

May 9, 2016

The Common Pitfalls of Evangelizing Children

Romans 8:15-16 (ESV), “**For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.**”

Assuring the child of salvation after becoming convinced that their child is saved is another common pitfall for parents. Many parents understandably seek to give that child verbal assurance of his or her salvation. The result of this is that many churches are filled with teenagers and adults whose hearts are devoid of real love for Christ, but who think they are genuine Christians because of something they did as children.

As Romans 8:15-16 make very clear the role of assurance is the role of the Holy Spirit - it is not the role of the parents. Too many people whose hearts are utterly cold to the things of the Lord believe they are going to heaven simply because they responded positively as children to an evangelistic invitation. Having “asked Jesus into their hearts,” they were then given a false assurance and taught never to examine themselves and never to entertain any doubt about their salvation. Parents should commend and rejoice in the evidence of real salvation in the lives of their children only when they know the child understands the gospel, believes it, and manifests the genuine evidence of true salvation – devotion to Christ, obedience to the Word, and love for others.

Rushing the ordinance of baptism for their child is the final pitfall for many parents. Many parents want to immediately baptize their child after he or she makes a profession of faith. Although Scripture does command us as believers to be baptized, Matthew 28:19 says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”, it is best not to rush into the ordinance in the case of a child. As was previously stated, it is extremely difficult to recognize genuine salvation in a child. Rather than rushing them into baptism after an initial profession, then, it is wiser to take the ongoing opportunity to interact with them and wait for more significant evidence of a lasting commitment. Even if a child can say enough in a testimony to make it reasonably clear that he or she understands and embraces the gospel, baptism should wait until they show evidence of regeneration that is independent of parental control.

I know of one church where the general practice is to wait until a child who has made a profession of faith has reached age twelve. Because baptism is seen as something clear and final, the primary concern for us as a church should be that when a younger child is baptized they tend to look to that experience as the proof of their salvation. Therefore, in the case of an unregenerate child who is baptized – which is sadly very common in the church at large – baptism actually does him or her a disservice. It is better to wait until the reality to which baptism testifies can be more easily discerned.

Tomorrow we will begin looking at the foundations of evangelizing children.