

# HOW OUR CHILDREN COME TO FAITH

by Stephen Smallman

**TO THE GROUP LEADER:** This resource is designed to help you lead others to better understand one of the “Basics of the Faith” booklets published by P&R. The numbers in brackets indicate the page number in the booklet. Below each question is an answer based on what the author presents, or advice on how to discuss the question. You have the freedom to adapt the questions to best fit your group.

A good teaching technique is to distribute the questions to the group and have them write down how they would answer BEFORE reading the booklet. After reading, members can refine their answers based on their reading. As a group, members can discuss their views to affirm or modify what they wrote.

Here is one of the most important questions most Christians (and even denominations) have to answer: How do you view the spiritual condition of your children and how will that determine how you raise them?

1. Describe your upbringing and family. What kind of spiritual training did you get. What difference did it make?
2. A covenant relationship requires two parties working in agreement. Our part is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. But what is HIS part of the agreement? And, what is HIS commitment to our children? (5-8)  
See how the group answered. The answer should become clearer as you get further into the study.
3. At this point the question must be asked: What is YOUR commitment to the spiritual upbringing of your child(ren)? How much time and effort are you willing to put into their spiritual education?
4. Jesus said about our children, “the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” (Matt.19:15) How, then, should you be praying for your children? (8-11)  
Pray like this: “Yes, Lord, I believe that promise, and I claim it for my child(ren).” We should be discipling them as early as their baptism.
5. What should follow, or accompany, these prayers? (10)  
There should be the public expression of our commitment to our children, and this is expressed by baptism. At this point the parents publicly acknowledge they are committing their child to Christ. They are also asking for the help of the church in raising their child to follow Christ.
6. How do you understand God’s part of the covenant after reading Genesis 17:7 and Deuteronomy 7:8-9? (11-13)  
God’s covenant was never made just to us. His promises were for all generations, to all who would love Him and walk in His ways.
7. Read Genesis 17:4. Wasn’t this covenant made only to the nation of Israel?  
NO! It was never intended for Israel only. It says “many nations” would come from Abraham, not just Israel. This was the major mistake of the Jews. Israel was to be a light to the nations that all should come and share in the great things God was doing for His people. Most of Israel failed to live under that covenant commitment, but there was always the remnant of true believers who did. These were the true Israel.

8. Where should we rest our confidence when it comes to raising our children in the Lord? (13-15)  
Our confidence should rest solely in the covenant promises of God! He has bound Himself to His covenant and He cannot break His promise.
9. Did circumcision save Abraham's son Isaac? (17-19)  
Make sure you give the group an emphatic answer: NO! Abraham was saved for 25 years before he was circumcised. Go over this section with great care. If they miss what is said here, they will not understand the crucial points of salvation. We don't want anyone to think baptism saves anyone. These are God's signs for us to know He will keep His promises to us and to our children.
10. What is the difference between regeneration and conversion? (17-19)  
Be sure the group understands the difference between these two important parts of the salvation picture. Understanding this will go a long way to their understanding the next section of the study.
11. Do our covenant children need to make a separate "profession of faith" sometime after they reach a certain age? (20-23)  
This might be the most difficult part of the study to get across. Think of it this way: In the OT, parents were told to bring up their children to know the Lord. Children were born Israelites, part of God's covenant people. If they always believed in God and were required to later make a profession of faith, they would have had to stop being part of Israel to then become part of Israel. Nowhere is this taught. It was assumed a child raised to believe God was their Father would always believe this.
12. When should your child confess, or affirm, his or her faith? (24-25)  
Historically, the church's practice was to require a time when a young person would be examined. This was called Confirmation. At this point, each candidate would be given the chance to either affirm what he had been taught to believe, or deny it and walk away from the faith. Affirming meant he was no longer accepting the faith of his parents based upon what he was taught, but on the basis he fully believed it for himself.

After going through these questions, read the text and fill in the answers in preparation for class, noting other questions you might have. [By the way, if you do have any other questions about what you read, write them down here so you remember them at class time.]

## APPLICATION

**Families** – What are you doing to bring up your child(ren) to know the Lord, other than just Sunday School (as important as that is)? If you need help with this, ask the elders of your church.

**Church** – Do you have a practice of helping parents know how to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? If not, after reading this material, make a plan, or you could possibly lose these children.

## For Further Study

*Understanding the Faith*. Phillipsburg, Stephen Smallman. NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001.  
*Beginnings: Understanding How We Experience the New Birth*, Stephen Smallman. P&R, 2015.

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