

INTRODUCTION

blesse; be bad, and He does not. Not only is this a faulty representation of the gospel, it is not the gospel at all! What a tragedy!

God in His grace and condescension loaded Scripture with stories, concrete illustrations of abstract truth. But we must use the Bible stories as God intended them to be used. He gave them to us for the same reason He gave us all of Scripture—that we might know what He, the only true God, is like, and that we might understand the salvation He has provided for His people through His Son. Bible stories illustrate Bible doctrines. We who work with children should be grateful for that and should use the Bible narratives to help our children understand the doctrines of our faith. We waste Bible stories when we only use them to moralize or to equip our children to win Bible trivia contests.

Is the church equipping its children to be the support and pillar of the truth in the next generation? Several years ago, I heard a radio broadcast featuring on-the-spot interviews with Christian authors and publishers at a large Christian convention. Interviewers repeatedly asked attendees two key questions: “What is justification?” and “What is the gospel?” Most of those interviewed proved deplorably incapable of giving a lucid, biblical response to these questions. Yet Christianity *is* the gospel. The central issue of our faith is that of sinners being justified before a holy God. These things are essential to an understanding of the Christian faith.

If those being interviewed had been taught the Westminster Shorter Catechism, they would have had this response ready: “Justification is the act of God’s free grace by which He pardons all our sins and declares us righteous in His sight. He does so only because He counts the righteousness of Christ as ours. Justification is received by faith alone.” How simple and yet how thorough! Is there any reason people must wait until they go to Bible college or seminary to learn such a simple definition, one so basic to our faith?

Today, we are often content with “God” words and with warm feelings about Him. In a society rife with faulty ideas of God, we fail to give a definition to the word when we use it. Eager to include and to think the best of everyone, we rejoice when we hear those “God” words, assuming the person using them is one of us. When we combine this failure to discriminate with our natural sympathies toward children, we are even quicker to assume children are Christians when, in reality, they have no idea at all what it is to be one.

TRAINING HEARTS  TEACHING MINDS

One summer, at a Christian camp for children from troubled homes, a counselor reported to me a conversation she had with a ten-year-old camper. “I asked him if he had ever asked Jesus into his heart and he said he did that when he was six,” she said. She went on to tell me that they were thumbing through his new Bible together when he saw a picture of the three crosses on Calvary. “What is that story about?” the boy asked, curiously. The result of the discussion with the child was comfort for the counselor, who was convinced that the boy was “saved” because of whatever he had done when he was six. Evidently, however, it never occurred to her that whatever “decision” children may have made, if they have absolutely no knowledge of the crucifixion of Christ, it is not safe to assume they are believers.

A PROPOSED SOLUTION

Those of us who care about passing on the baton of historic Christian truth must awaken to the importance of faithfully imparting its doctrines to our children. We cannot depend on haphazard, hit-or-miss Bible stories and memory verses, hoping that somehow our children will distill from them Christianity’s important teachings. Rather, we must provide careful, systematic instruction in doctrine. Children need a grid through which to sift all that they see and hear. We must provide this for our children while they are still young. Doctrine cannot wait until children are teens, because adolescents are making major life decisions. The theological framework on which to base those decisions, the biblical worldview, must already be in place.

The purpose of this book is to provide a tool for Christian parents and churches who take seriously this task of imparting doctrinal instruction to their children. Questions and answers come from *The Westminster Shorter Catechism in Modern English*, but the older version of the catechism may be used if preferred. Each question and answer of the catechism has six days’ worth of devotional readings for families to share together. The readings are simply written, with elementary and junior-high children in mind. They are brief, out of consideration for children’s short attention spans and for the busy schedules of contemporary families.

Each reading gives biblical support and simple explanations for

INTRODUCTION

the catechism answers. Every day for a week, the same question should be asked and the answer recited several times, followed by the reading provided. By the end of the week, the answer will be memorized. Prizes of some kind can be decided upon in advance, to be awarded after a certain number of questions and answers have been successfully learned. If one answer is memorized weekly, the entire catechism will be finished in two years. Because it contains such a wealth of information and because we remember best what we review repeatedly, I recommend taking children through the entire catechism more than once.

The apostle Paul called Timothy his “true child in the faith.” He instructed Timothy thoroughly and faithfully, then set him loose to carry on the ministry Paul himself had begun. This is what we as parents must do for our children. It is what we, the church, must do for the church that follows us, the church of the next generation. We must fulfill our responsibility now, so that we will be able to say with assurance, as Paul said to Timothy, “Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you” (2 Tim. 1:13–14).

