

# AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY (OR CONSENT OR REASON)

---

Age of Accountability (AOA) - also known as Age of Consent or Age of Reason - is a false doctrine which states that children who die *automatically* go to Heaven - simply because they are “children.” Unlike false teachings deliberately crafted for evil deception and profit, AOA is somewhat well-intentioned but nevertheless misguided (the same mindset disavows [Eternal Security](#)).

Apparently, a perceived need to resolve the theological difficulties surrounding the eternal disposition of children who die launched an effort to satisfy that need. Unfortunately, an improper qualification encumbered that effort: that the final resolution of a supernatural, spiritual truth must meet a natural, human desire; that an unknowable mystery (Dt 29:29) should be forced into the realm of human understanding. Therefore, rather than inquiring of Scripture in search of a solution rooted in truth, a predetermined solution rooted in human sentiment was presented to Scripture in a quest for justification.

This predisposition biased the effort and dictated the terms of the result; that first of all, a solution *must* be found - and second, that it must satisfy the limits of human knowledge, reason and logic. Instead of examining Scripture to discover *if* it provided an answer and, if so, determining and accepting whatever it was, a predetermined outcome was forced upon Scripture. As always, Scriptural “support” was then conveniently “found.” And, in turn, this “support” provided sufficient cover to elevate the desired resolution to dogmatic truth (2Ti 4:3).

(Whenever a man-originated dilemma triggers a need for Scriptural justification, man is always able to satisfy that need. That is why even homosexuals find it reasonable to appeal to Scripture for justification of their sinful lifestyle - Rom 12:10; 1Th 4:9-10; 1Pe 1:22; 3:8; 4:8; Jn 13:34-35; 15:17; 1Jn 3:11; 4:7, 11-12.)

The notion that children who die are not *necessarily* granted entrance to Heaven may not sit well, but Scripture cannot be adjusted, denied or abandoned in order to assuage unsettled feelings. Actually, the adjustment, denial or abandonment of Scriptural truth, especially when coupled with the invention of replacement truth, ought to cause far more fear and trembling than the “trauma” of accepting even the most “difficult” truths presented in Scripture (Rev 22:18-19; Pr 30:6; Ecc 12:11-12a; Dt 4:2; 12:32).

AOA attempts to overwrite God's Word by imposing human inclination upon it, hoping to force God to conform to the feelings and desires of man. But man has no standing to establish theological doctrine. He has neither the authority nor the power to proclaim the criteria by which God must grant Heavenly admission to "children" who die. God's [Plan of Salvation](#) is revealed in Scripture. It is not subject to change - and there is and can be no other plan.

The emotional sentiment and human reasoning behind all of this are certainly understandable, but allowing those to lead to the creation of AOA is not. The attempt to augment or replace God's program of atonement and reconciliation with some mysterious, gnostic, new-and-improved version offering more favorable terms for "children" forces the concoction of false doctrine. Yet, that is precisely what has been done. The solution is declared; the matter is closed.

And now, this comforting man-made doctrine is openly circulated and promoted because human reason and logic falsely conclude it just *has* to be true - because human emotion desperately *wants* it to be true. Operating within human limitations is, of course, all that man can do - and stretching to reach his boundaries is commendable. But the search for answers must be redirected when Scriptural truths must be abandoned, violated or replaced. Obviously, any effort which forces a predetermined conclusion is wasted and wrong. However, when a "truth" is desired badly enough, folks can become blinded as they employ the models of Rom 1:18 and Acts 7:57 to suppress their nagging consciences. God provides and intends this mechanism for our protection.

In any case, the root cause of all this is searching for truth from man's viewpoint rather than simply receiving truth at God's word. At times, this allows flawed or limited human reasoning, however logical it may seem, to be posited in opposition to Scripture. Such efforts may be driven by a stubborn adherence to a desired creed, an attempt to resolve a mystery of God in violation of Dt 29:29, an unrelenting demand of the human intellect to understand the unknowable, the construction of doctrine in reverse - from the desires, observations and experiences of man (and their analysis from man's view) backward to a resolution which satisfies the observer/participant rather than the Inventor/Choreographer - and more. AOA is a poster-child example of violating the rules in order to resolve, to *his* satisfaction, a quandary of man.

Still, AOA supporters do draw upon Scripture to justify their view (some of their offerings are examined below.) However, accurate Scriptural understanding requires presented truths to be analyzed within their presented contexts. One frequent, glaring example of violating this principle is the misuse of the parable

of the prodigal son in Lk 15 to “prove” that salvation is the result of man’s choice - and that it can be lost and regained.

That chapter, however, is clearly devoted to the question raised in its first two verses: Why was Jesus “wasting” his time with sinners? It does not contend or even hint that the son’s going away and squandering of life was a losing of his salvation. Rather, it is simply an example of the normal attitude and goings-on in the life of a pre-salvation sinner. The son’s choice to return is not presented as a prerequisite to salvation (or the regaining of it after its hypothetical loss). It is merely a logical human response to the circumstances of the narrative, the context of which holds obviously-different intentions. The welcoming of the son by his father upon his return contains no element of teaching that it represents a regaining of salvation - it simply illustrates how our perfect Father in Heaven enthusiastically welcomes an unsaved one who likewise truly repents.

In summary, that passage is not in any way dealing with man’s choice in salvation or his loss and regaining of it. Rather, it demonstrates the breadth and faithfulness of God’s compassionate love, mercy and forgiveness toward those who recognize and properly assess their sin, and are then moved to sincerely repent. Jesus’ parable is simply calling sinners to repentance while revealing that a warm, loving, enthusiastic welcome awaits them.

Similarly, six areas of Scripture most often offered to justify AOA are Num 14:29, 2Sa 12:23, Jam 4:17, Mt 18:1-14, Mt 19:13-14 and 1Jn 2:12. However, none of these passages remotely mentions, proposes or supports, let alone *teaches* anything whatsoever about “Age of Accountability” (developed further on). There is no suggestion or teaching of such a doctrine *anywhere* in Scripture, and the contextual concept itself is nowhere found. That is, the *issue* is understandably raised in the mind of man (even, perhaps, as a result of his very examination of God’s Word), but the *doctrine* is not found in Scripture.

Thus, when proponents fail in their attempts to sell AOA on the basis of Scriptural support, they resort to an oblique assertion that God’s grace provides the guarantee of salvation for children who die. But that is simply a desperately-fabricated facet of God’s grace void of Scriptural sense or support. It is, perhaps, an attempt to present a more difficult argument to rebut; that although AOA’s Scripture claims may be easily refuted and rejected, no one dare argue against God’s grace - especially when the eternal salvation of children is at stake. As is the case in the arena of politics and other venues, anything is easier to sell when it is attached to some benefit which will accrue to “children” - because anyone who refuses to buy whatever is being sold risks being characterized as a horrible person who doesn’t care about children.

Ironically, even the Roman Catholic church - a major player in the invented-doctrine market - cannot abide AOA's man-made version of God's grace. So they save children from Hell with their own self-made doctrine known as "Limbo." This "Limbo" teaching has recently undergone some revision (since the RCC created it and owns it, they can change it whenever they want).

"Limbo" had itself been in limbo for quite some time, as the church had held no official position since Augustine's view (below) had been abandoned. However, according to a [Vatican City release](#) dated May 8, 2007, the church has officially adopted a new version. As with AOA, it is nothing more than arbitrarily-invented theology originating in and flowing from man: "Children who die 'without being baptized' enjoy an eternal state of perfect natural happiness - a state commonly called 'Limbo' - but without being in communion with God." (When man invents doctrine, some remarkably-tortuous and desperate twisting can occur.)

Quoting an [AP article](#) of April 21, 2007: "If there's no Limbo and we're not going to revert to St. Augustine's teaching that unbaptized infants go to Hell, we're left with only one option, namely, that everyone is born in the state of grace,' said the Rev. Richard McBrien, professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame. 'Baptism does not exist to wipe away the "stain" of original sin, but to initiate one into the Church,' he said in an e-mailed response."

McBrien is arguing that religion surely cannot be expected to abide the notion that unbaptized infants who die go to Hell - and since deaths of unbaptized infants will continue (not to mention all the aborted babies), a doctrine must therefore be allowed (invented) to save infants from Hell while preserving the Catholic contention that baptism is the mandatory, effecting agent in salvation.

The starting point is not Scripture but rather the forced premise that unbaptized infants are destined for Hell and therefore must be spared (along with the other false premise that Catholic baptism is required and actually consummates a sinner's salvation). This passion to spare children from Hell leads to the same misguided hand-wringing which drives AOA. With both, man has decided to take God to the mat - and he is emboldened by the abundant support he receives from his brethren, along with his self-assessment of the genius, virtue, worthiness and downright common sense of his profound creation. And so, he courageously dares to dictate the rules of infant and childhood salvation to God.

Anyhow, since Catholic dogma denies Heaven to the unbaptized (contorted exceptions are allowed when pressed on this), Limbo just *has to* be true. If not, then these poor innocents are either going to Hell (totally unacceptable) or else

skirting the rules; that is, entering Heaven (presumably with a stopoff in purgatory) without need of baptism which Catholicism contends is, in fact, the very act of being born again. Breaking Catholic rules is likewise unacceptable.

Therefore, McBrien finds himself bemoaning the dilemma of choosing between Augustine's teaching (Hell-bound infants), Heavenly admission for the unbaptized or, if those 2 are rejected and Limbo is not accepted in their place, adopting the only viable alternative; that is, "everyone is born in the state of grace" (which is Catholic parlance for "everyone automatically goes to Heaven when they die at any age"). Ironically, this last option is precisely what AOA is all about - except that the AOA variation of God's saving grace somehow disappears when the child reaches some Cinderella-like stroke of midnight.

The justification for creating and sponsoring "Limbo" then is that the alternatives are unthinkable and unacceptable to the human mind and emotions. But this tortured confliction between reverting to the previously-invented doctrine of a mere man, violating church rules, accepting the clearly-flawed doctrine of "everyone goes to Heaven" or inventing a new doctrine which provides the desired solution can be avoided by simply leaving the matter in God's hands. And although the particulars are a bit different, AOA's justification derives from the same conundrum encountered by Limbo: an unwillingness to force man's intellect and feelings to abide what they consider unjust, illogical and intolerable.

Notice how easily human emotion and personal predisposition can lead to established premises, adopted assumptions, enacted requisites and manufactured doctrines which, in turn, require modifications of Scriptural teachings in order to make everything fit. An otherwise virtuous human sentiment prompts a search for a resolution which will satisfy man on his terms and, just like that, "official church doctrines" - whether Limbo, AOA, or Once Saved, Now Lost Again - are born!

Anyhow, an examination of the Limbo links above reveals the Catholic church's reasons for "reassessing" its previous position and amending it. They include "pressing pastoral needs," "reading the signs of the times" and that their previous teachings were "out-of-date." It ought to be obvious that those concerns cannot be allowed to trump the unchanging doctrines of Scripture.

[UPDATE: It's been changed again!](#)

There is no sense in wasting the effort to explore the holes in Limbo (or the dangers of the RCC, its flawed teachings and its self-proclaimed authority as the one true church and God-appointed keeper of the truth). I have mentioned Limbo for illustrative purposes only - because it is hatched in the same manner

as AOA (and Salvation Insecurity) and has as much theological integrity. All 3 originate with man to satisfy man - in bold rebellion against God's Word. If Limbo is properly rejected for its obvious genesis in man and divorcement from Scripture, then AOA (and SI) must be seen as deserving the same treatment.

In any case, the first difficulty encountered with AOA is the establishment of the "age" criterion. When, precisely, are "children" covered by AOA? Various AOA camps hold the age threshold to different values (or none at all) - but none has Scriptural support. In the end, this most critical, signature component of AOA is mere conjecture; an arbitrary assignment contrived of man.

AOA's governing age is variously established at under 20 (from the Numbers passage referenced above), 12 or 13 (according to the Hebrew tradition of bat/bar-mitzvah), 7 or 8 (according to the Catholic "sacrament" of "First Holy Communion" when children attain the "age of reason"), others (4-5, 16, 18), and finally, the seemingly most-prevalent, yet totally unsupported and ambiguous catch-all: "when the child becomes conscious of right and wrong."

All of these claims (particularly the last) beg many questions and raise various tensions which cannot be resolved even on a practical level, let alone any hope of reconciling them with Scripture. In the last case, for example, how exactly can a child's consciousness of right and wrong be known? Is man able to determine this? If so, how? Does man need to know (see below)? Do children come to this consciousness as an identifiable event or is it a drawn-out process? Must the process be completed before the child is held accountable? How is this completion recognized? In any case, where is such a criterion given any consideration in the [Plan of Salvation](#) as revealed in God's Word?

The link below argues the case for this last AOA option while conceding that the bible doesn't teach it (it even calls it a "tricky concept"). Since it is helpful to understand the opposing view, you may want to examine this. It is a short presentation but may serve a useful purpose. Test yourself to see how many false claims you can discover and if you are prepared and able to rebut them.

[A "tricky concept" not supported by Scripture - but legitimate and true anyhow?](#)

For argument's sake, AOA's Scripture and age claims are addressed below, but there really ought to be no need to refute them. It is sufficient to understand that legitimate doctrine simply cannot spring from human emotion and desire, however virtuous it may seem; to recognize that true doctrine must be established upon Scriptural truths alone. But it is precisely in the setting aside of this recognition that room is carved out for AOA.

First, God's Word repetitively and unambiguously teaches that all are conceived in sin (Ps 51:5; Isa 48:8; Gen 8:21b; Eph 2:1-3; Rom 5:12, 18a, 19a; Job 15:14; Ps 143:2; Pr 20:9; 1Jn 1:8; Gal 3:22a; Jer 17:9). Scripture ominously warns that we are, *by nature*, objects of God's wrath (Eph 2:1-3). We do not *become* sinners (as a result of sinning), but rather we *are* sinners (and therefore sin) because that is the very core of our being and our only living nature absent spiritual regeneration by the Holy Spirit (Rom 3:9-18, 23; Ecc 7:20; Isa 53:6a-b; 1Ki 8:46a; Jn 7:19a; Jam 3:2a; Isa 64:7; Jer 5:1-2; Job 15:14-16; Ps 36:1-4; 58:3; Gal 5:16-17; Rom 7:14-25; Jn 2:24-25; Gen 6:5,11-12; Jer 16:12; 17:9).

Human emotional sentiment so much wants to regard children as innocent, but God and His Word do not. This truth cannot be rejected or reworked simply because man sees it as too "hard" or because it does not fit within his limited scope of reason, logic, justice or fairness. In fact, it is the very inability to hide this conspicuous transgression - the ushering of children into Heaven based on their innocence - that fosters special AOA "saving grace." That fixes everything quite nicely, for then AOA no longer violates God's view of children. It simply sets in place a new arrangement for unregenerate children to enter Heaven.

However, just as AOA must eventually come to terms with the obvious flaws in its "innocence" argument, it is forced to finally concede that special grace for children is not based upon Scripture either. And so, in the end, it resorts to the assertion that God, at the very least, has surely decided not to hold children accountable. But the "not accountable" argument simply stakes out the same un-Scriptural ground as the "saved by special grace" position. It is essentially the very same thing: Children enter in because man says so - because man has made a way where there seemed to be no way.

Furthermore, the "not accountable" twist misses the point. For God doesn't hold *any* of us accountable for our sin *when we have been born again*; when our sin is atoned for on *God's* terms. God is able to justify this forgiveness solely on the basis of Jesus' propitiation of our sin debt; a debt which was once listed on the debit side of our ledger but was instead nailed to the cross (Col 2:14) and satisfied forever. Jesus' resurrection is the evidence that God has accepted His sacrifice as atonement for our sin in permanent reconciliation of our account.

Nevertheless, *only* those who are born again have their sin removed once for all through Jesus' perfect sacrifice (Heb 10:10; 1Pe 3:18). Just as there is now no longer any condemnation for adults who are born again (Rom 8:1), there is likewise no condemnation for children who have been re-born. And just as some adults are re-born and others are not, so it may be (or not) with children.

Spiritual life is available only because of God's grace, mercy and compassion. Spiritual rebirth is effected solely at the initiation of God by the power of the Holy Spirit on the basis of Christ's shed blood alone. It cannot be ordered up by man in blatant contradiction to Scriptural truths on behalf of those he deems as deserving of it. Scripture is abundantly clear that salvation is not self-initiated and cannot be earned or consummated in any man's virtue or works (Eph 2:8-9; Rom 11:6; 2Co 10:17-18; Tit 3:5a; 2Ti 1:9b; Col 2:13; Eph 2:4-5 and more).

We are not free to brush off and forgive the glaring errors of AOA, that they are somehow expunged because its creators and promoters are not seeking profit; that it simply looks to the eternal interests of precious children. Just as God supernaturally arranges for adults to overcome their inability to re-birth and save themselves, so He does for children. He really is ultimately sovereign and He really does have it all under control. He really doesn't need our help.

Next, just as children are not automatically Heaven-bound based on some sinless purity or special grace or exemption from accountability, neither are they excused from God's salvation terms on the ground that they have not yet attained the wherewithal to exercise a choice in the matter (as if man's choice is the effecting agent - see below). The child's spiritually-dead condition must be dealt with as Scripture dictates; his spirit nature must be made alive on God's terms. He must be reconciled to God - not by a clever trick devised of men, but by that which has been designed and revealed by God (Col 1:19-20; 2Co 5:18-19). The child must be born again (Jn 3:3). God is in charge - not man. And there is no Scriptural basis for claiming that all children are born again.

All men are conceived with a dead spirit nature and will have no part in God's Kingdom unless they are born again; born of the Spirit. A child who dies and has not been born again is not excepted and granted Heavenly entrance merely because of his age or any other stipulation man dares to impose upon God. God's Word does not teach or even hint at a separate means or [Plan of Salvation](#) applying specifically and uniquely to children. Many folks may offer comforting assurances, to include scholarly submissions, but absent legitimate Scriptural justification, they are merely conjectured theories and opinions.

In any event, it is illogical that children should be unable to be saved according to God's sovereign plan (not true, but this misconception is the foundational premise behind the creation of AOA) and yet find salvation in a man-made provision. In the spirit of Heb 8:7 (employing license), if AOA's founders had not found fault with God's plan, no place would have been sought for another.

More basically and equally illogical is the notion that some ingeniously-devised plan of man can actually save *anyone!* As with denial of [Eternal Security](#), folks believe they have stumbled upon an error of God; that He has failed to consider some intricate, unintended consequence of His salvation plan. Therefore, they seek to assist Him by shoring up a deficiency they think they have discovered. In actuality, however, they are attempting to redefine God's sovereignty, dictating the extent of His sovereign reach; that when it comes to the salvation of children, man has it all covered - and he will be sure to keep God informed.

Thus, the fear that children cannot be saved according to man's understanding of what God has revealed has led to what he believes is a virtuous amendment to God's plan. Moreover, AOA does not simply create an *easier* path to salvation (a *children's* version, if you will). It shamelessly eliminates *any and all qualification requirements whatsoever!* The result is not merely the provision of a *possibility* for *some* who die as children to be saved - it *guarantees* that *all* will be! And this guarantee is created out of thin air and sold on the basis of anything and everything but reasonable Scriptural support! Even in light of the overwhelming emotional sentiment, it would be expected that such a serious matter would command a more rigorous, intellectually-honest approach.

Furthermore, the logical extension of AOA thinking clearly demands a more inclusive plan. This betrays another AOA difficulty. If AOA is indeed sound doctrine, then to be consistent, the sentiment and concern which circumvents God's sovereignty to construct a Heavenly pathway for children must insist upon an equivalent exception for others who must merit free admission on the same basis. If children are excused from Scripture's terms of salvation because they are innocent and do not know right from wrong, or because God's grace can be arbitrarily redesigned to cover them according to man's reasoning and motives, or because God's heart melts so that He just can't bring Himself to hold them accountable, or because they do not possess the wherewithal to choose salvation on their own, then what about others who "deserve" special terms?

And since this entire doctrinal exercise is rooted merely in human sentiment, the list of these others would be endlessly argued among men because the defining criteria are created and posited by men; formed from the mere desires and opinions of men without any true assistance or support from Scripture.

Surely the mentally-impaired should be allowed in. But how severe must the impairment be? How will it be quantified and measured? Who will have authority over all this? What if the individual lived some period of time without the impairment? What length of time disqualifies him from AOA coverage?

Next, should the aged invalid be granted a free pass - or is he responsible for consummating his salvation before the disorientation of old age sets in? Yet, if he neglects this, how can it be known whether or not he would have done so before passing on if only he hadn't lost his mental faculties?

Perhaps the severely physically-impaired should be included, also - but again, the "severity" terms must be codified. What about those born into dysfunctional homes which expose them to harmful experiences and breed attitudes and behaviors which surely prevent them from choosing salvation?

And what of those who "never hear the gospel or see a bible?" And then there are the many who "sincerely" follow false religions but "truly" believe in God. Should the "good" ones - those who devoutly, faithfully and properly practice "good" religions - be held accountable to Scripture's terms of salvation or should they also be granted an exception based on their good intentions and the fact that their opportunity to choose properly was hindered by induced ignorance? After all, they cannot be held responsible for choosing their false religion. It was cultural or geographic or traditional or merely adopted from family or surrounding circumstances. And practicing their religion did make them better people. Still, perhaps this is too much of a stretch? Who decides?

In any event, if the rationale behind AOA is valid for children, then clearly it must be equally applied to all others who are similarly innocent, or able to be covered by the umbrella of God's grace, or who merit an exemption from accountability, or do not have a fair opportunity to choose. Thus, the enormous complication and confusion described above. For just as the age criterion is arrived at apart from Scripture, so it is necessary to ratify official and universal criteria, along with measurement methods and procedures, to determine exactly who qualifies for a free pass. Since man is choreographing the whole affair, he must shoulder the responsibility for defining "innocent," "fair opportunity," the parameters of God's grace and mercy (wow!) and the limits of His sovereignty (ouch!).

Furthermore, since human reason is the exclusive driving force behind all this, the good news is that these standards and limits can be fixed as leniently as desired - and they can be renegotiated and adjusted from time to time. Also, flexibility can be allowed in special cases which are deemed worthy by a review committee or some higher appellate panel or whatever. Perhaps a particularly bad sinner would face a stricter standard, with more leniency applied to the one who did a lot of good works or went to church a lot or had enough family and friends willing to submit his case for review and to lobby on his behalf (this type of effort is employed in the Catholic process of naming/declaring saints).

What it boils down to is this: Man resigns himself to allowing God to judge adults on His terms because adults, after all, are no longer innocent, are not covered by some mysterious provision of God's grace, do not possess a "not-accountable" pass and are able to muster up their own choices. Children, however, must be spared God's judgment because they are preciously innocent, are specially-favored objects of God's graciousness, are exempt from accountability, and are incapable of making mature choices. It doesn't matter that none of those things are Scripturally sound - it would just be unfair and wrong if God disagreed with man's assessment of the situation.

Of those 4 fabricated provisions, it is easier to reject innocence, mystery grace and non-accountability because their errors are more obvious. The issue of choice, however, holds potential to forge inroads with the earnest who are careless or unthinking. The arguments for choice can appear sound and persuasive when their specious nature is not detected; when one fails to notice that the support offered is rooted in merely-human reason and logic while violating the transcendent standard of Scripture.

AOA is just one false teaching which results when salvation is made to hinge upon man's autonomous choice rather than the supernatural power and will of God whose sovereign control over all things transcends human understanding. The error of reducing salvation to a mere choice of man (and the doctrinal intricacies that evokes) is thoroughly discussed in the [Eternal Security](#) writing.

God's Word reveals that God maintains ultimate sovereignty over election and salvation (Lam 3:58; Mt 22:14; Rom 8:28-30, 33; Jam 2:5; Rom 9:11-12; 1Pe 1:1-2; 1Th 1:4; 2Th 2:13; Eph 1:4-5, 11; Jam 1:18; Rom 11:5; 1Co 1:30) - and all else. Since this truth escapes human comprehension and unsettles the human spirit, it is reformulated to allow salvation to rely instead upon man's self-mustered, autonomous, "free will" choice. But substituting man's autonomy for God's sovereignty as the ultimate controlling factor creates a new dilemma - because it is undeniably certain that some folks, such as young children, die without having registered a salvation choice. Yet, rather than presenting a problem, the dilemma caused by this re-manufactured salvation model actually presents an opportunity which is seized upon by AOA and other false doctrines.

Predicating salvation upon a choice of man creates an illegitimate demand to provide a Heavenly pass for children who die on the basis that they cannot be held accountable for executing such a choice. But this artificial crisis is merely a convenient self-creation which makes room for a just-as-conveniently self-created solution - the *desired* solution.

(Completely off topic, yet nevertheless as an illustrative analogy, this is what sinister government politicians do when they strategically gin up a phony crisis by deliberately withholding approval, funding or essential services in order to justify their desired solution: tax increases - [It's a Free Country ... Or Is It?](#))

Since Scripture does not offer a viable contingency to cover the child's inability to choose (because it is unnecessary under God's plan), AOA rushes to the rescue with a Heavenly entrance exam which all children are guaranteed to ace. The attempted refutation of the truth of [Eternal Security](#) introduces the "choice" doctrine with the same strategy in view: allowing a specious dilemma to raise a bogus quandary conveniently resolved by the supplanting of Scriptural truth with a predetermined man-made solution.

With denial of [Eternal Security](#), the assignment of the effecting responsibility in salvation to a choice of man allows for the subsequent loss of salvation via a contrary choice. (See that writing for further details, but what is essentially being arranged for is this: When someone to whom salvation has been assigned behaves in ways which indicate otherwise, man is able to defend and preserve God's honor and integrity by claiming that the individual clearly chose to negate his original choice.) In the case of AOA, ascribing the gaining of salvation to man's choice allows (demands) the free pass for children because, after all, a just God must never be allowed to condemn anyone who lacks the capacity to execute the choice which is required to consummate their salvation. Never mind the serious Scriptural transgressions and difficulties that causes - AOA insists that any reasonable thinking person must grant the child a free pass.

When labeled "Age of Consent" or "Age of Reason," this arrogant transgression of God's revealed truths is even more apparent. It is fearfully audacious to posit God-designed and God-provided salvation upon human "consent" or "reason."

Of course, meddling with some particular Scriptural truth to construct and justify false doctrine inevitably requires meddling with others. In order to establish a base of integrity and an image of legitimacy deemed broad and strong enough to comfortably promote the new doctrine, it becomes necessary to make further "adjustments" to force all of it to fit. In the end, however, it is impossible to completely reconcile the altered truths with the remaining unaltered ones; there will always be a gap between God's truth and created truth. The best which can be achieved is a man-made bridge which *appears* to span the gap.

In the area under consideration then, entirely out of whole cloth, with no Scriptural support whatsoever, the completely man-made doctrine of AOA is crafted and proclaimed as theological truth - nicely and neatly resolving

everything from man's view; serving his desires and satisfying the limits of his intellect. The bridge of support from AOA to God's Word is built upon emotional sentiment which authoritatively asserts that children who die *deserve* to go to Heaven; that it would be unjust and unfair if they did not.

Yet, while it is obvious that such a bridge provides no actual support - that man dare not dictate to God His obligation to children who die - this effort to bridge the gap between God's truth and man's (as egregious and futile as that is on its face) is entirely unnecessary and useless because salvation does not ultimately hinge upon a choice of man anyhow; it rests in the sovereignty of God. A child's salvation, just as an adult's, is not reliant upon and effected by his autonomous choice; rather, it arises, as it must, from the infinitely greater power and surety of God's sovereign will and design. Man's choice follows God's leading.

In any case, let us now review the most popular AOA qualification criteria and six of the more common offerings of supportive Scripture mentioned above.

Ironically, the only specific age claim tied to Scripture is the one which even human reason and logic ought to reject. As such, it would require much greater Scriptural support and didactic treatment if the properly-recognized limits of human understanding are to be set aside to embrace this AOA version of God's empirical Word on the subject; that is, the "under 20" proposal of Num 14:29.

Num 14:29 In this desert your bodies will fall - every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me.

Surely, no one actually believes that all "children" who die prior to age 20 go to Heaven, do they? Sadly, a significant number of folks do indeed appeal to this passage to "prove" that such "children" are, in fact, automatically saved. First, this raises a dilemma applicable to *all* the age claims: Is the 20<sup>th</sup> birthday exactly the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of birth, down to the hour, minute, second, nanosecond and ...? Or is it merely the turning of midnight (in the time zone of birth, or current region of residence)? Imagine the grief and anguish of loved ones when an unsaved relative or dear friend dies 1 month, 1 week, 1 day, 1 hour, 1 minute or 1 second *after* he reaches his AOA! (Contrast the relief and joy experienced when death occurs by the same margins *before* his free AOA pass to Heaven expires!) Naturally, the notion of all sub-20-year-olds going to Heaven ought to be dismissed on its face based on spiritual common sense alone. Yet, here is just 1 of many examples of the attempt to make the case for 19 or "under 20:"

[An argument for "under 20"](#)

To this point, we have not yet defined “child” or “children.” But whichever AOA version is proposed, those terms simply mean anyone who qualifies for automatic Heavenly entrance (thus, we have 19-year-old “children”).

As pointed out earlier, Scriptural truth must be received and understood in context. There is no credible way to propose that the narrative of this passage and the events leading up to it have the slightest intention to convey some notion, however faint, that AOA is even part of the discussion. Clearly, the context is judgment by God upon an entire people (His own chosen people, at that) because of their corporate stubbornness and rebellion against Him and against His clearly-chosen leader for them - and all of that in the face of extraordinary and unique evidences and displays of His provision, goodness, faithfulness, sovereignty, omniscience, omnipotence and so much more.

As always, the best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture. 1Co 10:1-12 explains the purpose of God's dealings with the 20-and-over generation in the desert - and it had nothing to do with AOA.

1Co 10:1-12 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. <sup>2</sup>They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. <sup>3</sup>They all ate the same spiritual food <sup>4</sup>and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup>Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. <sup>6</sup>Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. <sup>7</sup>Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." <sup>8</sup>We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did - and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. <sup>9</sup>We should not test the Lord, as some of them did-and were killed by snakes. <sup>10</sup>And do not grumble, as some of them did - and were killed by the destroying angel. <sup>11</sup>These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. <sup>12</sup>So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

The general purpose in the judgment against those age 20 and over was consistent with God's overall purpose in purging the land of promise: that there should be purity among His people. And so, in His sovereignty, He arranged conditions which were most conducive to fostering and maintaining the purity

He commanded and desired. Just as the ungodly nations of the Promised Land were to be destroyed in order to prevent their corrupting influence upon His people, God sought to eliminate from among His own people those who would mislead and defile the younger generation.

God's reasoning for arbitrarily choosing age 20 as the dividing line is impossible to know for certain (some practical and cultural considerations are plausible, but no empirical explanation is available - even the offerings in Nu 14:21-23 cannot be morphed into AOA with any integrity). But one thing which can be known is that God could not fulfill His patriarchal promises if He eliminated the entire population of His chosen people. Still, it is irresponsible to suggest that all of those under 20 were granted free "temporary eternal" salvation and, in further irrationality, anyone who now dies under age 20 gets a free pass to Heaven.

Further, if this is supposed to be an illustration of AOA, why would *all* those over 20 be lost? Wouldn't all the automatically saved children be accompanied by at least some normally-saved adults (beyond Joshua and Caleb)? Isn't it more plausible that God was merely accomplishing what Scripture indicates; that He was purging His people of an influence which would lead them astray? It may therefore be proposed that some sort of symbolism is intended; that the recorded events are a shadow of things to come; that they point to actual eternal salvation for the under-20 population of some subsequent dispensation (unless a child lives to age 20, thus forfeiting his free temporary eternal pass and reverting to normal salvation requirements). However, this would introduce additional difficulties: When exactly did the under-20 exemption take effect? On what basis and whose authority? What does God do with the under-20s who died before the plan's inception? Obviously, the notion that God is now somehow compelled to allow all "children under 20" into Heaven based on some wildly-skewed exegesis of this passage is easy to dismiss with confidence.

Next, since the other age claims and the Scripture passages mentioned above are unrelated, let us first quickly examine and dismiss the age claims.

Both the claims of 12-13 (according to the Hebrew tradition of bat/bar-mitzvah) and 7-8 (according to the Catholic "sacrament" of "First Holy Communion" when children attain the "age of reason") are to be rejected out of hand. They would require a doctrine of God to find its genesis and basis in the traditions of men; traditions begun a mere 2000 years ago in the Hebrew case and even more recently with the Catholics. Neither tradition is tied chronologically or otherwise to any spiritual event or empirical truth of God. They are simply creations of men; symbolic cultural and religious rituals - not actual spiritual phenomena of any sort. These age thresholds are not in the slightest way able to be offered

as dogmatic doctrine related to the salvation of children. Moreover, they would have to be made “backward-compatible” in order to cover all the children who died before the doctrine was invented. Or are those children excluded?

Next, without underlying tradition as above, or any other associated hinge pin at all, but rooted entirely in personal opinion with no attempt or possibility to offer Scriptural support or reasoned argument, the age of “4 or 5” is proposed. This arises from a struggle to accept the older age claims since older children clearly possess the tools to judge right and wrong and to make informed choices. However, there is still a felt need to usher “children” into Heaven. Thus, a conjectured theory with a seemingly greater plausibility than the others.

The final age-specific offerings - “16” and “18” - are simply baseless stabs at numbers loosely linked to cultural age thresholds. But these two are as patently unreasonable as the “under 20” claim.

The remaining “age” criterion - “when the child becomes conscious of right and wrong” - is the most problematic. It is strategically ambiguous and, like the others, totally unsupported in God’s Word. In false humility, this variation claims virtue, allowing God to retain His sovereign control while, no differently than the others, dictating to God the *limits* of His sovereign control. Before we examine this last AOA provision then, let us consider this issue of sovereignty.

Obviously, any and all subordinate sovereign domains, along with their limited sovereign powers, inherently require and exist within the absolute, supreme, ultimately-sovereign dominion of the final Authority over all. When man sets conditions upon God’s sovereignty, he foolishly appoints *himself* as this final authority - with God’s limited sovereignty under *man’s* control. Clearly, however, it is man’s limited sovereignty which derives from God’s absolute sovereignty, not the other way around.

Further, if God is *not* the supreme sovereign One, then there is either *another* “God” and our faith in the God of Scripture is futile, or there is *no* God and the universe has impossibly and illogically created and sustained itself through an unimaginable set of coincidences and circumstances. The future of such a universe would be completely unknowable and unpredictable and would hold no discernible hope for mankind beyond his limited mortality.

Of course, despite man’s modification efforts, ultimate sovereignty remains with God. God Himself speaks of His sovereignty and its supremacy throughout Scripture - and He has plainly demonstrated it to His creation from the foundation of the world. God’s title, “El Adonai,” in its simplest translation is

“Lord,” but is accepted in virtual unanimity to convey “My Sovereign,” and without controversy, to signify “The Supreme Sovereign One.”

Understandably, the dilemma raised by the unfathomable and irresolvable mystery of the “2-level theory” - the relationship and inter-working of God’s sovereignty with man’s “free will” - leads man beyond the limits of his ability to comprehend. In actuality, however, man’s “free will” is not even a Scriptural concept; it is not found in Scripture. While the notion of man’s responsibility and accountability for his choices is indeed scattered throughout God’s Word, God’s influence and involvement in those choices is another Dt 29:29 mystery.

All through Scripture we see God hardening hearts, sending delusions, giving folks over to their sin, and orchestrating circumstances and responses designed to accomplish His specific plans. We find God making decisions and choices which seem arbitrary and even capricious - yet we know and accept on faith that He is just. It is a perplexing mystery that He chooses, according to criteria we cannot know or understand, to give some over to their evil pursuits while compassionately and mercifully rescuing others.

The attempts of man to explain all this are wearying at best. For example, many claim that God only hardens the hearts of those who first harden their own hearts against Him. But *all of us* are hardened against God until and unless *He* removes our heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh. Moreover, some who are saved had hearts which were hardened well beyond the “average” hardening. Yet, they find themselves included in His mercy while others who seemingly offered a much softer resistance are apparently left out.

It is likewise proposed that God only gives over to sin those who are “hopelessly” bent on it. But again, we are *all* hopeless slaves of sin until *God*, in mercy, love and compassion, removes our chains. It is God who must take the initiative if someone is to be saved. And once more, some whom He has saved would not have been eligible at all if God gave folks over to sin and deception based upon man’s view of “too far gone” or “steeped in evil beyond the limit.”

There is an abundance of Scripture which clearly details Who takes the initiative, makes the choice, and exerts the power in effecting salvation. Just as clearly, passages which exhort us to seek God or to do anything at all commanded by Him first require the leading of the Holy Spirit to work in us the very desire for God and a disposition to obey Him. If we find ourselves desiring God and inclined toward obedience, we are blessed of Him to do so. This theological dilemma cannot be reconciled to man’s satisfaction.

Rom 3:11    there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.

Jn 6:44a "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him,

Jn 15:16a You did not choose me, but I chose you

Eph 1:4-5 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup>he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will

Rom 8:29-30 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup>And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

1Th 1:4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,

Moreover, Scripture reveals that God raises some up (Pharaoh and Judas are epitomic examples) precisely to demonstrate His power through circumstances He Himself arranges by hardening their hearts and giving them fatally over to the depravity in which all of us are conceived (and yet, from which He chooses to rescue others before it becomes fatal). Once again, attempting to understand God's sovereignty vis-a-vis man's "free will" is quite frustrating and fruitless.

Titus 3:9 But avoid foolish controversies (and genealogies) and arguments and quarrels (about the law), because these are unprofitable and useless.

In the end, God is, and must be, sovereign over all - and whatever "free will" man possesses resides under the umbrella of God's absolute sovereignty. It is enough to recognize that to whatever extent man has "free will," he is not free to exercise it contrary to God's plans and controls. The formula which God employs in exercising His sovereignty while, at the same time, allowing man his own "free will" and then retaining and exerting more or less control over it just cannot be known. True faith accepts the mysteries of God without rejecting what He has revealed ("never let go of what can be known in an attempt to grasp what cannot"). Christians only serve to drive folks away from God when they attempt to teach and explain all this. The only wise course is to let it be.

No explanation of Scriptures such as these can satisfy the human intellect:

Ex 4:21; 7:3-4a; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17; 33:19; Dt 7:7; Jos 11:20; Ps 81:12; Isa 63:17; Lk 10:22; Jn 6:44a; 15:16a; Rom 1:24, 26, 28; 8:20, 29-30; 9:11-18; Eph 1:4-5; 2Th 2:11

Within the boundaries of human understanding, it is impossible to reconcile the following with what can be known and understood about God and His character, or with the extent of man's grasp of other Scripture. This causes discomfort because they violate man's concepts of justice, fairness, reason and logic.

Rom 9:11-18 Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad - in order that God's purpose in election might stand: <sup>12</sup>not by works but by him who calls-she was told, "The older will serve the younger." <sup>13</sup>Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." <sup>14</sup>What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! <sup>15</sup>For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." <sup>16</sup>It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. <sup>17</sup>For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." <sup>18</sup>Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

Lk 10:22 "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

Rom 8:20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it,

2Th 2:11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie

And so, let us now finish our consideration of the final AOA qualification standard. When confronted with the question - "*How exactly can a child's consciousness of right and wrong be known?*" - advocates of this variation conveniently explain that man *cannot* know. God alone is sovereign and omniscient; only *He* knows. In addition, the indications are unknowably different for each child. Such magnanimous concession may sound logical and reasonable and may play well with those desperately hoping for AOA to be true, but set against Scripture it is merely nice-sounding, self-serving spin.

Beyond that, the insincerity and lack of integrity in this concession are distinctly revealed when the parents of a child who dies are nevertheless comforted as though *all* children who die go to Heaven - or, at a minimum, *their* child surely

qualified for an exemption based on some human review and determination. (Many well-meaning and otherwise effective Christian pastors and leaders authoritatively teach that all aborted babies are in Heaven. Where do they find that in Scripture?) And so, although only God knows, man still reserves the right and authority to declare. As with the other AOA criteria, of course, there is absolutely no Scriptural basis for this version or any of the reasoning invoked.

Still, proponents find merit in this AOA position because it tailors the age regulation to each child's condition, somehow weighing their unique body of ability, experience, exposure to and knowledge of Scriptural truths, and various other factors seen as relevant - but this goes unexplained and is impossible to substantiate. So, in generous acknowledgment of the obvious confusion which is caused, and recognizing that God is supposed to be in control, they declare that only God knows when each child actually becomes accountable.

This is cleverly shrewd! A doctrine with no basis in Scripture is invented and then handed off to God in magnanimous deference to His sovereign handling of man's creation! This provides the best of all worlds! It creates the desired exclusion for children without putting man *or* God in a box. God retains control while grieving parents, and those who counsel them, are able to find comfort and consolation in concluding that the child qualified for AOA. Finally, a self-allowed and self-determined assurance that God surely agrees closes the case.

Alright then, let us now move beyond the age requirement claims to examine the remaining Scripture passages most often proposed as AOA support:

2Sa 12:23 But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."

It is inexplicable that this verse is invariably the very first verse so quickly and confidently offered by a significant number of AOA proponents. The twisting required to make this verse say, "AOA," is just plain intellectually dishonest.

This is David speaking of the son born of his sinful involvement with Bathsheba. There is no context in the surrounding Scripture or events which allows this simple statement to be appealed to as either ancillary support or empirical teaching of AOA. It is impossible to honestly propose any of the following:

- That, in referring to "going to be with him," David was referring to eternal salvation and Heaven (if so, it is beyond veiled; it is utterly unknowable)
- That even *if* David was referring to eternal salvation and Heaven, Scripture is then teaching through this statement and related events the doctrine of AOA; that Scripture is here establishing dogmatic teaching;

that the proposed resolution of this one unique incident somehow results from applying a non-existent doctrine of Scripture which is then to be universally applied to all children who die. If so, where are the details?

- That, in referring to “going to be with him,” David was not simply acknowledging that he too would die someday, joining his child in death
- That David knew his son was, or would be, in Heaven (if David knew this, Scripture does not reveal that he did or how he did)
- That even *if* David believed his son was assured Heaven, he did so on the basis of AOA (his son qualified due to his age or status as a “child”)

Surely, this passage cannot be offered as a proof text for AOA. And if God intended it to be part of the *overall* Scriptural support for AOA, where is the remaining support? Which is/are the didactic passage(s)? Attempting to tie this verse to AOA by appealing to other Scripture is impossible. Any other Scripture appealed to is just as ambiguous and unsupportive of AOA, and likewise unable to be reasonably and honestly connected to this one. And proposing AOA on the basis of any of them alone is clearly impossible; an embarrassingly-transparent effort to tamper with God's plan to accommodate man's desires.

One final point regarding this “support” passage: While AOA proponents attempt to derive a universal, empirical, spiritual type from a verse which provides such a woefully-weak argument for their cause, they must ignore or dismiss a much more applicable and relevant typological lesson from Scripture. That is, in the conquests of Canaan - the land God had promised His people through the patriarchs and where He ultimately did settle His chosen, rescued people - He ordered them to destroy even the children! (This applies to other events, also.)

Take a look at the following:

God orders children and infants destroyed!

1Sa 15:3; Isa 13:16-18; Dt 32:25

Destroy them completely, including the children! (but the livestock spared)

Dt 2:34; 3:6; 7:2; 20:17

Destroy all the peoples; have no pity! Destroy everything that breathes!

Dt 7:16; 13:15; 20:16

The purging of Canaan is universally understood to be God's judgment upon its nations' inhabitants for refusing to turn away from their idolatry, immorality and other evils. God, in His sovereignty and for His purposes - some of which can be confidently deduced - chose to use His people as His agents to execute His judgment upon the Canaanites. As mentioned, God did this primarily to rid the land of spiritual corruption so that His people could settle and live there free of

those dangerous influences. Of course, Scripture reveals that the Israelites disobeyed God's directives, thereby falling under His judgment themselves.

But the point is this: It is easy and logical to glean from these historical events (tellingly recorded at the Holy Spirit's direction) an unbiased, effective lesson regarding God's treatment of children vis-a-vis the execution of His righteous judgment. It is impossible to do the same with the 2Sa passage above or any of AOA's other offerings, including the popular favorites examined below.

God did not spare children, infants or babies in the womb from His judgments in the circumstances above. It is much more reasonable to derive spiritual application from these than from the 2Sa narrative. The essence of the argument from human emotion which calls for God to allow all children into Heaven is no different than that which demands He spare the children above.

Finally, while it is sad that a significant number of folks insist that adults control their own path to salvation, those of us on sound doctrinal ground know that God is the One who governs all. Yet, even among those who accede to this obvious, fundamental attribute of God, a significant portion still dares to attempt to seize God's authority over children. Oh, how we must grieve the Holy Spirit! It's long past time for Christians to establish and unite behind a final resolution: either God is supremely sovereign or He is not. As for me, I choose to grant Him what His Word unambiguously declares.

Okay, onto the next verse offered as AOA support:

Jam 4:17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

This is perhaps the second-most popular choice of the AOA camp. However, proper Scripture study requires reading what it says, not what we *want* it to say. This verse teaches exactly what it clearly and simply states: that anyone who neglects doing the good which he knows he ought to do thereby sins (this is the basis for what is commonly referred to as "sins of omission"). It does *not* state that if he doesn't know right from wrong, he gets a free pass to Heaven! It is absurd and intellectually dishonest to assert that this verse proves that all who die as children go to Heaven because they don't know right from wrong.

The AOA argument here is a blatant and agonizing distortion - that from what the verse does state, the unstated logically follows; that "anyone who does *not* know the good he ought to do, *doesn't* sin." That is eisegetic sleight-of-hand! That AOA assertion does *not* logically or reasonably follow from the text! Consider the can of worms *that* opens! It clearly establishes the Scripture-

rejecting doctrine that man is born innocent and does not have sin counted against him until he knowingly sins. Since a child apparently does not know right from wrong, he is sinless and granted admission to Heaven on that basis. What blasphemy! Whatever happened to Rom 3:23? All men are condemned at conception and are in need of salvation. They do not possess and retain eternal salvation temporarily until their first deliberate, conscious sin!

Further clarification is found in Rom 5:12-14. Sin, condemnation and judgment were in the world even before the law was given. There are no precious innocents! We are not condemned when we finally commit our first sin *because of the sin*. We are condemned at conception because our spirit nature is dead and requires rebirth. Meanwhile, our sin nature works to prevent this rebirth by pursuing the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life (1Jn 2:16).

Scripture contains much ammunition to use against the claim of support which AOA adherents attach to this verse. Anyone who possesses a fundamental understanding of systematic theology can easily shoot holes in it. And we are confronted once more with the begging questions: What age, exactly, is the dividing line between true salvation and salvation lite? And what about all the *non-children* who also "don't know right from wrong?" Are they included?

Next passage offered as AOA support:

Mt 18:1-14 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" <sup>2</sup>He called a little child and had him stand among them. <sup>3</sup>And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup>"And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. <sup>6</sup>But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. <sup>7</sup>"Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! <sup>8</sup>If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. <sup>9</sup>And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell. <sup>10</sup>"See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see

the face of my Father in heaven. <sup>12</sup>"What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? <sup>13</sup>And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. <sup>14</sup>In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.

Many AOA folks get excited that this passage is Scripture's didactic, "smoking gun" pronouncement of AOA. So let's examine what it says and doesn't say.

First, Jesus is exhorting his disciples to consider their *attitude*. They were adults with entrenched views and an established religious and cultural compartment facing a suddenly- and totally-changed spiritual environment. Jesus admonishes them to change and become *like* children; specifically, to adopt the child-like attribute of humble trust before God. An arrogant lack of faith and/or a prideful adherence to stodgy "religion" will prevent them from entering the Kingdom of God. He is not setting *children* as an example of anything; he is appealing to a virtuous *character trait* they commonly possess.

Second, Jesus does not even hint at the children's innocence, special grace coverage, accountability exemption or inability to choose. He merely mentions their humility. One common stereotype of children (sadly waning in contemporary culture) is an innocent, humble trust of authority. In light of this potential vulnerability, Jesus issues an ominous warning to those who would take improper advantage of such folks. On the other hand, he commends those who would properly welcome them and treat them with compassion and justice, thereby pleasing God by essentially welcoming God Himself.

Next - and here is the salient point of the passage - in verse 6 Jesus qualifies the "children" He is speaking of as those "*who believe in Him.*" That makes all the difference in the world! Jesus isn't teaching that all *actual* children go to Heaven. He is teaching truths related to those *who believe*; not "children", but *God's* children; those who are Heaven-bound on *God's* terms - who are *already saved* because they possess saving faith according to *His [Plan of Salvation](#)*, not that they hold an exemption card because of some man-invented AOA.

Even without the reference in verse 6, it would be a justifiably-natural interpretation to consider that Jesus is using a double-entendre to refer to new adult believers as new children of God. This is very reasonable considering that His targeted warnings were highly relevant to what was to immediately unfold; that is, the infiltration of new believers by religious manipulators attempting to

lead them astray and persuade them to accept man-made religion, ritual and laws in place of what they had received from the Holy Spirit (e.g., Gal 3).

The remainder of the passage expresses God's great loving concern for His believing children; how precious they are in His sight and how egregious He considers any corruption or violation of them.

However, it is the final verse - verse 14 - which is seized upon with enthusiastic hand-wringing glee by the AOA crowd. Once more, we must examine this verse in context. When a Scripture search desperately hopes to find a desired answer, a verse like Mt 18:14 can become irresistible. But this passage has nothing to do with AOA. In no way is it teaching that God will not allow "children" to ever be "lost;" that they are all granted free admission to Heaven.

Again, Jesus is not speaking literally of "children." Clearly, the lost sheep simply represents *any* unsaved one. If literal children are indeed in view, then where do we find the dogmatic establishment of the flagship "age" component of AOA? Furthermore, the "child" - the precious object of AOA's heart-felt emotional sentiment - *is nevertheless lost and needs to be found!* If AOA is true, why is that? How did that happen? How is it even possible?

What if that wandered-off sheep had fallen off a cliff or met a wolf before it was found? Who saw to it that the lost sheep remained safe? If God wasn't in sovereign control, the child could have perished unsaved, no? And surely, not every wandered-off sheep *is* found and rescued - some indeed perish. So if the child is mercifully found, God is the one Who sees to it. We don't need to invent a doctrine to help Him. And if the sheep does encounter a wolf or some other fatal circumstance, then that's just the way it is - and God knows all about it.

As indicated, it simply cannot be reconciled to human satisfaction how the Great Shepherd takes the initiative to rescue some lost sheep and not others. Alternatively, it is proposed that He does indeed make the initiative toward all, but some receive Him and some don't. Yet, Scripture makes it clear that the ones who do receive Him have nothing to boast about. How can that be? Without pursuing the unknowable any further, if the ones who receive Him do something (*anything*, however slight or seemingly insignificant) which the others do not, then it cannot be stated that they have nothing to boast in. But that's what Scripture says! And it doesn't say they *will not* boast; it says they *cannot* boast (Eph 2:9; 1Co 4:7; Rom 3:27; 4:2). Salvation is a received gift, not an earned reward (Eph 2:8; Rom 4:4-5; 6:23; 11:6).

Finally, “in the same way” refers to the manner depicted in vss. 12-13. Clearly, the lost one is saved only because he is sought after and found by his owner. If all “children” are saved automatically, why would they need to be rescued? Obviously, the man in the parable represents the Great Shepherd, Jesus, the Savior, who went out to seek that which was lost. Were it not for the loving, compassionate concern and effort initiated by the Savior, the “child” would remain lost! The “child” (just as an adult) is unable to save himself.

Additionally, this parable reveals the wonder of God's sovereign plan even as it obviates the need for man's. That is, the 99 secure sheep also required recovery at some point. Some may have been found and protected at or close to their physical birth. Others may have been found in the womb - and still others at age 2 or 7 or whenever. Shall the clay say to the Potter, “What allows you to do things your way?” No, God chooses and rescues the lost according to His sovereign pleasure. Children are not singled out for special treatment - nor are they excluded from the unknowable mystery of God's sovereign election.

As a point of emphasis, we observe once again that there is no definition included here for “little one” - no age criterion is found here or anywhere. If this is an AOA verse, where is the rest? That's why 2Pe 3:9 states it this way:

2Pe 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

God's desire pertains to *all*, not just children. Nevertheless, Scripture makes it abundantly clear that not only will *some* be lost, *most* will be. One example:

Mt 7:13-14 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.  
<sup>14</sup>But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

And Scripture nowhere specifies that all those who follow the wide path to destruction will be “adults” and that the narrow lane is the guaranteed conveyance for all “children” (along with adults who are saved God's way).

In this purported AOA passage then, Jesus is simply appealing to his audience in an effective manner, using a child to illustrate the attitude which all should employ before God. And He is demonstrating the love of the Great Shepherd toward those he seeks and saves. Naturally, all of this rekindles the frustrating mystery as to why God exhorts us to do and to respond when, in our depravity, we are unable and have no desire to do so. Likewise, human reasoning cannot

grasp His commissioning of the saved to evangelize and disciple the entire world in light of the fact that He has revealed that most will be lost.

However, we are not called to understand all things. We will not be judged by our level of understanding, though we ought to endeavor to understand all that we can. We are called to obedience. And we obey Him because we trust Him - because the gift of faith we have received gives us an assurance that our trust is perfectly placed. We are simply to do what He asks - because He asks.

This discipline is epitomized in Lk 5. Peter was the master fisherman, yet his expert skills and experience had yielded no results. The instructions Jesus issued were unconventional and Peter wouldn't have expected them to succeed. But in his famous response, Peter offers no argument or hesitation. He simply acknowledges that if Jesus says so, that's good enough for him. We must learn to do the same; to simply do what God expects of us. We must develop the discipline which, especially when we don't understand why, finds adequacy, satisfaction and excitement in simply knowing what.

Next passage offered as AOA support:

Mt 19:13-14 Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. <sup>14</sup>Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

This is another AOA favorite. Again, it is easy to see how a frantic hope to save the precious little ones allows a hopelessly-biased search to declare that this passage teaches AOA. However, these verses say nothing about AOA. Jesus is merely revealing that Heaven belongs to those "*such as these*" - not at all implying "these children" literally, or in an even larger stretch, *all* children.

Yet again we must ask, has God really left man to establish the age standard?

Next verse offered as AOA support:

1Jn 2:12 I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

There's no sense beating a dead horse. There's no AOA here either. John is clearly addressing believers in the Church. If this verse is saying what AOA proponents want it to say - that all children go to heaven - then vs. 13-14 must be taken to mean that all fathers and all young men go to Heaven, also.

Of course, AOA proponents offer many passages beyond the favorites listed above in their effort to support this invented doctrine, but there is no hope to establish AOA from Scripture. It is simply a misguided, feel-good, emotion-driven, man-made doctrine. All the support passages are embarrassingly taken out of context from narratives and teachings easily seen as unrelated to AOA. Sadly, much of the twisting and stretching is simply inexcusable.

[Here is Rom 7:9 being used to prove AOA!](#)

In the end, children are saved just as all others: by the sovereign will of a merciful God in keeping with the terms of *His* plan. After all, even if AOA was true, God still governs life and death. Therefore, any child who would be saved by AOA would essentially be saved according to God's sovereign will anyhow because God commands the circumstances which cause or allow the child to die before or after losing his AOA exemption. The child who dies unsaved seconds before reaching his AOA (not born again, yet covered by AOA) would enjoy Heaven because God controls the timing of his death. But just as God is able to bring the child's life to an end in time to save him (if AOA was true), God can arrange for him to live and be saved without violating Scripture. So why layer man-made sovereignty (AOA) on top of God's true sovereignty in election?

Conversely, God would know that the child who just died unsaved had reached his AOA 5 minutes ago. If He is a loving, compassionate God and children deserve special salvation treatment, then why wouldn't He have had the child die 5 minutes and 1 nanosecond earlier? But again, just as God could indeed order that the child should be saved by dying sooner (if AOA was true), He can save the child according to the normal plan. He has no need to adopt the methods of man. God can arrange for the child to live and be included in salvation according to the Scripture model.

Moreover, if AOA was legitimate, wouldn't God be rather sadistic to allow an AOA-covered child to live long enough to become an unsaved adult and then die unsaved? How horribly cruel it would be to temporarily possess eternal salvation for a season of life, only to wind up being condemned to an eternity in Hell anyway; destined for Heaven one moment and then, the tiniest, unmeasurable instant later, rerouted to Hell because death came too late!

And who can begin to explain why eternal salvation turns out to be merely temporary for children anyhow; that it requires renewal on God's terms if they are unfortunate enough to live to adulthood? Doesn't eternal mean eternal? What is meant by Heb 5:9? (see the [Eternal Security](#) writing for a discussion of the lunacy of treating eternal salvation as temporary)

Scripture makes no distinction whatsoever regarding the salvation of children - and neither should we. When we do, we open the door to endless other nice-sounding, compassionate, false doctrines (like sinless Mary). We must learn to allow God and His revealed Word to be our sufficiency. He has all the mysteries and confusion well under control. He doesn't need any input from us.

For example, if AOA was true, wouldn't/shouldn't loving parents (especially the saved who fully appreciate the contrast between Heaven and Hell) kill their children ("compassionate euthanasia") before they reach their AOA? After all, why would any loving parent put their child at risk of eternal damnation when it is so easily prevented (from a relative view) - especially since they realize there is no guarantee that their child will be saved according to the "normal" method? Surely, allowing children the opportunity to enjoy many years in this life is not worth risking an eternity in Hell. Death is the AOA child's guarantee of Heaven!

Fortunately however, it turns out that there is no need to kill our children after all! There is a backup plan (more manufactured doctrine, of course): *Children of saved parents are automatically saved, too!* Here is the "proof!" (Acts 16:31, 15; 11:14; 18:8; Jn 4:53; 1Co 7:14; Jos 2:17-19; 6:17, 23, 25) Otherwise, every child who lived to their AOA would go to bed saved one night and wake up condemned the next morning! But is midnight the actual witching hour after all?

See what happens? Just as the liar is compelled to manufacture new lies to cover his previous ones, false doctrine involves a similar juggling act with a desperate hope that all the balls can be kept in the air. It is beyond comprehension that many folks, including entire denominational sets, actually believe wholeheartedly that children of saved parents are saved. Of course, their explanation gets more confusing when only 1 parent is saved - and even more so if the saved parent is the mother instead of the father - and even further complicated if the saved parent is the divorced, non-custodial parent - and truly perplexing if the divorced, non-custodial parent gets saved after the divorce and separation from the child - and simply beyond understanding if the saved parent is only a step-parent - and ... where does it all end?

Where indeed! I should have moved on more quickly because another dilemma now presents itself! What about this? If children of saved parents are saved, and if Adam and Eve were saved, then all of us ... oh never mind. But since not everyone is saved, then Adam and Eve must ... like I said, just forget it.

And now more confusion has just overwhelmed me! Have we been wasting a lot of evangelizing effort? Do we really have to bother evangelizing children or

other exempt groups which are already headed to Heaven - especially those with saved parents who will always have an exemption coupon? Evangelizing the permanently saved makes no sense! We ought to be focusing on lost adults and leave the saved children alone. That would eliminate the need for VBS and lots of other stuff aimed at kids. Could this be true?

But now, what happens with children of *unsaved* parents? When their AOA pass expires, it is not replaced with a saved-by-parent pass. Unlike saved-by-parent kids, these children really do pass over from spiritual life to death (opposite Jn 5:24). And now it really does matter whether the witching hour is midnight or the exact anniversary of birth, right down to the smallest fraction of a nanosecond. (But if midnight, is it midnight in the child's time zone of birth, current time zone of residence, or a universal, standard time zone? Daylight savings or standard time?) If the child dies close to that point, determining the time of death would be of critical importance! This would be torture for parents awaiting that determination! And what if it turned out to be wrong? Wow!

And here's a final piece of AOA fallout: If the saved-by-parent plan is rejected because it simply wanders too far out of bounds, at least there is a way for AOA parents to enjoy their children longer than they otherwise might before the need to kill them to preserve the child's AOA guarantee. Rather than training the child up in the Scriptures, cultivating the child's critical thinking and reasoning skills and fostering his natural maturity, loving parents would do their best to keep the child out of church, away from the Scriptures, dumbed-down and coddled as helpless infants as long as possible. Why nurture the child and train him up properly when that hastens the onset of his AOA expiration? Prolonging the child's ignorance of right and wrong, and shielding him from knowledge of God and His Word allows the parents more time to enjoy the child before it becomes necessary to execute his Heavenly initiation ritual.

In the end, perhaps those desperate for AOA may seek solace in convincing themselves that AOA may indeed be true, but God has chosen not to reveal it to man because doing so would risk mass killing of innocent children. But while some may find comfort in self-deception, we cannot join them or foster such comfort. God is sovereign and will always be on the throne and in control.

Children are not innocent. There is no "special grace." Children are accountable and accounted for. And salvation isn't effected through a choice.

God's Word says it. ~~I believe it.~~ That settles it!