
Leading Sons and Daughters to Christ

2 Timothy 3:10-17

Russ Kennedy

Introduction I remember my first profession of faith in Christ...

I remember truly being converted as a teenager...

Does this testimony disturb you? It should. For all the good and wise ways of my parents, their handling of our spiritual formation was misshapen by decisionism and legalism.

This is the first Sunday of our 2008 Family Enrichment Conference. We dedicate this month to preparing singles and helping families to be pleasing to God in their marriages. The series over the years have tried to lay a foundation for being together as God's people, first in the community of the church and then in the context of the home. This year our topic is *Spiritual Formation in the Home*.

We have a Bible based, Christ-centered, home-supporting children's ministry we call the Ministry of Spiritual Formation. That ministry is designed to supplement and support the spiritual formation that is supposed to be going on at home. At times, we must do more when children come from unbelieving homes or who are challenged physically. This month, the Biblical Counseling and Spiritual Formation Ministries are partnering in this series to help parents with spiritual formation in the home.

In this series of sermons this month, we are going to be addressing the following topics.

- Leading sons and daughters to Christ.
- Bringing sons and daughters to church with Pastor Devon Berry.
- Keeping sons and daughters from hell with Pastor Dan Turner.
- Heart issues in parenting with Dr. Robert Jones.

The Elders have published a statement of philosophy on Children's Inclusion at the Chapel. That document is available on our website and we strongly encourage every family to read it and be persuaded by it. In developing that philosophy which governs our ministry to children, we set forth the following aims.

TO ESTABLISH BOUNDARIES ACCORDING TO GOD'S WORD. It is our aim to set the framework from the Scriptures in which we do ministry. We work through texts, distill them into summary statements of what we believe. These then help us to make wise applications of the Scriptures from our own insights and from the wisdom of other churches.

TO ENCOURAGE FREEDOM WITHIN GOD'S WILL. Once we establish a framework we want to encourage families and ministries to feel a sense of liberty to work out your own walk with God with wisdom and freedom. In doing so, we are implementing the larger model for Christian liberty within ministry.

TO ENABLE PARENTS BY GOD'S GRACE. As a particular focus this month, we want to enable, equip and encourage parents in the rearing of your children.

We have already seen the fruit of that work in God's grace as several of our teens have made public professions of faith through baptism. We rejoice in what God has done.

In line with those aims, our series will be formatted as follows:

The morning sermon on the topic will be largely expositional. It will work through one or more relevant texts on the subject and explain what God's Word says. The purpose of this exegetical work is to establish the Biblical boundaries according to the Scriptures. It will be designed to organize your belief and orient your wants towards what God requires.

The evening sermon on the topic will be largely practical. I use this term because you will recognize what I am saying, even though I cringe a bit when we say it this way. We will work through practical wisdom guidelines, advice, steps of action, and things to avoid. You will need to listen to them, adapt the ones that fit your life, home and way with your children. Much of it will be applied Scripture from the experience of those who have reared children and who counsel families here.

The whole series is aimed at preparing future parents and equipping current parents. So, unless you are a eunuch or have the spiritual gift of singleness, this series is for you. It is meant to complement the Adult Bible Education hour. You will notice there is no sermon on communication – that is for you to learn by coming to the ABE hour at 9:15.

So, let us take up God's Word with prayer and ready hearts to hear and heed the Scriptures.

Seeing a Child's Commendation

2 Timothy 3:10-17

Timothy is an example for us of the place and power of godly parents who bring children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Some will remember a great deal of this from an earlier sermon last year.

The Personal Mentor

(v.10-11)

¹⁰ You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ¹¹ my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me.

This young man now serving on behalf of Paul in a difficult situation in the church at Ephesus has been mentored by Paul. He has observed what has shaped Paul's life and ministry. He has the spiritual tools and training to understand the sacrifices required and the risks entailed. He was maturing as a man and was a Christian in ways we would all hope and long for our children.

The Problems Faced

(v.12-13)

¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

He was being thrust into difficulty and danger. The culture he lived in and the circumstances he ministered in were deteriorating. He was surrounded by people who had the appearance of godliness but denied its spiritual power (v.1-9). They were arrogant and wicked. The apostolic ministry of the Word even in the church at Ephesus had not pro-

duced a pure church. It was beset with doctrinal errors and sins. Into this situation, Timothy was sent to become a teaching elder.

The Privilege Experienced

(v.14-15)

⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

In contrast to the hypocrisy all around him, Timothy had followed Paul's example (v.10). He is exhorted to continue in what he has learned. Now at first, you would think that Paul would point to his own instruction of Timothy. But, he seems to emphasize the childhood Bible education Timothy received. In the verbs here I see a process that parents and church together should lay hold of.

Expose - He was acquainted with the Scriptures by a process of *familiarization*.

Explain - He was taught the Scriptures through a process of *instruction*.

Examine - He had learned the Scriptures by accountability and *assimilation*.

Evangelize - He had believed the Scriptures by a gracious work of *conversion*.

His family which included a godly grandmother and mother (1:5), had exposed, explained, examined and finally evangelized him. They had done so in total reliance on the power of Scripture to do God's work in Timothy's life. The Scriptures are able to make your children wise unto salvation. This is an extraordinary phrase. It includes three key thoughts for us.

The Old Testament (as well as the New) is able to bring conversion and thus must be included in the process. The whole Bible with its whole story and with Christ at its center is the subject of this process.

The innate and ingrained folly of children is recognized. Your children are naturally and sinfully foolish. That folly blinds them to their need of salvation and to the gospel. The Scriptures themselves have the capacity to impart wisdom, saving wisdom and reverse the folly of a child's heart.

The Scriptures are our task with salvation as God's responsibility. It is the Scriptures that we work with. Too much of what passes as child evangelism is nothing but manipulation. By exposing our young children to the Bible, by explaining the Bible to children as they are able to understand, by examining them, holding them accountable for memorizing and thinking with the Bible, all the while utterly dependent on God to grant regeneration, faith and repentance *through the Scriptures we give*.

This is fundamental to why we teach the Bible to our children here at church. We do not do little moralistic stories. We do not teach life principles, per se. We teach the Bible. So, do you? Do you as a parent with sons and daughters in your home, do you teach them the Bible? If you are single, are you equipping yourself for future personal ministry with your own or others children?

Now, do not hear me to be saying that there is a guarantee. There is not one. God will grant saving faith to those whom He has chosen. But if you will embrace by faith these principles and put them into practice, you will be pleasing to God. That, is a guarantee.

The Profit Declared

(v.16-17)

¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

Why? Because the Bible is profitable, useful and all we need to bring a young person to maturity and competency. The Bible is what you need to use in your rearing of your children.

The Bible is useful for *instruction*. It will show your children what is true and what and who is to be desired. It is to be the major and central curriculum for your child's life, his personal, public and spiritual maturity.

The Bible is useful for *reproof*. It will show your children what is wrong. It will expose and explain your children from God's perspective. It will function to bring consciousness and conviction of sin.

The Bible is useful for *correction*. It will show your children how to change and what to change to. It should be used to upright your children and reverse their sin and folly. It will show them the right path and how to get on it.

The Bible is useful for *training in righteousness*. The fundamental aim of the Bible is a right relationship with God in loving Him and a right relationship with others in loving them. We are not talking about legalism. We are talking about your children being so saturated with the Word that as situations arise they are able to resist sin and choose wisdom through the flow of God's thoughts through their own hearts and minds.

Now, do you believe this? Do you believe that you as a parent are responsible primarily to be shaped by the Bible yourself and to shape your children by the Scriptures? I think most of you would formally agree with that. But the question really is, do you functionally agree with it? Are you working out the Scripture in your own home and life as a model of the meaning and message of the Word? When your children listen at church in Scripture Learners, Scripture Sowers, Learning Lambs, do they hear what they see at home?

Now, I have heavily weighted this message around this text. But let me pick up the pace and let us consider some further, Biblical truths in regards to your children.

Understanding your Child's Condition

All children are born as sinners (Psalm 51:5) and will aggressively commit acts of sin (Ephesians 2:1-3). Children are not born innocent and become sinners. Children are born sinners who learn to sin skillfully.

Imputed Sin from Adam

(Romans 5:12)

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

Every one of us, whose ultimate father is Adam, have Adam's sin put to our account. Paul is arguing that since men suffered the consequence for sin before the Law was given, then they are accounted to be sinners by virtue of being in Adam. Your children are accounted to be sinners in God's eyes because Adam's sin is put to their account.

Innate Sin as in the Flesh

(Ephesians 2:3; 1 John 1:8-10)

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Your children inherit sin from their earthly father. This power, principle or law of sin that is innate in every person born of an earthly father is often referred to as the "sin nature". The Bible refers to both something in us and that we are in. It is called the world, the flesh, the old realm and the old man. It is that realm into which your children are born and whose nature they receive from their earthly father. This is the principle and power that drives your children's commission of sin. It is imbedded in the heart as beliefs and desires.

Involved Sin as Commission and Omission

(Romans 3:23)

For there is no distinction:²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...

Your children commit sin from the moment they are born. They complain and cry when nothing is wrong. They are totally self-focused and self-absorbed. They demand attention and gratification immediately. This is not mere inability to control themselves. This is the sinful nature expressing itself without restraint. The Bible refers to this primarily as folly. Without discipline, restraint, correction and instruction, this folly will simply mature into willful, uncontrollable, sophisticated, skillful rebellious sin.

The effect of this is massive. Your children then have total depravity, total inability and total accountability.

Why cover these three important ideas first? Without a deep commitment to the power of the Word of God, a formal and functional belief in your child's depravity, you will struggle with a Biblical view of your child's conversion.

Leading your Child's Conversion

Conversion is the result of God, through the Word and Spirit, giving life through the new birth and granting the gifts of faith and repentance so that a child believes the gospel and bows to Christ as King, calling on the Lord to be saved.

Formation through Discipline and Instruction (Ephesians 6:4)

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

However, it is important you to know that one of the ways that God intends for you to lead your sons and daughters to Christ is through the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Pastor Dan will be talking much more about this text later. Most of you will be bringing up unbelieving, unsaved children. They are sinners and have not yet become saints by the regenerating work of the Spirit. But, you must rear them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. This means quite simply what it says. You must discipline your children God's way. You must teach your children about God and His ways.

This answers a question many have asked. What good is disciplining children's attitudes and actions when nothing they do is acceptable to God? Why should we teach unsaved children Bible truths, have them memorize Bible scriptures, even teach them how to pray, read their Bibles, live as Christians and require them to come to church when they are not saved? The reason is because God has commanded it. That command is an expression of love and wisdom as a moral restraint on your children, even if they never are converted. If the Lord is pleased to save them, then the self-discipline and Biblical knowledge they have will now serve them well as they grow in Christ likeness.

Conviction through the Scriptures (Galatians 3:23-26)

²³ Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

The Scriptures are essential in bringing your children to Christ. The entire Bible, including the Old Testament, is profitable for its purposes. One of the purposes of the law is to bring about knowledge of sin and our sinfulness. It acts as an instructor to teach us how we sin. It acts as a judge to declare us guilty of our sin. It functions as a tutor to point us to and to bring us to Christ. The Bible then highlights the holiness of God and sets the standard for your children, a standard they cannot possibly attain. They are to love God and love neighbor in every attitude and in every action and in every affection at all times in all ways in all circumstances. Condemned by the Law, guilty before God, burdened by sin, afflicted by the consequences of sin in reproof and rod, your children are ready to hear of the good news of God's enduring love, taking their punishment for them, freeing them from their sin through Jesus' death on the cross. Without the true knowledge of their sin and sinfulness through the Scriptures, your children will not be spiritually ready for what the gospel actually is good news about.

Evangelism with Integrity (Romans 1:16-18; 1 Corinthians 15:1-5)

Romans 1:16-18

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” ¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

1 Corinthians 15:1-5

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

The sweetness and loveliness of Christ is given as hope for the lost, not candy for the self-focused. So the message of the gospel cannot be altered. Evangelism is *the giving of the gospel with simplicity and clarity* so that your sons and daughters understand their position as a sinner before God, the saving work that Christ has done and their responsibility to believe the Bible and submit to God as their King. Now, the *message* of the gospel is simple. The *mechanisms* of the gospel are infinitely complex. One does not have to know all the intricacies of the gospel to be saved. But one must know, be able to understand and be able to articulate the message of the gospel in order to believe in Christ and bow to Him.

Summons without Coercion (Romans 10:9-17)

Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

¹⁴ But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

This text is foundational to all evangelism and necessary our children’s conversion. God has ordained that all who call on Him will be saved. But they cannot call on the Lord if they do not know Him. They cannot know Him unless someone tells them the gospel. Everywhere in the New Testament that the gospel message, the story of Jesus and its meaning, is given, people are called on to respond. There is no manipulation. There is no

dangling out of some self-serving good for the person. No recounting of evangelism in the New Testament makes it about “going to heaven.” It is never about “asking Jesus into your hearts.” The gospel invitation is to believe in the gospel message, to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ alone to save from sin, to bow to Christ as Lord and King and to call on Him to save.

This is the way you should speak to your children (and anyone you are evangelizing). 2 Corinthians 5 says that we proclaim, persuade and plead. But great caution should be used so that your calling your sons and daughters to Christ is *never* a matter of *pleasing you as their parent*. This will almost assuredly elicit a response from children that will be a false profession. Please understand, if your children cannot understand the gospel they cannot profess the gospel. So keep it simple and keep it true. Use the Bible’s way in calling them to repent and believe. We do NOT recast the gospel in children’s language. We speak the Bible’s language. If they cannot understand the concept of sin, they cannot be saved yet. If they have trouble with repeating the gospel back to you unprompted at each step, it is difficult to see how they can believe. The summons, call or invitation of the gospel is to believe a message, not to make a decision. Do not make it your aim to have your children make a decision. Make it your aim to see your children believe, repent, bow and call on the Lord.

If your son or daughter declares that they would like to be saved, then work them through the key elements of the gospel. Can they articulate it? Do they grasp its essential facts as both true and trusted? Are they willing to obey God in everything? List some things they have not been obeying God? Are they willing to repent? Then, read Romans 10:9-17 to them and see if they understand from the Bible what they must do. And rejoice in what God’s Spirit enables them to do next (or not).

Responding to your Child's Confession

Your child responds to the gospel through a confession of faith.

A Private Confession through Prayer

In some way, everyone whom God calls to salvation, will call upon God to be saved. Your son or daughter may call on Christ to save them alone, guided by someone else or with you. Note what I have said above. When your child comes to you and says that they have been saved, ask questions. Have them tell you what happened, what they did, what they said. If someone else was with them, what did they do? How did they prompt? What is the content of the gospel given to them?

If you are satisfied that they understand and have responded to the Biblical gospel in a saving way, encourage them to make their confession public through baptism and to walk with Christ now. You should look for genuine repentance, striving for holiness, a new hunger for God’s Word and genuine sorrow over failure and sins. Look for the fruit of the Spirit. Look for increased apprehension and appreciation for the person and work of Jesus. Look for all this at your child’s level of maturity and ability.

A Public Confession through Baptism

Observing Acts 2:37-41; 8:12-13; 36-38; 9:10-19; 10:47-48; 16:14-15; 30-34; 18:8; 19:1-5; 22:12-16 we see that people who have believed make their public confession of faith through baptism. In the New Testament, those who profess Christ are required to and respond by being baptized. This is the Biblical way of identifying yourself as committed to Christ and to His kingdom. There is no other way in the Scriptures. All those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, bow to Him and call on Him should and will publicly confess faith through baptism. This is the entry gate into the community of faith, the church. At baptism, one gives public testimony to their profession of faith and then is baptized as a public symbol:

- That they are willing to publicly separate themselves from their past life of sin, self and religion and live in the kingdom of God;
- That they have been placed into the saving death, burial and resurrection of Christ;
- That they are to be identified as a member of the Body of Christ and the local gathered assembly;
- That they are now to leave the old life and to walk in newness of life before the face of God and in the presence of the company of the saints.

Your child, as with any adult, should publicly profess faith in Christ through baptism. They should do so as we have outlined in this message. They should have an understanding of the gospel, a clear commitment to the call of the gospel and a humble willingness and desire to obey the gospel. Just as we should not manipulate nor coerce our sons and daughters into professing Christ, neither should we do so into baptism. However, we *must* clearly teach them that calling on Christ privately will entail confessing Christ publicly.

Finally, some practical, wisdom counsel:

Conclusion

Your work at spiritual formation in the home should follow the pattern we saw in the home Timothy was reared in. Organize your spiritual formation along these lines:

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| Expose | Acquaint your sons and daughters with the Scriptures by a plan and a process of <i>familiarization</i> . |
| Explain | Teach your sons and daughters the Scriptures through a plan and process of <i>instruction</i> . |
| Examine | Help your sons and daughters to learn the Scriptures by intentional and age appropriate accountability and <i>assimilation</i> . |
| Evangelize | Recognize when your sons and daughters have believed the Scriptures by the evidences of a gracious work of <i>conversion</i> . |

Examine yourself to see if you have really believed the gospel, bowed to Christ and called on Him to save you. You cannot lead your children where you have not personally been. Is your faith genuine? Is your walk with God sincere? Do you yourself embrace Christ as your sole and only Redeemer and Ruler?

If you have been speaking about salvation in unbiblical ways with your children, begin immediately to reverse that. Start teaching them the gospel according to the Bible. Change the way you call them or invite them to be saved. Don't worry if they do not seem to be able to understand the simple gospel. If they cannot yet comprehend it, either intellectually or spiritually, it is unlikely that they can make a credible profession of faith.

If your son or daughter has made a private confession of faith, talk to them about the gospel. Can they articulate what they believe? Do they understand what sin is and that they are a sinner? Do they experience guilt and the sense of being under the wrath of God? Do they understand the cross as where God punished their sin? Do they believe that Jesus died and was raised and is now in heaven? Do they understand that He is the KING, the LORD. In our culture, this takes more explaining since we are not governed by human kings.

Do not hinder a son or daughter from being baptized who have a clear understanding of the gospel, a Biblical confession of faith and a willingness to be baptized. Understand that sons and daughters applying for baptism must be able to give a credible profession of faith to their elder(s). If they have actually been converted, your preventing their public confession and membership in the local assembly may actually also be inhibiting their growth as a believer.

Do not bring a son or daughter to be baptized who does not understand the gospel. Do not manipulate or coerce them. Do not use baptism as a way to think that you have ensured their salvation. We are not seeking in our evangelizing our children to get a decision from them. And use wisdom and discernment as you work with them.

May God be glorified in through His church, now and for ever.