

2.1. Whom do we teach in our children’s programs?

Whenever we teach in a church-sponsored children’s or youth ministry, we are not teaching just one group of students, but really we are teaching four groups.

Teaching New Believers

New believers or recent converts are often present in our classes. These are children who have only recently become believers. They may be unbaptized or may be following a baptismal class, and are not yet church members, but they have received Jesus as their Savior, so they are real believers. They may not know much about the Bible or its teaching and are only beginning their Christian lives. These new believers need teaching that can give them assurance of salvation. They need teaching in the most elementary truths of the Christian faith—the basics. They need doctrinal lessons like who God is, who Jesus is, how we are saved, etc. They also need to understand the basic truths about baptism and becoming a member of the church.

Teaching the Unsaved or Those Who Have Not Yet Trusted Jesus

Those who have not yet received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord are unsaved. They are not yet believers. Usually some unsaved children are present in a church class for children or youth, so some teaching should be geared to their needs. They need to realize that they are sinners in need of the Savior. Good teaching for the unsaved helps to make them aware of their sin, and their unsatisfactory standing before God. It helps them understand that they cannot save themselves by good works or any other means, that only Jesus Christ can save them. It is necessary to invite these children to put their faith in Jesus. If some of them respond to the invitation, the teacher needs to be prepared to lead them to salvation in Christ. There is not a single aspect of teaching about the Christian life that can help the unsaved, because they do not yet have God’s Spirit living in them. Therefore all teaching should be geared to leading them to salvation.

Teaching Children Who Have Been Believers for Some Time

If the children’s program has been in existence for some time, the majority of the children will probably be believers who are fairly well established in the Christian faith. These may be children from Christian families who have grown up in the church. They have already received Christ as Savior, they know they are saved, they have been baptized and understand why, and they are members of the church. Some of them may know a lot of Bible stories and even Bible verses. The challenge with these children is to help them keep on growing in their Christian lives and keep on learning and practicing more of God’s Word while keeping teaching fresh. The same old Bible story presented in the same old way will not be sufficient. These children will become bored easily unless new insights are given and new challenges are set forth. They need to begin or reinforce lifelong habits of reading and memorizing God’s Word, of private and corporate prayer and worship. They need to know what specific things they should be doing to obey God, and what specific things they should be avoiding to keep out of sin. They should be taught how to share their faith with others and should be encouraged to try out various spiritual gifts and to serve others and the church. They should learn what attitudes please and displease God.

Teaching Children Who Come from Non-Bible-Centered Churches

Some children in our programs come from families who are members of churches that do not understand or believe the Bible as we do. I am not talking merely about children from other Protestant churches or other denominations or church fellowships. I am talking about children from churches that follow non-biblical practices. These children have a unique set of problems. Two things are especially problematic. First, their families may fear that we will lead their children away from the family’s church or faith, so they may cause problems for the children in many different ways. Second, even if the family does not make life difficult for them, the teaching the child has been or is receiving can cause problems for him. The child may perceive that the teaching you are giving is at odds with the teaching he has previously received. These two teachings—the Biblical teaching and the unbiblical—may be at war in his mind. He tries to reconcile them, and he cannot.

Another problem is that he might not really understand the teaching you are giving, or he may misinterpret it because he interprets new teaching in the light of the old teaching he has received. Many times cults or non-biblical religious groups use words that are the same as or similar to words we use. However, they give these words new or different meanings. When the child hears you use some biblical words, he may not understand them in the biblical sense, but in the sense in which his church has used them. In this case the child seems to be hearing, but he is not understanding the same meaning you are trying to present.

It will not help to tear down the child’s church or religious group. If possible, it is often best not even to mention his church. It is often better just to teach the Bible in a way that will help the children, and to be praying much for them and their families.

Children from this kind of background first of all need teaching for the unsaved, and afterward, teaching for new believers, with the exception of baptism and church membership. We can lead these children to salvation even if they are unable to participate in the baptism class, and even if they are not ready right away to become members of our church. We can go to their homes, make friends with their families, and teach them little by little. We must have great patience with these children. We must spoon feed them if necessary until they grow stronger, just as we would with a tiny baby. We should not discourage them from coming to our programs. We want to draw them in, not keep them out.

We should be careful not to baptize or give baptismal teaching to children whose families have not agreed to this. We can always, however, teach what the Bible says about baptism without pressing the issue. Consider your teaching a slow germinating seed that will take much time to grow. We can also try talking to the parents. If you can lead the parents to Christ and begin helping them grow in their faith, you may be able to help the parents understand the truths of baptism.

The end we are seeking, whenever possible, is to draw the family gently into a church that believes and follows the Bible. You cannot rest easily leaving your child in a house where you know they will give him poison! You must try hard to get him out of that house. However, you must also be very wise in the way you seek to do that. If you do not act wisely, soon the child may be forbidden to come to the program or even to have any contact with you or your church. Then you will have no way to rescue him. So go slowly, with love, concern, and much prayer. Be courteous and above all, patient. If a separation does not occur at once, don’t give up hope. Gently, consistently, keep on teaching and helping the child and his family. Through persistence and much prayer, things can change.

Deciding What Teaching Is Important for Your Class

Every teacher has a unique class, so every teacher must decide what teaching is important for his class. A good place to begin is to try to decide how many of the children are really saved. If the teacher is uncertain, he may begin with a short series of one to three lessons on salvation, followed by an invitation to receive Christ. If an invitation has never been given before, it is not uncommon for large groups of children or even the whole class to respond to the Gospel and to receive the Lord as Savior. After that, the teacher obviously needs to concentrate on teaching the new believers, but he could still mention the Gospel briefly, if not in the lesson, then at the time of the invitation. From time to time, maybe on special days like Christmas and Easter, an entire Gospel lesson could again be presented to assure that newcomers and visitors have a chance to receive Christ, too.

The teacher should gear most of his teaching to the largest group of students. If most of his students are old-time believers, he should gear his teaching to them but also offer some teaching for other groups. If most of his students are new converts, he should gear his teaching to new converts, but also offer some help to the unsaved and to those who have been Christians for some time. All teachers should be aware of any children from non-biblical churches, and be ready to help them after class or in their homes.

LET’S PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Write here the names of the children in your class who you believe may be unsaved. Why do you think they are not yet saved? What is needed for them to be saved? Begin to pray regularly for their salvation.

Name of child	What may hinder him/her from being saved?
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Think about each unsaved child. What specific teaching could help him or her? Write down some ideas here:

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Write here the names of the children in your class who are from non-biblical churches. Write whether each child is unsaved or a new believer. I have done one for you as an example.



Name of child	Member of what church or religion?	Unsaved or New Believer?
James Peter Muntati	Church Try Real Hard	Unsaved

LET’S REVIEW

What four groups of students may be in every class? Briefly explain what each group is.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

QUIZ

- T or F If a child has not yet received Jesus as Savior, we should teach him to pray every day.
- T or F If a child is a member of a non-biblical church, we should make sure to tell him all the bad things we know about his church.
- T or F If a child is a member of a non-biblical church, he may be either saved or unsaved.
- T or F The only important teaching to tell children to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

