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Are Our Children Called?

Doctrinal Paper

Approved by the Council of Elders
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All scriptures are quoted from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version* (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee) unless otherwise noted.

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Are the children of members of God's Church called now?

The answer to this question affects how parents view their children, as well as the expectations they can have of their children. No less important, the answer also influences how children perceive themselves and the self-expectations they will develop. Within the Church's modern history at least, opinions on this issue have ranged widely. Some feel the youth are indeed called by virtue of association with and training in the ways of God. Others, however, question the use of the term "called," wondering if it implies that youth who do not respond to God now may be forfeiting their only opportunity to come to Him. Additionally, many members with grown children who did not stay in the Church feel guilty, wondering if with better training their children would have remained faithful. Others believe parents are neutral in this matter and that it is God's choice alone whether to call the children.

When adults don't know whether our children are called now, their conversations will reflect this with phrases such as, "I don't know whether God will call my child or not" and "Since our children are not called now, we can't expect too much out of them." When children hear these kinds of statements, they often feel it doesn't matter which way they choose.

A biblically-based answer to this question is needed in order to know the responsibilities, expectations and type of approach toward children God wants parents and the Church to have.

Placing This Question in its Larger Context

It is important to place this question first within the context of God's overall plan for humanity.

When God created the first humans, He offered them access to the Tree of Life. This tree symbolized having access to God's Holy Spirit and potentially receiving eternal life (Genesis 3:22, Revelation 22:14). Other scriptures reveal that the Holy Spirit imparts the mind of God and is concurrently the power and essence of God and "earnest" (or down-payment) of eternal life (2 Timothy 1:7, 2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:13, 14). Instead of choosing this tree, our first parents chose the symbol of human self-determination, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and were subsequently driven from the Garden of Eden. God restricted Adam, Eve and their offspring from any further access to the Tree of Life (Genesis 2-3).

In His plan to eventually replace Satan's rule over the earth with His own government, God has been "calling" and "choosing" selected individuals, and training them for leadership in His future Kingdom. Those who are given His Spirit, and who remain faithful to Him, will receive eternal, spirit life at the return of Jesus Christ.

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What it Means to be “Called”

Romans 8:30 states, “Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified” (all scripture quotations are from the New King James Version and emphasis is ours throughout).

The Greek word here translated “called” is *kaleo*, “derived from the root kal--, whence Eng. ‘call’ and ‘clamor’ . . . is used (a) with a personal object, ‘to call anyone, invite, summon,’ e. g., (Matt. 20:8; 25:14); it is used particularly of the divine call to partake of the blessings of redemption, e. g., (Rom. 8:30; 1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Thes. 2:12; Heb. 9:15.)”¹

Here Paul describes the process or sequence of events God uses to bring people to eternal life. God determined and planned from the beginning to call people to become “conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29). The final step, yet to come, is to become glorified, as Christ is. Verse 30 does not imply that everyone who is called becomes justified and glorified. Rather, Paul was explaining the sequential steps in the salvation process—being called by God precedes becoming justified.

Peter cautioned the saints to “make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10). Here the word “calling” comes from a similar Greek word, *klesis*, meaning “‘a calling,’ [it] is always used in the NT of that ‘calling’-- the origin, nature and destiny of which are heavenly (the idea of invitation being implied); it is used especially of God’s invitation to man to accept the benefits of salvation)”² While this definition seems to imply a false concept of “going to heaven,” it still recognizes that this calling is heavenly, that is, from God. “Election” comes from *ekloge* meaning “‘a picking out, selection’ (Eng., ‘eclogue’), then, ‘that which is chosen.’”³

Jesus stated in the parable of the wedding Feast, “. . . many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14). Here the word is *kletos* and means “‘called, invited’ . . . used, (a) ‘of the call of the gospel,’ (Matt. 20:16; 22:14)”⁴. “Chosen” comes from *eklektos*: “lit. signifies ‘picked out, chosen’ (ek, ‘from,’ lego, ‘to gather, pick out’), and is used of . . . (c) believers (Jews or Gentiles).”⁵ *Eklektos* is used 23 times in the New Testament. The King James Version translates it “elect” 16 times and “chosen” 7 times.

Christ used the words “called” and “invited” nearly interchangeably in this parable (verses 1-14) about those summoned to a wedding. The concept of invitation is particularly important

¹ W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Fleming H. Revell, 1981), s.v. “Call, Called, Calling.”

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, s.v. “Elect, Elected, Election.”

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, s.v. “Choice, Chosen, Chosen.”

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because it carries the notion that the invitees are welcomed and their presence is desired, but that they have a choice in how they will reply. God calls—invites, if you will—many people; each one's response determines whether he becomes chosen, part of the elect. The parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23) illustrates the differing reactions among the many called. Some do not give God's truth an opportunity to take root, and quickly let go of it. Others start responding but when facing opposition quickly give up. Others, fruitful at first, later make poor choices and become unfruitful. Some, though, bear good fruit that endures to the end.

In John 6:44 Christ said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (see also verse 65). The Greek word for “draws,” *helkuo*, refers to “dragging, pulling or attracting.”⁶ God the Father is responsible for initiating the actions in one's life that will ultimately bring him to follow Christ. Without God's direct and miraculous intervention, no one can pursue His truth and Kingdom. But notice again, Christ did not say that everyone whom the Father draws chooses to come to Him.

Christ also showed that a difference exists between the time when God's Spirit is “with” one, and the time when it is “in” one. In John 14:15-17, Christ addressed the disciples before His crucifixion, prior to the giving of His Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Referring to that time when God's Spirit would (future tense) come and be in them, He said, “. . . but you know [it], for [it] dwells with you and will be in you.”

God was affecting their lives through the influence of His Spirit, but they had not yet received it as an indwelling presence. A few weeks later, as Acts 2 shows, they learned what it meant to be imbued with the Holy Spirit, and saw its association with baptism.

Calling necessarily precedes baptism, and for those who are called, the Holy Spirit will be working with them. However, being called does not equate to actually receiving the Holy Spirit. That takes place after baptism with the laying on of hands. Before a person is baptized he must repent, exercise faith in the sacrifice of Christ for the remission of sins and willingly choose to follow God. From these passages, we conclude that being called is an invitation that does not necessarily involve a positive response to the invitation. Those who respond to God's calling are described in another way.

What it Means to be “Chosen”

The Matthew 22:1-14 wedding parable prefigures Christ's return, the resurrection of the elect, and their subsequent marriage to Christ. He beckons “the called,” giving them access to this glorious opportunity, but most of them reject the invitation. God determines whom He will call,

⁶ *Ibid.*, s.v. “Draw.”

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then those called must decide whether and when to accept that invitation. Those who repent and live by faith become “chosen.” *God calls whom He will, but humans decide how they will respond.*

Scriptures indicate that people are considered chosen at the time God imparts His Holy Spirit into them. Peter, speaking of God's spirit-filled children who comprise the Church of God, described them as “. . . a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people. . . .” (1 Peter 2:9). Romans 8:11, 16-17, 22-23 also show that only a person who has the Spirit of God abiding within him, is a literal child of God's. Such an individual is God's chosen—His own child. A person whose name is written into the “Book of Life” (Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 13:8) would certainly be considered by God to be chosen.

Christ reveals in Revelation 17:14 that those saints who will rule with him are “called” and “chosen” *and* “faithful.” Just as people can choose to follow God, they can also choose to change their minds, and even a chosen person is not unconditionally guaranteed to be in the first resurrection. Many scriptural warnings admonish the elect, those who have responded to God's calling, not to throw away their extraordinary chosen status and promised salvation.

Scripture does not define how many God has called, but compared to those chosen, the number is “many.” The preceding verses show the difference between being called and being chosen. This distinction should be clearly noted in determining whether or how God calls children.

Can a Child Be Called?

Children can, and should, have a certain knowledge and grasp of spiritual issues. Scriptural evidence leaves no doubt that a child can have a relationship with God. Throughout the ages many have done so.

For example, “. . . Samuel ministered before the LORD, even as a child . . .” (1 Samuel 2:18) and “the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favor both with the LORD and men” (v. 26). Josiah followed God from the time he began his reign over Judah at the age of eight, and as a teenager, “. . . in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David” (2 Chronicles 34:3).

The evangelist Timothy is an excellent example of a child growing up instructed in God's way of life. Paul told him to “continue in the things which you have learned” and further remarked “that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures” (2 Timothy 3:14-15). It was his mother who taught him, as her mother had taught her— “. . .when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also” (2 Timothy 1:5). Eunice could not have known, in Timothy's

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childhood, that he would become a minister of God, but she obviously taught him with the expectation he would learn, understand and practice God's truth.

Other scriptures amply illustrate that young people can understand spiritual concepts. The Proverbs were written, "To give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion" (Proverbs 1:4). The father's goal in teaching his son the laws of God is to help the son internalize and never forget them (Proverbs 3:1-3). David wrote, "Come you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD" (Psalm 34:11).

Should one be surprised that God would be involved in the spiritual lives of children? Not at all. Indeed, through observing His actions throughout the Old Testament, particularly with the nation of Israel, one sees the value and importance He places on young people.

Parallels and Lesson from the Nation-Family of Israel

When God brought Israel out of Egypt, to become His own special people, they were to learn of Him, walk with Him, and represent Him to other nations. He said, ". . . if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:4-6).

The Old Covenant God made with Israel did not include the promise of the Holy Spirit, as the New Covenant does today. But even without the indwelling of His Spirit in most people, God had spiritual expectations of the parents and children. Note the following scriptures:

"And teach them diligently to your children and your grandchildren. . . and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children" (Deuteronomy 4:9-10).

". . . that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson. . . ." (Deuteronomy 6:2).

"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

"When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the LORD our God has commanded you?' then you shall say to your son: 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a

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mighty hand; and the LORD showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household. Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us” (Deuteronomy 6:20-25).

“. . . I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants shall live” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

God desired all parents within His special, called-out nation of Israel to diligently teach their children His truths and way. Furthermore, He expected those children would live that godly way, and would in turn teach the next generation the same truths. This generation-to-generation process was a vital key in perpetuating the promises of the Old Covenant.

God made a covenant with Abraham saying, “‘And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.’ And God said to Abraham: ‘As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations’” (Genesis 17:7-9).

Interestingly, of all the areas of Abraham’s obedience, God stressed one particular issue: “‘For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD” (Genesis 18:19). God looked not only upon Abraham, but included his children with an expectation that Abraham would pass on to them the knowledge and practice of His ways.

Abraham, “the father of us all” (Romans 4:16), set a precedent for both physical Israel and its spiritual counterpart today—the New Testament Church, which is called “a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9) and the “Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16). Galatians 3:29 adds, “‘And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.’”

Today the Church is a spiritual nation, a family paralleling the original Israel God called in the Old Testament. Are God’s expectations for the parents and children in the Church any less than it was for ancient Israel?

The apostle Peter confirmed this fundamental principle when he declared at the end of his powerful sermon on the Day of Pentecost:

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“...Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38-39).

The Impact of Acts 2:38-39

In this tremendously important statement, God confirmed His intent to work spiritually with three groups of people:

- *you*—specifically, those repentant Jews Peter was addressing, of whom about 3,000 were baptized that day.
- *and to your children*—their descendants who, even though they did not have the spiritual maturity for the weighty commitment of baptism that day, had the same promise given to them.
- *and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call*— Of primary importance at the time, this meant God would call the Gentiles, who were previously “afar off” (Ephesians 2:13, 17).

God’s promise to the second category, “your children”—the offspring of the converted— is a special blessing. Under the Old Covenant, the children were included from its inception (Genesis 17:7). They were also present when the Old Covenant was renewed (Deuteronomy 29:10-13; Joshua 8:35). They were part of religious assemblies (Joel 2:16) and received God’s promises along with the adults (Isaiah 54:13; Jeremiah 31:34).

Since the New Testament Church began primarily with Jews who understood their blessings through the Old Covenant, a logical question with the issuance of new promises under a New Covenant would have been – “What about our children?”

Matthew Henry makes some interesting comments to this perspective: “(3.) ‘your children shall still have, as they have had, an interest in the covenant, and a title to the external seal of it. Come over to Christ, to receive those inestimable benefits; for the promise of the remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, is to you and to your children,’ v. 39. It was very express. (Isa. 44:3): I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed. And (Isa. 59:21), My Spirit and my word shall not depart from thy seed, and thy seed's seed. When God took Abraham into covenant, he said, I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed (Gen. 17:7); and, accordingly, every Israelite had his son circumcised at eight days old. Now it is proper for an Israelite, when he is by baptism to come into a new dispensation of this covenant, to ask, ‘What must be done with my children? Must they be thrown out, or taken in with me?’ ‘Taken in’ (says Peter) "by all means; for the promise, that great promise

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of God's being to you a God, is as much to you and to your children now as ever it was"(Matthew Henry's Commentary, Acts 2:37-41).

The children Peter referred to in Acts 2:39 are in a unique category. As Paul later wrote, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy" (1 Corinthians 7:14).

The word sanctification ". . . is used of (a) separation to God."⁷ Something, or someone, "sanctified" is set apart in a separate category for a particular use. "Holy" comes from *hagios* which ". . . fundamentally signifies 'separated' (among the Greeks, dedicated to the gods), and hence, in Scripture in its moral and spiritual significance, separated from sin and therefore consecrated to God, sacred."⁸

In families where either a father or mother is a believer, by virtue of their being called and chosen God views both their unbelieving mate and children in a very special way. This verse does not necessarily say that unbelieving mates are called by God (especially in light of the term "unbelieving"), but they are in an unusually blessed position—they live with a converted person and are thus exposed in a very close and personal manner to God's way of life.

While the believer's conduct may be a powerful example for the unbelieving mate (even "without word" [1 Peter 3:1-2]), he or she can usually go further than just setting an example with the children, actively teaching them God's way and directly developing their understanding and relationship with Him. Without the influence of a converted parent, children in that household would be no different than others who in ignorance disobey God and lead spiritually "unclean" lives. But because of the parent's conversion and relationship with God, such children are not as others. They are in a special category—though not baptized, they are part of the "holy nation," the Church. Though they are not converted, they do have a special access to the knowledge of the way of God.

In the process of maturing physically, emotionally and spiritually, if and when they become personally convicted of God's way of life, and accept and respond to their calling, they too can receive the Holy Spirit as promised. Personal repentance must be deeply experienced, the lifelong commitment must be well-understood, and the responsibilities of an "ambassador for Christ" must be accepted with spiritual gravity and maturity. Competent counseling from a variety of spiritually-wise people—ministers, parents, and experienced members, for example—can greatly aid a young adult's development toward baptism.

⁷ Ibid., s.v. "Sanctification, Sanctify."

⁸ Ibid., s.v. "Holiness, Holy, Holily."

Factors Affecting the Outcome

A called person is invited to understand God's way, accept His authority in his/her life, surrender to Him, be baptized, partake of the Holy Spirit, prepare for His coming Kingdom, and inherit immortality at the first resurrection. However, the way in which children growing up in the Church are called will differ from what most adults experience. A child's calling is gradual and becomes more personal as he grows and matures. This is often manifested in the many steps of decision-making that increase as the child matures to a young adult. An adult's calling is likely to be more abrupt or dramatic (like the Apostle Paul's), and entered from a more worldly-oriented perspective.

Experience shows that, as with all people called, some young people who grow up in the Church relate to and respond favorably to God's way of life, and some do not. When should one consider that a child has an invitation to pursue God's truth and Holy Spirit? Does it only apply to the biological child of a converted member? What about a step-child, foster child, grandchild, or niece? What about the older teenager of a newly converted parent? What about the grown children of a recently converted parent? What about a young teenager whose parents have turned from the truth?

The Bible does not specifically address each of these situations, but does give a guiding principle to apply. Once more, it is found in revisiting the fundamental lesson of the Tree of Life. Adam and Eve, invited to partake of the tree representing God's Spirit and the road to eternal life, chose instead to take from the forbidden tree. Nevertheless, they had *exposure* to the Tree of Life; it was in full view of them and they had access to it.

Similarly, when God calls people, they are invited to partake of His Spirit, the spiritual Tree of Life. Their degree of exposure to this Tree of Life is critical, especially for a young person, for their decision-making process.

Numerous factors determine the type and degree of positive exposure to God's way, and work together to affect the eventual response of a young person to that invitation. These influences include, but are not limited to:

- Age—for example, an older child about to leave home perhaps will not have much exposure to the truth if a parent is called at that time in his life
- Influence of friends and peers
- Influence of popular culture (e.g., television, movies, music)
- Personality, aptitudes, interests
- Temperament

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- Example of parent(s)
- Example of other family members
- Influence of the congregation—member and leadership examples, Sabbath services, church activities

Amount and Quality of Instruction From Parent(s)

The greatest deterring factor, of course, is Satan the Devil and his societal structure. As he did with Adam and Eve, he works mightily to persuade each person to reject God's bidding. Satan craftily aims his efforts at manipulating the negative sides of all these influencing factors. The parental or guardian role is extremely important for children, because those filling this role have the opportunity and responsibility to design a home environment that gives children maximum understanding of the way of God and protection from the influence of Satan's world.

For example, consider a child who grows up in a home where both parents are members of God's Church, but are unable to attend church services or fellowship with brethren. Furthermore, the parents are seldom seen studying the Bible or praying and give little religious instruction in the home. How much is set before this child's eyes that will help him choose to respond to God's calling?

On the other hand, consider parents who become converted when their child is very young. They proceed to teach this child God's truths with a positive, encouraging approach, conduct regular in-home Bible study and prayer, frequently discuss His plan and the wonderful blessings available both now and later in His Kingdom. They also attend weekly Sabbath services in a supportive, nurturing congregation. This child has a much greater opportunity to personally relate to and clearly understand the benefits and blessings God offers.

Without question family and church life profoundly influence children as they mature and make their decisions about whether or not they will follow God. For this reason, God speaks plainly about parental duty.

The Parents' Responsibility

The greatest positive factor in children's lives should be the parents. Fathers and mothers can exert a far more profound influence in their child's upbringing than any other factor. Sadly, all too many parents relinquish their God-given role to other persons, or influences, which bring about negative results.

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Proverbs 22:6 instructs parents to “Train up a child in the way he should go.” This straightforward scriptural instruction leaves little room to wonder what God desires and expects. He clearly urges them to teach their children His way, expecting they will follow it. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (Electronic Database Copyright 1996 by BibleSoft [article “Train; Trained”]), says of this passage: “‘Train up a child’ means more than to teach, and includes everything that pertains to the proper development of the child, especially in its moral and spiritual nature.”

Notice Psalm 78:3-7: “Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, And not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments; . . .”

Paul added, “. . . do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

The Church also bears certain responsibilities for spiritual child development. When Christ emphasized to Peter three times that he must take care of the people (John 21:15-17), twice He said to feed, or tend, “my sheep,” while once saying, “feed my lambs.” Interestingly, one commentary states, “It is much more according to usage to understand by the ‘lambs’ *young and tender* disciples, whether in age or Christian standing (Isaiah. 40:11; 1 John 2:12, 13), and by the ‘sheep’ the more *mature*.”⁹

Jesus commissioned the Church to make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20). What more fertile ground exists for making disciples than that of our youth who have already been called by God? The entire Church must be involved in this work.

When the Calling is not Pursued

What about children who choose not to respond to God’s calling? Are they headed to the Lake of Fire? Can they pursue God at a later time?

Those who do not respond to God’s calling now have not necessarily forfeited their only opportunity to receive eternal life. Only God knows the heart or mind of each individual and when

⁹ Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset and David Brown, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1961).

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each person has had sufficient exposure to and understanding of His way of life. Since God does not treat people unfairly (Romans 2:11, Ephesians 6:9, Colossians 3:25, 1 Peter 1:17), those He deems to have not received an appropriate opportunity for salvation now will assuredly receive one later. Jesus Christ is the One who will perfectly decide such matters (John 5:22).

We do know this: receiving the Holy Spirit requires repentance, which presupposes knowledge of and obedience to God's law (Acts 5:32) and leads to an intensely deep, personal relationship with God. If one has received the Holy Spirit, and then rejects God, he is indeed in danger of the Lake of Fire. But if one has not yet sufficiently understood God's expectations so as to make an informed decision, God can and will continue to work with him.

God's calling is not merely a one-time event, but a process! It involves an ongoing interaction between a loving Father and His children.

Although it is highly ironic, sometimes temporarily rejecting God's calling lays the groundwork for accepting it later. Eventually, those who depart from God's way will walk into trouble, will experience the spiritual emptiness of the world, and will be scarred by sins that could have been avoided; but this does not mean their opportunity for salvation is lost. Some truly do not comprehend the value of God's way and the trials of life serve to make them more aware, receptive and responsive. Experience can be at times an unkind, but effective, teacher, and its lessons sometimes create the maturity necessary for people to sincerely repent, return to God, and renew and deepen the relationship with Him that they might have had when younger. The parable of the Prodigal Son is certainly an example of this.

So, if a young person decides not to accept his calling, can he pursue it at a later time? Life has shown this very thing often happens as youth temporarily leave God's way, only to repent and embrace it at another time. In fact, most people God calls, no matter what their age, go through some form of resistance to that calling. How many baptized adults, at some point in the process of coming to full repentance, delayed responding to God's call, for whatever reasons?

While we should never encourage youth to leave God in order to follow the prodigal son route—indeed, it is a tragic choice because of the inevitable penalties associated with breaking God's law—we must also recognize that some people do follow this unwise path.

God's commitment is this: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). God works patiently with people—after all, they are His children, too—and He will give everyone ample time to respond.

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Conclusion and Implications

Are the children of members of God's Church "called" now? With the understanding that being "called" means being invited by God, the answer is "Yes!"

Whether those children eventually choose to respond to this calling depends upon many factors, including the quality and degree of exposure to God's truth via family and congregational influences. If they do not respond immediately, it does not necessarily preclude them from future opportunity—either later in this age or in the age to come. God works with all people in the most appropriate way and at the optimal time to bring them into His Family.

A converted parent really has but one course of action. He or she must follow Abraham's example of teaching his children God's truth, with the expectation that they will understand God's way of life and choose it as their own.

Parents and all members of the Church must view children as genuine, respected participants of the congregation, hoping and expecting that they will become baptized fellow-members. The biblical perspective is always to encourage people to answer God's calling, as opposed to offering loopholes legitimizing no response. Implying that it is equally valid for a child not to respond to God now is a serious mistake. Just as Abraham "commanded" his children, God urged ancient Israel to respond to Him for their own good. He said, "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;" (Deuteronomy 30:19). Because God's calling represents the best life available, children should be kept well aware of God's special invitation to them now.

Children are told to "obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1). Both parents and the Church need to do the right thing by strongly encouraging our youth to value and walk through the magnificent open door God has given them.

God revealed through the prophet Malachi that, "He seeks godly offspring" (Malachi 2:15). This is our children's special heritage and identity. This is God's desire and vision for our youth as He calls to them, as He extends the marvelous invitation to partake of the Tree of Life—eternally serving in the Kingdom of God!