

I. The High Gospel-Calling of all Christian Parents

Last week we saw that very carefully and very explicitly connected with the observance of Cover-over, and Unleavened Bread, and the Consecration of the Firstborn there is this very strong emphasis on parents teaching and instructing their children. We saw that this isn't just a suggestion, or even a really good idea, but a command.

- ✓ Exodus 12:26–27 — And when your children say to you, “What do you mean by this service?” *you shall say...*
- ✓ Exodus 13:8–10 — *You shall tell your son* on that day...
- ✓ Exodus 13:14–16 — And when in time to come your son asks you, “What does this mean?” *you shall say to him...*

Why is this parental instruction of children such a big deal?

- ✓ Exodus 12:14 (cf. 12:17; 12:42) — “This day [of Cover-over] shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; *throughout your generations*, as a statute *forever*.”

So we see that God, in His sovereignty and wisdom, has chosen to work *generationally*. We may take the whole idea of parents and children for granted, but this amazing, generational design of families is actually a key part of God's eternal purpose to call a multitude of people out of this world to worship and glorify Him.

- ✓ Psalm 78:1–7 (Deuteronomy 4:9–10; 32:46–47) — [The LORD] established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.

Having children is not about us, as parents, and it's not about our children. It's about the glory of God, and His kingdom. (cf. Mal. 2:15) Just this knowledge, in and of itself, should begin to shape our ideas about how we practically live out our calling as parents! (Purposeful and intentional, diligent and consistent, thorough and complete, earnest and joyful and humble.)

So what does Exodus say about the *content* of parents' instruction to their children? Even though I'll be talking especially to parents, all of this can also apply to *grandparents*, as well as to all of you who are *future parents* and *future grandparents* – and, as we'll see in the end, this will very much apply to *all Christians in general*. So what is it that we're supposed to be teaching our children?

II. The Gospel-centered CONTENT of parents' teaching and instruction (Part I)

“You shall say, ‘*It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s Cover-over, for he covered over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.*’” (12:27; 13:8; 13:14-15)

As we saw last week, as soon as this answer is given to the children, a whole host of other questions is raised. *Why* did Yahweh strike the Egyptians, killing all their firstborn? *Why* did Yahweh cover over and spare the houses of the people of Israel? What’s the *connection* between this lamb, and this blood, and this meal that we eat, and the striking of the Egyptians, and the sparing of the Israelites? And so these questions would in turn compel Jewish fathers and mothers to go back even *before* the exodus to God’s covenant promises to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, (cf. Deut. 6:20-25) and then even before that to God’s creation and the fall of man, and the curse, and the first promise of redemption, and then the flood, and God’s covenant with Noah. And, of course, all of this would lead parents to ultimately point their children not just backward, but forward to God’s final provision of redemption through a Messiah.

So in order to answer the child’s question, “what do you mean?”, there had to be a very purposeful, and a very careful communication of *history* and *theology*. Or to say it more plainly: The whole *reason* parents *exist* is so they can pass on the mighty, saving deeds of God (that’s history) and so therefore the truth about God (that’s theology) to their children. You see, the Gospel (which we all admit to be really important) grows out of history – *redemptive* history. It has its roots in a history that reaches back to creation, and also forward to the consummation of all things. And so if we are to faithfully teach the Gospel to our children, then we must teach them the entire *history* of redemption from beginning to end. This is what we might call the Big Picture, or the Big Story of God’s redemption. A fancier way to refer to this is Biblical Theology. Biblical Theology just means the revealing of God *in* the Big Picture of biblical (or redemptive) history. It is the responsibility of all Christian parents to teach their children the *whole* of biblical history because this history is the history of God’s redemption, and the Gospel cannot be *fully* understood apart from it.

Listen to what the resurrected Jesus said to the two who were walking on the road to Emmaus:

- ✓ Luke 24:25–27 (cf. 44-47; John 5:46-47) — He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets [former and latter], he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

See how a right understanding of Jesus is rooted in an understanding of the whole big picture!

- ✓ Acts 17:2–3 — [Paul] reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.”
- ✓ Acts 18:28 (cf. 18:5) — [Apollos] powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

- ✓ Acts 8:35 — Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture [Isaiah 53] he told him the good news about Jesus.
- ✓ Acts 28:23 (cf. 24:14; 26:22; 8:35) — From morning till evening [Paul] expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets [the entirety of the Old Testament].

Throughout the entire New Testament, and throughout the entire *Bible*, this big, overarching story of redemptive history is *essential* to the Gospel itself.

Now, can a child be saved apart from a thorough and comprehensive knowledge of this history – of this Big Picture, Biblical Theology? Yes! If that weren't the case, then most Christians today would never have been saved. But here's where we come to a huge problem in our day. In our day, even in solid and very conservative homes, the teaching of children has been limited to just enough teaching about the Bible to "get saved," have a personal relationship with Jesus, and then be a "good" Christian. (We might also add to this some teaching on issues like creation versus evolution.) Even if we wouldn't actually want to say this out loud, it can often be the reality in our homes. But what God commands all Christian parents to teach their children is how to *root* the Gospel in the history (in the whole big story) out of which it grows – in the history of redemption that begins in Genesis 1 and travels all the way, without any interruption, to Revelation 22. Recently, I was sharing this verse with our children:

- ✓ John 5:24 — [Jesus said,] Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

After marveling at the fact that a man in history actually said these words, I asked *why* we should believe these words. How thrilling it was to be able to say that we should believe and rejoice in Jesus' words because He didn't just come out of nowhere. Instead, He's the fulfillment of the *entirety* of the Old Testament Scriptures. Without Jesus, *none* of the rest of the story of God's mighty, redeeming works can make sense.

So how do we do this? How do we teach our children Biblical Theology? Well, the first thing that's going to be required is time. I would suggest that no child has ever received a theological education from his parents apart from regularly scheduled and consistent times of teaching and instruction. That's not to say that there shouldn't be spontaneous teaching just in the everyday living of life. There should be a great deal of this spontaneous teaching. But regularly scheduled, consistent times of teaching and instruction will also be a necessity. This doesn't mean long, and drawn out, and dry, and boring. Remember, this is the revealing of *God* throughout the entire history of *redemption*! So what this does mean is that we will need to discipline ourselves as parents to create the *habit* of *time* set aside for the teaching of our children. (This can happen in a whole myriad of different ways.)

But after "*time*," the second thing that's going to be required is *knowledge*. What *is* this biblical theology, and how do we teach it to our children? How do we teach our children the Big Picture of the Bible so they can take any one chapter in the Bible and see it *in light* of the *revealing of God* in the *history of redemption*?

Resources: (See list on page 9)

Notes on the resources:

- Resources for children are often excellent resources for adults (read *carefully* and *study* the Big Picture Story Bible!) If you didn't start teaching Biblical Theology while your children were young, then don't be afraid to teach your older children with the books that are still geared towards younger children. Read these with your children not only for their benefit, but for yours.
- Even if you're in the stage of using the "Big Picture Story Bible" with young children, make sure that you have read and grasped "God's Big Picture."
- No resource is perfect, because none are God's Word. As parents, you have to use resources (these resources included) with discernment.
- When we teach children the Bible using simple language, we often end up saying things that aren't true, or that are misleading. Watch out especially for any attempts to make the Bible more "cool" or "entertaining" than it really is. Watch out for text that turns biblical language into "slang." Watch out for imaginative and creative license (guesswork). Watch out for artwork that demeans the Scriptures or is unfaithful to the text. (I believe that how we read the text can strongly counterbalance the effect of cartoonish pictures).
- Most resources will have to be adapted to some extent to what you understand are the needs of your children. No author of any book is better able to know how to teach your children than you are.
- In the end, the best biblical theology is just a reading of the whole Bible from beginning to end. These are just tools to help that happen. It's impossible to teach our children Biblical Theology without reading the Bible to our children (Idea: Use Emerson or Egermeier to choose which passages to read from the Bible).

The goal of teaching our children Biblical Theology is that they might come to love and read for themselves the "un-watered-down," "un-doctored-up" Scriptures from beginning to end. A "course" in Biblical theology is never, ever finished! We simply go on grasping it, by faith, in deeper and more wonderful ways as we come to the Scriptures *in their entirety* over and over again.

We've seen, then, that God commands all Christian parents to teach their children how to root the Gospel in the history (in the whole big story) out of which it grows – in the history of redemption that begins in Genesis 1 and travels, without a single interruption, all the way to Revelation 22. In fancy language, this is "Biblical Theology" (or Big Picture theology) – the revealing of God *in* the Big Story of redemptive history. But then there's something else that should always be happening as the natural result of Big Picture theology.

III. The Gospel-centered CONTENT of parents' teaching and instruction (Part II)

As the story of God's redemption plan is unfolding in history, and as this story is being interpreted and explained in the Scriptures, we begin to notice various specific ideas or themes that are *essential* to the Gospel. For example, the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit in

creating, and then in *recreating* – in creation and in redemption. As we notice this theme growing and developing in our Big Picture theology, it's good and natural that our minds want to take what this passage says, and what that one says, and what this passage over here says about the work of the Holy Spirit and ***put them all together*** so that we can understand all the redemptive truth about the Holy Spirit *together* as a whole. We'll want to do the same thing when it comes to the truth about who we are; about sin; about who Jesus is and what He has accomplished; about salvation; about the Church, about the future; etc. It's by this same method of taking various parts of the Big Story and putting them all together in one place that we learn about something as essential to our salvation as the truth that God is a Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So what is this method called where we collect all the different parts of a single truth that's essential to the Gospel, and put them all together in the same place? The fancy name is Systematic Theology. Or maybe we could just call it Topical Theology.

Can you see how this Topical Theology is so very closely related to our Big Picture Theology? If we don't understand Big Picture Theology, then our Topical theology will be dry and lifeless, and maybe even forced and artificial. On the other hand, if we don't understand our Topical theology, then our Big Picture theology will stay very shallow, and we'll be far more likely to fall into wrong thinking and wrong beliefs. In the end, it should be almost impossible to separate completely between Big Picture theology and Topical theology. But when it comes to the theological education of our children (that just means teaching our children about our redeeming God!), it's very helpful to think of these things as two *separate* ideas.

So remember, in Topical theology this is all we're doing: We first think of all the different truths that are essential to a full, and thorough, and joyful understanding of the Gospel (God, Man, Christ, Salvation, Holy Spirit, Church, the Future, etc.) And then we search the Big Picture so that we can bring all the different parts of a single Gospel truth into one place and understand them together. But once they're all together in one place, we still have the wonderful benefit of knowing the history out of which they grew, and their place in the Big Picture theology. Having all the different parts of any one truth that's essential to the Gospel together in one place will always deepen our understanding and our joy, and it will also protect us from error, and help us to grow, and be firm and established in what the Bible calls "*the faith*."

- ✓ 1 Timothy 3:9 — [Those who would serve as deacons] must *hold the mystery of the faith* with a clear conscience.
- ✓ Jude 3–4 — Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for *the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints*. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.
- ✓ Colossians 2:6–9 — Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, *rooted and built up in him and established in the faith*, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.

- ✓ 2 Thessalonians 2:13–15 (cf. 2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Cor. 11:2) — But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. *So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to **the traditions*** that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.
- ✓ 2 Timothy 1:13–14 (cf. 1 Tim. 6:20) — Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, *guard **the good deposit** entrusted to you.*

Now, can a child be saved apart from a thorough and comprehensive knowledge of “the faith”? Yes! If that weren’t the case, then most Christians today would never have been saved. But this doesn’t change the fact that we are all accountable as Christian parents for the theological education of our children. It’s not enough to teach our children how to be saved, have a personal relationship with Jesus, and then be a “good” Christian. Instead, we must also teach our children, and instruct them in “the faith.” We must pass on to our children the “**good deposit**” of all the truths that are essential for a thorough and joyful understanding of the Gospel. That’s Topical Theology. We need to teach our children *all* that the Bible says about God. We need to teach our children what the Bible says about the Church. We need to teach our children what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit. Why? Because all of these things are truths ultimately essential to the Gospel – not to being saved, but to the Gospel that saves. These truths are what make up “the faith.” So how do we teach our children Topical theology? (Time/Knowledge)

Resources: (See list on page 9)

Notes on the resources:

- Remember: resources for children are often excellent resources for adults. If you didn’t start teaching Biblical Theology while your children were young, then don’t be afraid to teach your older children with the books that are still geared towards younger children. Read these with your children not only for their benefit, but for yours.
- Even if you’re in the stage of using the “The Ology” with young children, make sure that you have read and grasped “Big Truths for Young Hearts.”
- No resource is perfect, because none are God’s Word. Use with discernment.
- No author of any book is better able to know how to teach your children than you are.

A “course” in Topical theology is never, ever finished! We simply go on grasping it, by faith, in deeper and more wonderful ways as we come to the Scriptures over and over again.

IV. Conclusion: Keys to “Success”

So we see that our privilege and responsibility as parents (and especially as fathers) is actually to give our children a theological education – thoroughly instructing them in all the essentials of “the faith” (Topical theology) and in the knowledge of the one true God as He has revealed Himself throughout the whole history of redemption (Big Picture theology). That’s a big task, and it may feel overwhelming. But think about it! How could the one true God expect even the

slightest bit less from those to whom He has entrusted the stewardship of *His* children? – For they are not ultimately *ours*. So what are the keys to success? Here are some important things to remember.

First of all, in order to be teachers, we ourselves have to be learners. There's a sense in which it's true that we haven't grasped something until we're able to teach it. The writer of Hebrews says of all his Christian readers that "by this time" they ought to have been teachers. (Heb. 5:11-14) And so this applies not only to parents, but to all of us as Christians. We all need to be constantly pursuing our own theological education so that at various levels we might all be "teachers" of God's Word. (Faithfully read God's Word, use tools as appropriate, devote yourself to the teaching of God's Word on Sunday morning.)

Not only must we always be learning ourselves, but we must be full of humility and devoted to prayer. We never know it all, and we never have all the answers. So if we feel inadequate, that shouldn't lead us to discouragement, but rather to praying earnestly and depending only on God's grace.

A third key is to remember that in all our teaching our goal and prayer is first of all that God will give our children the New Birth – that they will be born again and brought from death to life as new creations in Christ. We cannot teach or instruct our children into the kingdom. This can only be a miraculous work of God's sovereign grace. So as we give to our children a theological education, we have to be careful that this theological education doesn't give a false assurance of salvation.* Instead, the goal of all theological education should be first of all that all our children are miraculously born again, and then second of all, that they are brought safely, in the end, into Christ's heavenly kingdom.

The final key to success that I want to share with you this morning is one that I will confess is closest to my own heart. We already talked about it last week, but I want to close with it again, this week. Listen to what the father in Israel was to say to his son.

✓ "You shall tell your son on that day, 'It is because of what the LORD did *for me* when *I* came out of Egypt.'" (13:8; cf. 12:27; 13:14-16)

The point of Unleavened Bread is not simply remembering what the Lord *did* when *Israel* came out of Egypt, but remembering "what the Lord did *for me* when *I* came out of Egypt. Nothing causes children to be more resistant and hardened to the instruction of their parents than instruction that doesn't flow from the heart. So one of the most important signs that what we say

* Jewish parents could assume in their teaching that their children were already members of the Covenant Community because they received the sign of the covenant (circumcision) at eight days old. But even in the Old Testament, there was a spiritually circumcised people *within* the people marked out by physical circumcision. (cf. Jer. 9:25-26; Acts 7:51) This spiritual circumcision of the heart was the ultimate goal of parents instructing their children. But the "spiritual circumcision" in the Old Testament was never marked out as a separate people with a separate covenant sign. They just always existed inside the bigger covenant community. In the New Covenant, however, this is exactly what we *do* have. Under the New Covenant, all who confess Christ and are born again, are marked out separately in the New Covenant community of the Church. And so in this New Covenant community, we no longer give the covenant sign (which is baptism) to infants, but only to those of our children who have given the evidence of the New Birth through true repentance and faith.

is actually flowing from our hearts is our faithfulness to personally identify with *all* that we teach. A constant theme in all our instruction of our children should be simply this: This is what the Lord has done *for me*. How can I speak of the wrath of God without reflecting on the fact that I myself was deserving of condemnation? How can I speak of the cross and forgiveness without gladly testifying to my own experience of God's mercy and grace? How can I recount the history of God's salvation from Genesis to Revelation, without joyfully claiming every part of this history as the history of my very own salvation? How can I communicate the truth about the Church without expressing my own delight in the Church as the true body of Christ? How can I communicate any single truth about God without failing to communicate that *this God is my God*?

- ✓ Deuteronomy 11:18–21 — *You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.*

If this was the responsibility of God's people under the Old Covenant, then *how much more* must it be our privilege and our joy as those who've seen the Old Covenant all *fulfilled* in the New? As parents, what is it that's "in our mouths" (cf. Exod. 13:9-10)? And to what extent is this truly just the outflow and the overflow of what's in our hearts?

A List of Suggested[†] Resources for the Theological Education of our Children

Level 1 (AND UP)

- Big Picture** – **The Big Picture Story Bible** (David Helm)
– **The Complete Illustrated Children’s Bible** (Janice Emmerson)
- Topical** – **Learn About God** (Carine Mackenzie)
– **Everything a Child Should Know About God** (Kenneth Taylor)

Level 2 (AND UP)

- Big Picture** – **Gospel Story Bible: Discovering Jesus in the Old and New Testaments** (Marty Machowski)
- Topical** – **The Ology: Ancient Truths Ever New** (Marty Machowski)

Level 3 (AND UP)

- Big Picture** – **The Big Picture Family Devotional** (David Helm)
- Topical** – **Training Hearts, Teaching Minds: Family Devotions Based on the Shorter Catechism** (Starr Meade)

Level 4 (AND UP)

- Big Picture** – **God’s Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible** (Vaughan Roberts)
– **Gospel Transformation Study Bible**
- Topical** – **In God’s School: Foundations for a Christian Life (based on the Heidelberg Catechism)** (Pierre Marcel)
– **Big Truths for Young Hearts: Teaching and Learning the Greatness of God** (Bruce Ware)

“Lay” Adults (AND UP)

- Biblical** – **The Kingdom of God: A Baptist Expression of Covenant and Biblical Theology** (Jeffrey Johnson)
- Systematic** – **Everyone’s a Theologian: An Introduction to Systematic Theology** (R.C. Sproul)
– **Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith** (Wayne Grudem)
– **Abstract of Systematic Theology** (James Boyce)

[†] All resources must be used with caution and discernment.