
Your Child's Inclusion in Church Life

Acts 2:38-41; Mark 10:13-16

Russ Kennedy for the Elders

Introduction

This morning we talked briefly about the commended process that brought Timothy to saving faith in Christ and a mature ability in ministry.

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*.

Timothy grows up in a Bible-centered home, is engaged in ministry in his home church and is disciplined and trained by Paul. As he matures in Christ, he serves in the church.

Today, there is much confusion about salvation, baptism and church membership "out there". There may well be some "in here". The Elders thought it would be good to clarify what we teach about these things, particularly in relation to children. So, this evening is not so much a sermon, as a family talk on what we believe, teach and practice.

Now, I want to emphasize that we understand that many will have not thought through these things. Others will have different beliefs and practices. We, as the Elders, have been given the oversight of the church. But we do not want to rule as dictators. We want to govern through teaching. So this is the first in a three-step strategy outlined this morning to teach on these things. We ask that you have hearing hearts and a poise to be persuaded.

So let's pray to that end, that we will teach well and you will be teachable.

The Foundation in God's Word

Come with me to two texts that help us stay on the right path along the third way.

To Call Children to be Saved

Acts 2:38-41

Peter is preaching at Pentecost. This is the first Redemptive Historical message whose content is recorded for us. Through it Peter is explaining the gospel to those gathered who are observing the demonstrations of the Holy Spirit's descent and power. A number of interesting things could hold our attention not that least that the gospel is being entirely taught from the story of the Old Testament as pointing to Christ. Second, the resurrection is the center-piece of the message.

For our purposes tonight, note verses 37-41.

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. [ESV]

The promise of forgiveness of sins and regeneration, the promises of the New Covenant, are for all people. It is for the Jews. It is for the Gentiles. It is for children. The promise of salvation in this New Covenant is condition upon repentance and faith. That condition is for children as well. So the exhortation to repent and believe *is directed to the children in the audience*, as well as the adults.

Three important observations then arise from this.

In the New Covenant, God promises to save children who truly believe and repent. Their salvation does not come as a matter of being in a believing household. They are to be baptized upon their own profession of faith in Christ.

We are to preach the gospel to children with essentially the same content and call as to adults. Peter expressly expects that children listening to him can believe and will respond. Children may respond in saving faith to the sermon he has preached.

Those who do respond, children and adults, have been called by God. The confidence then rests in God's saving initiatives, not primarily in our ability to communicate. God will call through the preaching of the gospel and through the hearing of the gospel grants the regeneration and the capacity to understand the gospel.

This is wonderful. We ought then to keep the gospel clear and the message pure. We ought to do it in such a way that it is true to the Bible and understandable to our hearers. And, we depend in God's saving work to call sons and daughters to Himself so that they respond with true faith and repentance and ask to be baptized.

To Accept Children Coming to Christ

Mark 10:13-16

Jesus models for us an openness to receive children coming to him.

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. [ESV]

Mark, as do every gospel account of this, sets this between a confrontation with the religious leaders over divorce and a rich man who turns away from Christ clinging to his riches. The point is right in the center. Some will reject Christ because of religion and rules. Some will reject Christ because of treasures and riches. But those who enter the kingdom enter it like children, with complete, simple faith and trust.

The disciples see the children as a distraction and a waste of time. Jesus is indignant and rebukes them. This is a good reminder to us that our ministry must be so clear with the gospel that the standards are clear for the religious and the rich, yet the door is wide open to those who come like children, including the children.

So we are guided by these two important texts to embrace these two principles:

God has promised to save children who truly believe and repent.

Jesus has modeled an openness and willingness to receive children.

The Application in Church Life

The following is being given to the church by the Elders. It is our carefully considered guidelines and commitments as we thought through the inclusion of children in the whole of the church life. It is our prayer that this reflects a wise, cautious approach that still encourages and receives children truly profession Christ.

Beliefs:

The following beliefs will provide the foundation for child evangelism and incorporation at Clearcreek Chapel.

1. We believe God sovereignly moves the heart to embrace Jesus Christ and the Gospel.
2. We believe that one submits to God in the Gospel in repentance and faith.
3. We believe that true repentance recognizes the reality and extent of one's sin, seeks forgiveness and commits to rejection sinful patterns of behavior.
4. We believe that saving (true, genuine, authentic) faith requires the understanding of the facts of the Gospel, assent to their truthfulness, and submission to Christ and the Gospel as the only remedy for sin.
5. We believe that the basic facts of the Gospel include, but are not limited to:
 - a. The right of God to rule;
 - b. The fact of our corporate and individual rebellion;
 - c. The reality of judgment (death) upon the sinner;
 - d. The plan of God to substitute the death of the Son for some;
 - e. The work of Jesus in living a perfect life and voluntarily sacrificing himself for those who would believe;
 - f. The resurrection and session of Christ on His throne as the judge of the universe;
 - g. The necessity of an individual response of repentance and faith to the Gospel for salvation.
6. We believe that God can change the heart of children to embrace the gospel.
7. We believe that because of our sinful nature, children are very easily swayed to please those in authority roles (parent, teacher, pastors...).
8. We believe that false professions and false hope are extremely detrimental to the later embracing of the Gospel and to spiritual growth.
9. We believe that believing parents should participate greatly in the spiritual mentoring and development of their children.
10. We believe that baptism is Biblically mandated and exemplified to be a public testimony declaring one's faith in Christ and the Gospel.

11. We believe that the New Testament teaches that only those who have been baptized have the right to a public declaration and acknowledgment of union with Christ.
12. We believe that baptism as the public declaration of one's faith confers the full benefit of participation in the community of believers, the church, and is requisite for membership.
13. Even though they may be too young to participate in decision-making, we believe that believing children can and ought to participate in the worship, praying, accountability, and service of the church.
14. We believe that accompanying the declaration of faith in Christ there is of necessity a change in life where one is motivated to live in obedience to Christ. This does not imply a perfect obedience but cannot be without some evidence of its truth.

Commitments:

With the aforementioned beliefs in place the evangelization and inclusion of children at Clearcreek Chapel will have the following character.

1. We will present the Gospel regularly and clearly to the children of Clearcreek Chapel.
2. We will present a comprehensive view of the facts of the Gospel.
3. We will challenge children to respond to the Gospel in repentance and faith, and a public declaration through baptism.
4. We will not coerce or manipulate the young, impressionable heart.
5. We will shepherd and work through the parents (if at all possible) to assist in the recognition of the effects of the Gospel.
6. We will be careful to assess the authenticity of the response to the Gospel but not to the extreme knowing our inability to know the heart.

Guidelines:

When a child (someone less than 18 years of age) attending Clearcreek Chapel indicates that they possess faith in Christ in response to the Gospel, the following procedures will be observed to facilitate their incorporation into the church community life.

1. If the child declares their faith in the context of a Chapel ministry the ministry worker should, with the child, inform the parents of the child's statement and its context.
2. If the child declares their faith in the context of the home or if the family has been informed of the child's profession, the parents should interact with the child to assess their basic understanding of the Gospel and its implications.
3. The parents should consider whether there appears to be evidence that there is a new heart and motivation for obedience and life.

4. The parents should contact their elder(s) for counsel and encouragement and fill out the baptismal request form available from the Chapel office with the child.
5. The elder(s) should set aside a time to speak with the child and the parents to validate the child's understanding of the Gospel and verify their testimony and life.
6. The elder(s) should clarify any point of confusion the child might have with respect to the Gospel and its implications.
7. The elder(s) should explain the meaning and purpose of baptism to the child and family.
8. The elder(s) should explain the concept of church membership and community at a level the child understands.
9. The elder(s) will then present the child for baptism and membership for the next available baptismal service.
10. The flock that the family is assigned to should make special effort to affirm and encourage the child in their participation in the community of the Chapel.

Our Plan for Instruction and Implementation

September, 2007 – Series on Community

In September, as a part of the series on Community, two sermons relating to baptism scheduled as follows:

Date	Service	Title/Aim	Speaker
9/2/2007	AM	Mission and Vision – Our Challenge	Russ Kennedy
	PM	Covenant – Our Commitment	Greg Cook
9/9/2007	AM	The Pattern of Community - Trinity	Mark Schindler
	PM	The Gathering of Community – Evangelism	Dan Turner
9/16/2007	AM	The Promise of Community - Israel	Mark Schindler
	PM	The Mark of Community – Circumcision	Russ Kennedy
9/23/2007	AM	The Purpose of Community - Maturity	Mark Schindler
	PM	The Entrance into Community – Baptism	Russ Kennedy
9/30/2007	AM	The Practice of Community - Fellowship	Mark Schindler
	PM	The Support of Community – Stewardship	Chad Bresson

January 2008 – Family Enrichment Conference

Theme: Cultivating Grace in Children

Date	Service	Title/Aim
1/6/2008	AM	Children Living in Spiritual Homes
	PM	Helping Parents Develop Spiritual Homes
1/13/2008	AM	Children Coming to Christ through Evangelism
	PM	Helping Parents Bring Children to Christ
1/20/2008	AM	Children Professing Christ through Baptism
	PM	Helping Parents Prepare Children for Baptism
1/27/2008	AM	Children Sharing in Community at the Lord's Table
	PM	Helping Parents Prepare Children for the Lord's Table
2/3/2007	PM	Thinking Biblically about Baptism
		Thinking Biblically about the Lord's Table

May God grant that we will be faithful as shepherds in guiding and guarding the sheep. May God enable families to be pleasing to God in rearing their children. May God give His saving grace to our sons and daughters. May He be glorified as we grow and mature together.