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# A Family Talk: Your Child's Conversion

## 2 Timothy 3:14-17

*Russ Kennedy*

**Introduction** Many of you grew up in homes that had the “Family Talks.”

We have a tradition here of having family talks together as a church. Usually these are informal and very practical. Sometimes we just need to share together what it means to be together as a people. We have to make practical decisions that are wisdom based. Today is a little bit of that sort of day. We want to talk today about your children, their conversion to Christ and their inclusion in the Chapel community.

### The Ministry Context

The Chapel has developed a Bible based, Christ-centered, home-supporting children's ministry we call the Ministry of Spiritual Formation. Under Pastor Dale's leadership, many important and innovative changes have been developed and implemented. We are now working to further build on that foundation. The Children's Ministry Team and I have been working to sharpen some things and to shape some new things. We will be talking more about these in the future.

### The Framing Concerns

The Elders have also been bringing to completion some work Dale introduced. We have finished a statement of philosophy on Children's Inclusion at the Chapel. As Pastor for Spiritual Formation, I will be introducing that in this evening's service on behalf of the Elders. We have three framing concerns and aims as we work through this.

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. You will see this unfolding over the next few years as we continue to grow in ministry with ministries working through Mission, Vision, Purpose and Strategy development.

TO ENABLE PARENTS BY GOD'S GRACE. As a particular focus today, we also want to enable, equip and encourage parents in the rearing of your children. The Spiritual Formation Ministry is as much a ministry to parents as it is a ministry to children. We are here to supplement and support, not be a substitute for your parenting.

## The Leadership Commitment

Over the next nine months, culminating in the Family Enrichment next January, we will minister aiming to help parents within the community of the church. Some of the work will be for you in your home as we work through parenting in both principle and practice. Some will be explaining and applying for being together as God's people here in the church. We intend to give careful thought and take time to work through these topics.

## A Child's Commendation

## 2 Timothy 3:14-17

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.

### The Personal Mentor

(v.10-11)

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)

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 produced 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)

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. 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)

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.

## 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)

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)

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)

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.

I have been careful to refer to the *earthly father*. Jesus Christ is not in Adam and therefore has no imputed sin from him. Jesus was not born of an earthly father and so did not receive the transmission of the old sin nature as we all do. Jesus committed no acts of sin at all. So, He went to the cross and suffered for the sin of others. He who had no sin, was made sin for us, so that we who had no righteousness, might have the righteousness of Christ put to our account.

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

## Your Child's Conscience

The conscience is a word for the way God designed people to experience guilt (2 Corinthians 1:12). It is the part of your child that must be trained by God's Word to recognize and respond to what is right and wrong. Your child will experience or feel guilt according to how you train their conscience.

### **Informed and Instructed by Parents** (Romans 2:15; 3:19-20)

You must train your child's conscience through the Word of God. They must be taught what is right and what is wrong. They will grow from folly into wisdom as they learn the connection between choices and consequences. Your use of reproof and the rod reinforces the instruction of the conscience and reminds them that punishment follows disobedience.

### **Callused and Hardened by Sinning** (Titus 1:15; 1 Timothy 4:2)

If you permit your children to go on sinning without teaching, reproof, correcting and instructing in righteousness, their consciences will be come callused and seared, insensitive to external stimulus, hardened, that is resisting change and eventually dead, incapable of functioning normally. Unchecked and unopposed sin will lead to uncontrollable and uncorrectable children.

### **Weakened by Legalism** (1 Corinthians 8:7-12; et al)

There is another danger in relation to training your child's conscience. This is the danger of legalism. Legalism is adding commands to the Word of God or interpreting the commands of the Word of God so as to change their meaning, intent or application. Thus, you must be careful to distinguish between the commands and requirements of God and the household rules and guidelines. Cursing your parents is a sin. Staying up past 10:00 is not a sin but disobeying a rule established by your parents is sin. An over-focus on externals, outward conduct or demeanor can produce hypocrites and Pharisees. If you do this and your children are converted, their consciences will be trained to be overly sensitive and thus they will be weaker brothers.

Teach your children God's Word. Teach them God's commands. Distinguish carefully between what God says and how you apply it in your own home, life and living. As they mature, grant more and more freedom for them to choose and live wisely.

### **Aiming to have a Clear Conscience** (2 Timothy 1:3; et al)

The aim is to rear children who will live with a clear conscience. They walk with God, obey God, understand the difference between God's commands and wise guidelines, exercise their conscience to grow in discernment and after being converted, are able to live in the community of the church as a strong believer.

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 and a practical understanding of your child's conscience, you will struggle with a Biblical view of your child's conversion.

## 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.

### Conviction through the Law

(Galatians 3:23-26)

One of the purposes of the Law is to bring about a 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. So, you use the Law in your teaching and training of your children in order to bring them to the end of themselves ("I can't do this!!!") and to point them to Christ ("He has done it for you!!!"). The Word of God and the Law of God 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.

### Evangelism with Integrity

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

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 child understands 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 gospel in order to believe in Christ and bow to Him.

### Summons without Coercion

(Romans 10:9-17)

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.

Finally, I would not counsel you to use the sinner's prayer or to coach your children into or through a prayer of confession (I don't recommend this period.) 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).

## 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

We will develop a bit more our thinking about this tonight and in following messages in September and January. 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. Other church traditions have substituted a number of other ways to publicly profess Christ. These are wrong. They have no Scriptural warrant and confuse who is to be treated as a true believer.

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.

No person privately professing faith in Christ who refuses to be baptized should be treated as true believer. Some people will need to be taught as a result of having learned error. This may take time. We even have an example of re-baptizing people who were baptized on the wrong grounds (Acts 19:1-7). Fear of people, fear of water, unwillingness to be publicly identified as a believer are evidences of being unrepentant and un-submissive to Christ. We must not dry down the watered up standards in the Bible.

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.

## Your Child's Communion

Briefly, consider then your child's participation in the Lord's Table. We have worked through this as Elders and are in agreement on the following two key principles. This evening, I will be presenting, on behalf of the Elders as the Pastor for Spiritual Formation, our teaching and practice on children's inclusion and participation in church life.

Now, some of this will be entirely new to many of you. So we are engaged in a process of teaching and instruction that we pray you will prayerfully hear, consider, study and, by grace, embrace as the truth of the Bible and the practice of the church.

### Invited to those who have publicly professed Christ

We invite all those who have publicly professed Christ and are not under discipline to share in the Lord's Table. You do not have to be a member of this church. We want all members of our church to be here and not absent yourself from the Lord's Table except as hindered by the providence of God.

We are teaching that baptism is the way to publicly profess Christ. So when we invite all who have a public profession, we are basically inviting all baptized believers to share in the fellowship of Communion. Now, we want you to consider and weigh and be convinced in your own minds. For some, this will be a change in what you have done in



your family with your children. We leave this to you, at this time. We will be teaching more about this in September and in January.

### Instructed at home and church as to its meaning and significance

While we commit to you as elders to teach and instruct you and your children as to the meaning and significance of ordinances, of baptism and the Lord's Table, we exhort you as parents to do the same. If you have sons and daughters who have made a profession of faith but have not yet been baptized, spend some time talking with them about their faith. If you have concerns that their character or conduct does not match their confession, then challenge them. If they absolutely will not be baptized, then you need to begin to evangelize your son or daughter.

Be encouraged in all this. We want to guide you and we want to guard you in love. We want you to be fully mature in Christ as parents. We want to guard you from sin in dealing with your children. We want to see our sons and daughters come to faith in Christ and to begin to walk with Him in humility and holiness.

**Conclusion** Let me give some recommended resources.

1. *Your Child's Conversion*, Dennis Gunderson. A very helpful little book that occasionally is more conservative in accepting a child's profession of faith than we want to be. It is clear, however, about the issues in hand.
2. *Two Ways to Live, Children's Edition*. Excellent book for explaining and engrafting the essential elements of the gospel without difficult theological terms. This forms the base for one our learning outcomes in Spiritual Formation.
3. *The Eaglet*, Jim Eliff. Written as a picture book to be read to young children. Uses a metaphor to parallel the gospel and moves into the gospel itself.
4. *Keach's Catechism for Children*. A Biblical catechism based on the 1689 London Confession of Faith used by Charles Spurgeon and many others. Designed to teach children the basics of the gospel and the requirements of the Law.

Finally, some practical, wisdom counsel:

- 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 children 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.
- Young people, many of you have made private professions of faith. If you have truly believed and truly bowed, if you have called on the Lord to save you, I challenge you to talk with your parents and seek to make your profession of faith public. Ask to be baptized.

Some of you may struggle with this. Again, we encourage you to study, pray, ask questions, seek wisdom and be willing to change where necessary. This is a weighty matter. This is not about how we mow the grass or what we wear to church or whether we sing just hymns. This is serious. Tonight we will be presenting the position of the Elders on your child's incorporation in the ministry.

Finally, an invitation. We will be having a baptism service on July 15<sup>th</sup> in the evening service. This will be a time of great celebration as a number publicly profess Christ. We invite you to join us for a wonderful evening. We call you who have believed and have not been baptized to ask for baptism by picking up and turning in an application.

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