the mind of God, but one intuition, though in its realization there is succession. Christ's earthly mission was seen in one conception, yet an interval of thirty-three years fell between His birth and His death. He was "foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times" (1 Pet. 1:20). Augustine states: "God willeth not one thing now, and another anon; but once, and at once, and always, he willeth all things that he willeth; not again and again, nor now this, now that; nor willeth afterwards, what before he willed not, nor willeth not, what before he willed; because such a will is mutable; and no mutable thing is eternal" (*Confess.*, XII, xv, cited by Shedd, *Theology*, I, 395). The power to conceive of a thing as a whole before it is executed in the order which its intention requires, is not altogether outside the range of finite minds. There is every reason to believe that Solomon foresaw and designed every detail of the temple before any work



was begun. That vision accorded him was as comprehensive concerning those features that were to be wrought out at the end of the process as concerning those which were first in the order of procedure. The capstone is no less evident in the architect's mind than is the foundation. It is true that human foresight is subject to development and change, which mutability is never true of the divine archetypal vision.²⁰

Chafer's comments deal broadly with the divine Godhead without distinguishing the three Persons of the Trinity. But the point that he illustrates, which is so clearly born out in God's Word, is that nothing happens but by God's eternal decree. Thus, God decided what He, including the Lord Jesus Christ, would and would not do before creating.

I assert to you at this time but do not take the time to prove from God's Word at this time that in the eternal council chamber of the Godhead, it was decided, which is to say the Lord Jesus agreed, that He would save not only sinners but that He would save sinners who were children. How do I know this? If He does it, it is only because He decreed it. Before I am done, you will see that He does it. Ergo, He decreed it.

Next, there is His incarnation. Incarnation refers to that miracle by which the Second Person of the Godhead became a man, which occurred when the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary, a virgin. From that supernatural conception in the womb of Mary, the Lord Jesus Christ developed and then was born naturally. From His birth, He experienced the process of maturing physically. He was a member of Adam's race, though never experiencing sin.

In Hebrews chapter 4, the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ is addressed, showing His priesthood to be superior to the priesthood of Moses' brother Aaron and his descendants. Vital to us here is Hebrews 4.15: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin."

This verse asserts that the Lord Jesus Christ, though He was sinless, was both "touched with the feelings of our infirmities" and "was in all points tempted like as *we are*." In other words, as He lived out the thirty-three years of His life here on earth, He experienced everything you and I have experienced, but without experiencing any of our sins. He is holy.

Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ knows better what it is like to be a baby, an infant, and a child than you or I do. He has a perfect memory of childhood, and we do not. He also lived through those experiences with complete awareness of who He is and His mission, while our childhood awareness was warped by sin.

The Lord Jesus Christ saves sinners by being their substitute. When He passed through those phases of life that you and I have passed through, or are passing through, He did so for the express purpose of qualifying Himself as our Divine Substitute that He might save such as we from our sins. Was the Lord Jesus Christ not willing to save children, He would never have passed through childhood. Therefore, the fact that He was born into our race is proof positive of His intentions to save members of our race, including children.

His crucifixion is next. Of course, the crucifixion refers to that awful morning when Roman soldiers nailed the Lord Jesus Christ to a cruel cross, where He died for people's sins. But why did the Lord Jesus Christ suffer the cross? Did He not suffer crucifixion because it was decreed in the Godhead council chambers from eternity past? Yes. Revelation 13.8 identifies the Lord Jesus Christ, that One worthy of all men's worship, as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

The Savior also suffered crucifixion because He wanted to do what He did. Hebrews 12.2 gives us insight: "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." What is meant here by the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews is that instead of the joy He experienced in Heaven with His Father, the Lord Jesus Christ chose to endure the cross. In doing so, He despised the shame of such ignominious suffering and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

²⁰ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology, Vol. I*, (Dallas, Texas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1976), pages 228-229.

Why did He do that? Why did He suffer the wrath of God on behalf of sinners? Why did He, in so doing, establish the ground on which forgiveness is granted, both to adult sinners and also to young sinners, sinners who are children? Because He wanted to. In John 10.18, referring to His future crucifixion, He said of His life, “No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself.” Thus, it was His choice. His decision was a decision He made in eternity past, but a decision that He executed on a bare hill outside Jerusalem more than 2,000 years ago.

After everything was done, all the prophecies completed to the letter, the Lord Jesus “said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.”²¹ Commenting on His words, C. H. Spurgeon wrote, “What a grand utterance! Now, are we safe, for salvation is complete.”²²

Complete for whom? Complete for you and me? Yes. Complete for sinners? Yes. Complete, also, for children. The price has been paid. The saving work has been done.

Fourth, there is His resurrection. Jesus Christ was raised from the dead in a glorified body. He did not rise from the dead as a spirit, absent a body. Oh, no. The tomb was empty, you see. Nothing was left behind, but the material His body had been wrapped in. Why then was Jesus Christ raised from the dead? There are several reasons, including the fact that death couldn’t hold on to Him as the Lord of life, Acts 2.24. Paul mentions the reason in Romans 4.25, where he writes about the Lord Jesus Christ as the One “Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”

What does it mean to be “raised again for our justification”? Most scholars indicate that our Lord Jesus was raised as a testimony to show that the Father approved His sacrifice and accepted it. However, I think more is meant. I am persuaded that the resurrection of Christ was necessary to complete the offering of the blood sacrifice, so the Lord Jesus, our great High Priest, could offer His blood by sprinkling it on the mercy seat on high.

Some would say, “But Jesus Christ is the mercy seat on high.” To that, I would reply, “Absolutely true. What else explains not only the use of the word translated mercy seat to describe Him (Romans 3.25) but also His appearance at the time of His second coming?” What does the Apostle John observe in Revelation 19.13? “And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood.”

Thus, one of the reasons the Lord Jesus rose from the dead was to fulfill His duty as our great High Priest, offering the blood of the atonement on the mercy seat to wash away sins. But unlike the types found in the Old Testament, He was both Lamb of God and High Priest. Thus, He not only shed His blood for the remission of our sins, but He also offered up His blood as the High Priest. Being the Mercy Seat, He sprinkled His blood on His garments! That explains His appearance at His Second Coming since the blood on His garments cannot be anyone else’s blood but His Own.

Again, His resurrection is an integral part of the provision for our salvation, and not ours only, but also the salvation of children who turn to Christ.

Fifth, there is His ascension. After His resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ ascended to His Father’s right hand on high. Dozens of passages in God’s Word show this to be true. But why did Jesus Christ ascend to His Father’s right hand? I begin with Hebrews 10.12:

¹² But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;

¹³ From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

¹⁴ For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

¹⁵ *Whereof* the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before,

¹⁶ *This is* the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them;

¹⁷ And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

¹⁸ Now where remission of these *is, there is* no more offering for sin.

²¹ John 19.30

²² Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon Devotional Commentary*, (Bronson, MI: Online Publishing, Inc., 2002), bible@mail.com

The passage refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, Who offered Himself once for sins and then sat down at God's right hand, expecting His enemies to be made His footstool. Making His enemies His footstool refers to the submission of the vanquished to the victor and bowing humbly before Him. But it does not refer only to those who are finally lost but also to those who obey the Gospel and are saved, as verse 17 clearly shows: "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

Christ's ascension to the Father's right hand has very much to do with sinners being saved from their sins, as well as the impending doom of those who remain lost. Thus, the entire program of God, from Christ's incarnation to His crucifixion, His resurrection, and His ascension, is to glorify God, in part, by saving sinners from their sins, even sinners who are children.

Sixth, there is His present session. That was then, 2,000 years ago, and this is now. What about the Lord Jesus Christ's intentions and willingness to save children now? Keep in mind that the Lord Jesus Christ's present session, what He is presently doing at the Father's right hand in Heaven, He has been doing since His ascension. What does history show the Lord Jesus Christ has been doing in His present session? History shows He has been saving sinners.

Whether it is on the Day of Pentecost and through the times of the apostles, the revivals that swept through Europe during the Protestant Reformation, the revivals in England and the New World in the 18th and 19th centuries, the Welsh and Korean Revival in 1905, the revival on the Isle of Lewis in the mid-twentieth century, the revival in Indonesia in the 1970s,²³ the revival presently occurring in rural Nepal,²⁴ or the conversions of individual sinners under the preaching of the Gospel, what Jesus Christ has been doing in His present session is saving sinners, including sinners who are children.

Keep in mind that justification by faith in Christ, Romans 5.1, is an "outside-of-you" work. That is, Jesus Christ does not have to be physically present for a sinner to be justified, since justification is entirely a pronouncement by God of a sinner's righteous standing in His sight, by Christ's substitutionary work on Calvary's cross. Thus, nothing impedes the conversion of the lost during Christ's present session, insofar as the Lord Jesus Christ is concerned. The Word of God is still honored, the Spirit of God still convicts sinners, and Jesus still saves.

The question that needs to be asked is if my Lord Jesus is still willing to save children. The answer found in the Bible is one I will address momentarily. But the response from church history and concerning Christ's present session is "Yes!" From the brief biographies given to us by James Janeway and Cotton Mather, we know that children, even relatively young children, have been saved by the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, we have abundant evidence of Christ's willingness to save children in His present session in Heaven.

Finally, there is His conversation. So far, I have presented theological and historical reasons that reveal the Lord Jesus Christ's willingness to save children, as well as His desire to save any other sinner who will come to Him by simple faith. But it is now time for us to consider the Lord Jesus Christ's words, as He expressed Himself concerning His willingness to receive children to Himself.

Review again what we read together earlier, from Matthew 19.13-15:

- ¹³ Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put *his* hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.
- ¹⁴ But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of Heaven.
- ¹⁵ And he laid *his* hands on them, and departed thence.

Now, from Mark 10.13-16:

- ¹³ And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and *his* disciples rebuked those that brought *them*.

²³ Kurt Koch, *The Revival In Indonesia*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1972)

²⁴ "What Will Be Known As The Nepali Revival," <https://www.calvaryroadbaptist.church/sermon.php?sermonDate=20181209a>

- ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw *it*, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.
- ¹⁵ Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.
- ¹⁶ And he took them up in his arms, put *his* hands upon them, and blessed them.

Finally, from Luke 18.15-17:

- ¹⁵ And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when *his* disciples saw *it*, they rebuked them.
- ¹⁶ But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.
- ¹⁷ Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.

Those passages clearly show that the Lord Jesus Christ was willing to receive children unto Himself. Understand that the word “infants” in Luke 18.15 does not refer to toddlers and younger, but “to children old enough to have the Scripture read intelligibly to them.”²⁵ He did not permit their parents to bring their children to Him but granted those children themselves permission to come to Him in a saving way.

Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ’s willingness to save children from their sins is undeniable. It is indisputable that children can be saved from their sins when they are relatively young and that children have been saved from their sins when they are relatively young.

The challenge facing pastors, churches, and parents is not the Lord Jesus Christ’s willingness to save children. The real challenge may be your convictions concerning your children’s need to be saved or your commitment to doing what is necessary to see them saved.

If you think your child needs to be saved from his or her sins, and if you think the Lord Jesus Christ is willing to save your child from his or her sins, it only makes sense, to make use of the means that are available to see your child saved from sins. Does it not?

Part Four – Now That We Know, What Should We Do?

You get a better idea of what someone believes by observing what that person does than listening to what that person says. Would you not agree with that? I think it bears repeating. You get a better idea of what someone believes by observing what he does than listening to what he says.

Thus, we have good reason to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ does love the lost, did give Himself an atonement for sins to save the lost and the lost from their sins. How can we believe these things? Because not only did He make statements about each of those things, but He went beyond words to die on the cross, to rise from the dead three days later, and then ascend to the Father’s right hand on high.

Reflecting on the Lord Jesus Christ’s willingness to save sinners from their sins, as demonstrated by His eternal decree, His incarnation, His crucifixion, His resurrection, His ascension, His present session, etc., it is safe to say that whatever obstacle to the conversion of a sinner, particularly a child, exists, it is not Jesus Christ.

That being the case, where should we look next to examine those impediments to childhood conversion? If the Savior is willing to save, why is the sinner not saved when the sinner is not saved? Might the willingness of the sinner, particularly the willingness of children who are sinners, not be considered? I speak as a man and not from God’s perspective.

²⁵ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke Volume 2: 9:51-24:53 - ECNT*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), page 1469.

As previously mentioned, Horace Bushnell, the 19th-century pastor and theologian most famous for being a co-founder of what has come to be the University of California at Berkeley and for authoring the seminal book titled ***Christian Nurture***, is the unrecognized dominant influence in the thinking of those today who are concerned with evangelizing children.

Horace Bushnell's view was that children are so naturally good and so naturally inclined toward the things of God that the unwillingness of a child to embrace Christianity was likely to be explained by grievous errors on the part of pastors and parents. In short, if the child does not become a Christian, particularly a church kid, according to Bushnell, it is likely the parents' or the pastor's fault or the parents *and* the pastors.

No one would take up the position that either parents or pastors' conduct has **no** bearing on child evangelism, but is Bushnell's underlying thesis correct? Are children essentially good? Do children exhibit the inclination to please God and embrace Christ if they are not interfered with? If a youngster is not saved, is it the parents' fault or the pastor's fault? These are fair questions since it is not at all unusual for parents of a lost kid to blame the pastor, though they rarely blame themselves.

What is remarkable about Bushnell's influence on Christianity through his book can be summed up in two observations:

First, Bushnell's book, ***Christian Nurture***, is filled with misinterpretations and misapplications of the Bible. I am astonished that such a book would receive praise from 19th century Bible-believing readers. The book has so many departures from Bible truth. It reflects such a departure from received Christian orthodoxy that if Bushnell was alive in the 20th century, he would have been considered a modernist.

Second, I am astonished that Bushnell has had such a significant influence on people who have no idea of the effect of his unbelief and distortion of the truth on their beliefs and practices. You would think people might want to know where they acquired their ideas about child-rearing and child evangelism, but that does not seem to be the case at all.

Thus, I urge you to set aside preconceptions about children and opinions about their willingness to become Christians, and at least ponder the considerations I will set before you. Love your children while at the same time demonstrating a desire to face the truth about them. After all, there is nothing to fear from the truth. The Lord Jesus promised that "the truth will make you free," John 8.32.

What factors affect the willingness of a child to come to Christ? I would like you to consider this critical subject under five headings:

First, THE NATURE OF THE CHILD

May I say that each child born is a unique individual in the sight of God? May I also observe that there are characteristics and traits that each child has which are unique and unlike anyone else in the world? There is only one Frances. There is only one Christina. There is only one Aaron. There is only one Rebecca, though many other children use our children's names. However, despite these unique differences that make each child unlike anyone else who has ever lived, the great majority of characteristics and traits our children possess are attributes that all children possess.

Speaking more broadly, it is not only our children who possess these attributes but every one of us. What, particularly, needs to be said about the nature of children? It is a sinful nature. Of course, I speak of the spiritual nature of a child, of any child, of every child. The spiritual nature of a child is sinful.

There is a cause for your child's sinfulness. We call it the Fall. In the Garden of Eden, they were not the only ones affected when Adam and Eve fell from their pristine holiness into the depths of sin through disobedience to God's command. Because Adam was the federal head of the human race, all who descended from Adam are born into the same condition that Adam fell into by his act of rebellion against God. How else do you explain Cain's murder of his brother Abel? How else do you explain Cain's refusal to

worship God with suitable offerings? In Romans 5.12, the Apostle Paul stated the matter clearly to the Christians in Rome: "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."

Do you doubt your own child's sinfulness? Romans 6.23 declares that "the wages of sin is death." Find me a child who will never die, and you will have found a child who is not sinful. I could give many examples and dozens of explanations, but the short version is this: Your child, like every other child, is sinful. Your child got that way, and the same way that you and I got that way, by being born into our sinful race that has been sinful since Adam's first sin in the Garden of Eden.

Next, a few comments about the condition of your child's sinfulness: sinful is a word. But words have meaning. What, then, is the meaning behind this word "sinfulness"? Sinful children are children who commit sins. What are children like who are correctly described as sinful?

A child does not become sinful by committing sins, just as no dog becomes a dog by barking. It is quite the other way around since Adam's Fall. Dogs bark because they are dogs. Children commit sins because they are sinners. Adults commit sins because we are sinners. It is nature that produces the behavior, with Adam and Eve being the only people who ever became sinful. Since then, we have been conceived sinful.

Your child's behavior is characterized by disobedience toward God because he is spiritually dead in his sins, and it leaves him the object of God's wrath. The Apostle Paul described this condition of sinfulness to the Ephesian church in Ephesians chapter 2. The descriptive words he used to picture sinfulness to his readers were such phrases as "dead in trespasses and sins," "children of disobedience," and "children of wrath." Those descriptions show sinfulness to be a bad spiritual condition.

What is the consequence of such a sinful nature? I have touched on the result leading up to this point, but the harsh reality is that being sinful means that your child will someday die like everyone else who is sinful. It is terrible to die, and we must all die, unless the Lord Jesus Christ returns before you die and, being a Christian, He takes you directly to Heaven. But physical death, as bad as it is, is not the worst of it.

The worst of it for the sinful child who is not a Christian is Hell. What kind of mom or dad would you be if, #1, you believe the Bible, and #2, you contemplate the eternal destiny of your beloved son or daughter, but you are unmoved and unaffected by your child's sinfulness? The sinfulness of your child is an unpleasant topic, a dreary subject. But facing the facts is necessary for you to have any hope of seeing your son or daughter in Heaven instead of Hell.

Sinfulness makes every child God's enemy, though God is no child's enemy. You ought to be so affected by your child's sinfulness that it alters your behavior. Your children's sinfulness places them in opposition to the plan and purpose of God for their lives. And as Adam and Eve's sinfulness prompted them to hide from God in the Garden of Eden, so your child's sinfulness prompts them to flee from the face of God and inclines your youngster to reject the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Next, THE EXPERIENCES OF THE CHILD

As if your child's nature was not enough to prevent them from wanting to become a Christian, there are also the experiences of life that will make the youngster all the more unwilling to become a Christian. Seek to understand the experiences of life in light of First John 2.15-17, where the Apostle John uses the word "world" to refer to the evil, Satan-dominated culture in which each of us acquires our many experiences:

- 15 Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.
- 16 For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

Why does the Apostle John command Christians not to love the world? Because the world, the people, and this culture in which we live, constantly subject us to powerful temptations of various types, which are strong inducements and persuasive enticements to sin.

Why do parents seek to control what entertainment their children are exposed to, what friends they keep company with, what schools they attend, and what teachers and coaches influence them? Because such experiences appeal to the eye, appeal to sensual appetites, or appeal to pride to provoke the sinner to commit more sins. And if Adam's condemnation was the result of one sin, imagine what is in store for someone who commits a lifetime of sins?

Of course, since Satan (God's archenemy) controls the world (which is to include the culture), it stands to reason that someone immersed in worldliness will be correspondingly less inclined to be willing to become a Christian. In addition to the nature of their sinfulness, the brainwashing of the sinner is accomplished by the world's propaganda. It all adds up to children being more and more convinced that becoming a Christian is something they do not want to happen to them.

Third, THE EXPOSURE OF THE CHILD

There is little real difference between what you would call experiences and what you would call exposure, except that I am using the word exposure related to what your child has become aware of without experiencing. Children can become exposed to sex sins in movies, in public school, in printed material, online, and by observing what takes place in the extended family without committing sex sins.

Only the naïve deny that exposure to such sins leads to a desire to experience such sins. But children become exposed to more than just sex sins. The whole anti-God and anti-Christian mindset of the world is observed and heard by children as they watch what is going on around them. An essential part of parenting is exerting control over your child's environment.

When my daughter was enrolled in a karate school, there was not a minute she was taking instruction that her mother, or I, was not observing, listening, and evaluating what our little girl was exposed to. Why did we enroll our daughter in a Christian school? Was it because I am a pastor? Not at all. We enrolled her in a Christian school so I would know what she was being taught and so I would know by whom she was being taught. No parent can control everything a child is exposed to, but our goal was to control everything we could control and to decide for ourselves what she was exposed to.

Perhaps a Christian school or homeschooling is not an option. Cultivating a good relationship with a child's public school teacher is also an option. The key is exercising wisdom in shaping your child's environment and intentionally offsetting the negatives you cannot prevent with positives under your control.

A child's willingness (humanly speaking, of course) to become a Christian is powerfully affected by what that child is exposed to, not just what that child experiences. Therefore, seeking to be responsible parents, we exerted ourselves to minimize her exposure to worldliness, be on hand so we could counteract worldliness when exposure was unavoidable, and get her under the Gospel as much as humanly possible.

Some Moms and Dads think some recent conception called "quality time" helps raise children. Other Moms and Dads think doing things with their kids helps raise them. Not that such time spent with children is not helpful, so long as Moms and Dads are not trying to justify being absentee parents or trying to fill their own childhood voids (Little League baseball dads or stage moms come to mind) in their kids' lives rather than raising their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Exposure to the Gospel, not exposure to you, is the real key to parenting. Understand that I am not suggesting you ignore your children or mistreat them. But the goals include raising your kids so that they

will be more willing to become Christians. This is not accomplished by going hunting on Sunday but by being under the Gospel, where grace is ministered to your child through the teaching and preaching of God's Word.

Fourth, THE CONVICTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Every child's natural and usual tendency will be to reject the Gospel. In every child's nature, it opposes God's plan and purpose for their life, which is mainly accomplished by rejecting Christ. Therefore, wise Christian parents are unsatisfied with good, obedient, responsive kids who please their parents in every respect while rejecting the Savior.

To see their children converted, parents are called upon to pray and work diligently to influence their child's experiences and exposures, and to comment on those experiences and exposures they cannot control. It is why Solomon wrote, "My son, hear the instruction of thy father," in Proverbs 1.8. It is also why he urged, "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways," in Proverbs 23.26.

But parents can only work on the environment. To work on the child's heart, to overcome the sinful antagonism that a child has toward the things of God, requires the intervention of the Holy Spirit of God to produce willingness in the child. Only the Holy Spirit can so affect a Christ-rejecting sinner that they want to be a Christian. No sinner who is unaffected by the Holy Spirit will ever be willing to come to Christ. The sinful nature is so deeply ingrained and vehemently opposed to the things of God that it is impossible for the sinful child to willingly come to Christ without the Holy Spirit's intervention.

Romans 5.6 declares, "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." "Without strength" to save ourselves. "Without strength" even to want to be saved from sins. It requires the Holy Spirit's supernatural intervention to persuade a sinner to want to become a Christian and be *willing* to come to Christ.

Finally, THE DRAWING OF THE FATHER

Many things are mysterious and unfathomable. No one can fully understand the Holy Spirit's involvement in persuading the sinner to want to come to Christ and the Father drawing the sinner to Christ. So, rather than understand it, let us recognize that such a relationship exists.

Jesus Christ said, in John 6.44, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." Thus, you cannot, on your own, willingly change your mind and come to Christ. You cannot. Neither can your child.

We know from this verse that the Father must draw sinners to come to Christ. We know the Holy Spirit must persuade sinners to *want* to come to Christ. All we can conclude is that the Holy Spirit's persuasion and the drawing of the Father must work together in perfect harmony for a sinner to be willing to come to Christ.

Again, I am convinced you have a better idea of what someone believes by observing what he does than listening to what he says. I think it bears repeating yet again. You have a better idea of what someone believes by observing what he does than listening to what he says.

We have briefly looked at the factors related to a child's willingness to come to Christ. Their willingness is related to and influenced by their sinful nature, their experiences in life, those things they are exposed to, the Holy Spirit's convicting and persuading work, and the Father drawing the young sinner to Christ.

We know the child's sinful nature always pulls away from the Gospel, away from conversion, and opposes any willingness to come to Christ.

The particular way the Father and the Holy Spirit deal with the lost is shown in the Bible. However, **which** individuals are dealt with by God, the Father and the Holy Spirit are unknown. We do know the Savior's willingness to save. We saw that in Part Three.

That which we **can** directly do, which parents can presently do, and which preachers can now do (setting aside the vital ministry of prayer to the Father as being indirect) has to do with our children's experiences and exposure. We can influence and comment on these experiences and exposures.

What experiences can you create for your children to offset the impact of those influences which will work to pull sinful children away from a consideration of Christ? How about family devotions? How about parents setting examples in worshiping and serving God? How about a reverence for the things of God that even little children can recognize? And what about comments that are made and instructions provided, so children will see their experiences in a new light, a light you offer them?

Then there are those things children are exposed to. What can you do? Minimize their exposure. Change the environment. Control who has access to them and where they go to school, or what activities they participate in will increase the things they see that no child should see or that no child should hear.

These are the prominent factors that affect and influence a sinful child's willingness to come to Christ. No mom or dad can affect the presence of his child's sinful nature, but they can influence the strength of its grip on their child. That's what discipline, correction, and the occasional spankings are for. And while we cannot control the Holy Spirit of God so that He will persuade and we cannot control the Father so He will draw, we can exercise control over our children's experiences in life and the things they are exposed to. We can make sure they are exposed to the Gospel as much as humanly possible. We can take steps to ensure that we do not grieve and quench the Holy Spirit so that He will not bless our efforts or hear our prayers.

Before a child comes to Christ, he must want to come to Christ. What are you willing to do? What sacrifice are you ready to make to work toward the goal of your child wanting to come to Christ? I am persuaded that what you are willing to do, the steps you are willing to take, and the lengths you are willing to go, not to make sure your child becomes a worldly success, but to make sure your child becomes a Christian, will bear upon the likelihood of your child ever being willing to come to Christ.