

Teaching Children the Whole Counsel of God

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Acts 20:27 - for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

D.A. Carson -

What he [Paul] must mean is that he taught the burden of the whole of God's revelation, the balance of things, leaving nothing out that was of primary importance, never ducking the hard bits, helping believers to grasp the whole counsel of God that they themselves would become better equipped to read their Bibles intelligently, comprehensively. It embraced

- *God's purposes in the history of redemption (truths to be believed and a God to be worshiped),*
- *an unpacking of human origin, fall, redemption, and destiny (a worldview that shapes all human understanding and a Savior without whom there is no hope),*
- *the conduct expected of God's people (commandments to be obeyed and wisdom to be pursued, both in our individual existence and in the community of the people of God), and*
- *the pledges of transforming power both in this life and in the life to come (promises to be trusted and hope to be anticipated).*

(Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching: In Honor of R. Kent Hughes, 2007, 177-178.)

Element 1 - A story-based chronological overview of the Bible which introduces children to the main character of the Bible – God – and acquaints them with key people, places, and events

- If we limit a child's scope of the many stories in the Bible, we will inadvertently also limit their view of the God of the Bible.
- Through a careful God-centered presentation of a wide array of Bible stories young children will begin to commit to memory important truths about God, truths that are repeated throughout the Bible in a variety of settings.
- Chronology is important as it reveals the order of events and the "cause and effect" or direction and progression of those events: creation, fall, judgment, and redemption. Young children need to see these connections if they are to make sense of the whole.

Element 2 - Biblical theology which focuses on the meta-narrative and overarching "storyline" of the Bible.

- Biblical theology sees the Bible as one complete, true story that progressively reveals God's redemptive purposes, which come to their complete fulfillment in the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

The message of Bible is the saving work of a holy God to reconcile sinners to Himself through the perfect life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, that God may be glorified forever.

- We need to show children that individual Bible stories are connected and all ultimately point to this main message.

Colossians 1:15-19 - the Bible is about Jesus and His redemptive work

Cautionary note: Just as we once may have underemphasized the importance of biblical theology, we must also not overemphasize it to the exclusion of other necessary disciplines.

John Piper -

Not only should the particulars of the Bible be seen in relation to the larger storyline of the Bible, but we should also realize that the story exists to reveal the particulars of God and his ways. And those particular glories of God are seen and enjoyed not mainly by gazing over the whole dazzling landscape of redemptive history, but by focusing on some particular thing God did or said inside the story.

(The Great Story and the Single Verse, 10/24/2012 at desiringgod.org)

Element 4 – Systematic theology that teaches foundational doctrines

Wayne Grudem -

Systematic theology is any study that answers the question, "What does the Bible teach us today?" about any given topic.

This definition indicates that systematic theology involves collecting and understanding all relevant passages in the Bible on various topics and then summarizing their teachings clearly so that we know what to believe about each topic.

(Systematic Theology, 1994, p.21)

- It creates important categories in the mind so that the child can recognize that different "things" or "beings" possess distinct qualities.

Systematic theology provides a structure by which foundational doctrines of the Christian faith can be learned. You are creating categories, assigning Biblical texts to those categories, carefully examining the information in those categories to come to doctrinal conclusions.

- Systematic theology provides categories that serve to guard against wrong interpretations of topics and specific texts.

Element 4 - An explicit presentation of the essential truths of the Gospel leading to a clear understanding of saving faith.

1. God is the sovereign Creator of all things
Implication - God made you. You belong to God. God is your ruler.
2. God created people for His glory
Implication - God created you to know, trust, and love Him most of all.
3. God is holy and righteous
Implication - God's commands are holy and righteous. You must obey God's commands.
4. Man is sinful
Implication - You have disobeyed God's commands. You are a sinner.
5. God is just and is right to punish sin
Implication - You deserve God's punishment of death and hell.
6. God is merciful. He is kind to undeserving sinners.
Implication - You must depend on God's mercy in order to be saved.
7. Jesus is God's holy and righteous Son
Implication - Jesus came into the world to save you.
8. God put the punishment of sinners on Jesus
Implication - Jesus died on the cross to be punished in your place.
9. God offers the free gift of salvation to those who repent and believe in Jesus
Implication - God tells you to believe in Jesus and repent of your sins and you will be saved.
10. Those who trust in Jesus will live to please Him and will receive the promise of eternal life – enjoying God forever in heaven.
Implication - If you are trusting Jesus for your salvation, you must follow Him.

(Helping Children to Understand the Gospel. Children Desiring God)

- While every lesson we teach should present important Gospel truths, not every lesson must explicitly present the entire Gospel.

Element 5 Moral instruction - the commands of Scripture which guide us in the righteous ways of God.

Deuteronomy 10:1-6 -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.

- God's law is a revelation of His character (Psalm 119:137; Romans 7:12)
- Moral instruction is not a relic of the Old Testament; Jesus' one recorded sermon was full of ethical teaching referring back to and expanding the Old Testament moral instruction. The New Testament is full of commands.
- God's law has a 3-fold benefit as described in The Reformation Study Bible ESV (2005, p. 264)

Its first function is to be a mirror reflecting to us both the perfect righteousness of God and our own sinfulness and shortcomings.

Moral instruction reveals our need for a Savior.

A second function, the "civil use," is to retrain evil. Though the law cannot change the heart, it can to some extent inhibit lawlessness by its threats of judgment.

Before and after faith → Moral instruction restrains evil.

It's third function is to guide the regenerate into the good works that God has planned for them (Eph. 2:10) The law tells God's children what will please their heavenly Father.

After faith→ Moral instruction guides us in what is pleasing to God, so that we might become increasingly conformed to the image of Christ.

Kevin DeYoung -

It sounds very spiritual to say God is interested in a relationship, not in rules. But it's not biblical. From top to bottom the Bible is full of commands. They aren't meant to stifle a relationship with God, but to protect it, seal it, and define it. (The Hole in Our Holiness, 2012, p. 45.)

Element 6 – Bible study skills to provide the necessary tools for rightly reading and interpreting Scripture.

Give the children Bible lessons and teach them for a class time; show them how to study the Bible and you teach them for a lifetime.

*2 Timothy 2:15 - Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, **rightly handling the word of truth.***

- Basic hermeneutics (tools of interpretation) and study skills in which the students do the following:
 - Ask "Who, What, Where? When? Why? and How?" of the text
 - Examine proper context - interpreting a passage in reference to the whole
 - Note types of expression - figurative language such as hyperbole, metaphors, analogies
 - Look for repetitions, lists, contrasts, and comparisons
 - Notice and understand nuance

- You can start giving children basic study tools and skills at a very young age. For example, by refraining from simply "telling" the students what the text is saying and instead asking some specific questions, you are training their study skills.

- Resources for teaching Bible study skills:
 - The Importance of Biblical Literacy for the Next Generation* (childrendesiringgod.org - free download)
 - How to Study Your Bible for Kids (Discover 4 Yourself® Inductive Bible Studies for Kids)*

Some diagnostic tests to determine if you are teaching the whole counsel of God...

1. Look at a span of 5 years – in those 5 years are you covering each of the six elements in age-appropriate and balanced proportions?

- Make a chart and evaluate each curriculum. Five years = 30 boxes to possibly check. Note “main” emphasis and then any secondary ones

2. Consider your current scope and sequence – from preschool to high school - and then ask if these key questions are being addressed:

- What is the nature of Scripture: its authority, clarity, necessity, and sufficiency?
- How do we know that God exists?
- Can you name and define 12 attributes of God?
- What is the Trinity?
- What is the chief end of God?
- Why did God create the world?
- What is meant by God’s providence?
- What are angels, demons, and Satan?
- Why did God create man in His image and likeness?
- What is the significance of God creating us as male and female?
- What is the chief end man?
- What is the essence of sin?
- What are the Old Testament covenants? What is the New Covenant?
- What are the 10 Commandments?
- Why did God give Israel the law? How was the law fulfilled in Christ?
- What was the purpose of Old Testament temple, priests, and sacrifices? How were these completed in Christ?
- What was the covenant that God made with David? How was it fulfilled in Christ?
- Can you name 8 Old Testament prophets? What was their primary role?
- Why did Jesus, who is fully God, become fully man when He came into the world?
- What is meant by the “kingdom” of God?
- What did Jesus accomplish when He died on the cross?
- What is the significance of Jesus’ resurrection?
- What are the essential truths of the Gospel?
- What are the elements of salvation? What must you do to be saved?
- Why did God send the Holy Spirit?
- What is prayer?
- What is the role of God's law in the life of a believer?
- What is the church - its nature, governance, and mission?
- What are the two sacraments (or ordinances)?
- What is the “priesthood” of believers?
- How is marriage a picture of Christ and the Church?
- What is the second coming of Christ? What will Christ do?
- What are the new heavens and new earth?
- Can you describe the main message of the Bible in one sentence?