

Truth78 Core Training Series

The Theological and Philosophical Foundations of Truth78 Teaching Resources

Introduction

We believe that if our children are to become mature disciples of Jesus, they must be given a theological education grounded in both the breadth and depth of Scripture—teaching them the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). Additionally, it must be done in an age-appropriate manner that instructs the mind, engages the heart, and implores children and youth to trust in Christ and walk in His ways. Paul’s words to Timothy can serve as model for us:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵and 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. ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.—2 Timothy 3:14-17

Acquainting children and youth with the Scriptures in this manner will involve exposing them to the actual *content* of Scripture, while also emphasizing a core set of *essential truths* (doctrines) regarding the Christian faith. In conjunction, there must be a focus on a call to personally respond to those truths (relational). Both are important. John Piper states:

Sometimes it is necessary to stress that Christianity is primarily a relationship with Jesus rather than a set of ideas about Jesus. The reason we do this is because no one is saved by believing a set of ideas. The devil believes most of the truths of Christianity. We need to stress that unless a person has a living trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord, all the orthodoxy in the world will not get him into heaven.

But if our stress on the personal relationship with Jesus leads us to deny that there is a set of truths essential to Christianity, we make a grave mistake. There are truths about God and Christ and man and the church and the world which are essential to the life of Christianity. If they are lost or distorted, the result will not be merely wrong ideas but misplaced trust. The inner life of faith is not independent from the doctrinal statement of faith. When doctrine goes bad, so do hearts. There is a body of doctrine which must be preserved.¹

Therefore, we must stress both the doctrinal and relational aspects of the Christian life. Our teaching resources are designed to emphasize and carefully balance these two.

¹ Piper, John. “Contend for the Faith,” a sermon delivered at Bethlehem Baptist Church of Minneapolis, Minnesota on November 25, 1984, copyright ©2015 Desiring God Foundation. Used by Permission.

Teaching the Whole Counsel of God

In Acts, Paul writes:

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

D. A Carson makes the following observation from this text:

What he 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).²*

One way to evaluate whether or not we are teaching our children and youth the whole counsel of God is to see if they can answer these crucial questions, with increasing biblical depth, as they grow and mature:

- What's in the Bible? Who is the Bible about?
- What's the main message of the Bible?
- What are the essential doctrines of the Christian faith?
- Why do we need to be saved? How are we saved?
- How are we to live?

At Truth78, we have identified and incorporated the following five elements (or theological disciplines) into our curricula scope and sequence and other teaching resources. We believe these five elements, interspersed at different ages and emphasized to varying degrees throughout these ages, comprise an appropriate breadth and depth of Scripture needed for teaching the whole counsel of God, and thereby, answer the above questions:

² Ryken, Leland, and Todd A. Wilson, editors. *Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching: In Honor of R. Kent Hughes* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2007), 177-178).

Bible Survey and Book Studies—an overview of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. In our curricula this is first introduced in the preschool years, by a chronological, story-based presentation that introduces children to the key people, places, events, and themes of the Bible. Most importantly, it emphasizes God as the Author and main character of the Bible. This provides children with a fundamental Bible foundation upon which the other elements will be built. In the older grades, individual books of the Bible are studied more in-depth.

Addresses: What's in the Bible? Who is the Bible about?

Biblical Theology—introduces students to the main storyline of Scripture, whereby God progressively reveals His redemptive purposes, which come to their complete fulfillment in the person and work of Christ, for the glory of God. Students are taught to see that the Bible's many diverse stories, written over time, all serve to communicate one, main unified message.

Addresses: What's the main message of the Bible?

Systematic Theology—a topical approach in teaching the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith. Systematic theology presents the Bible's teaching on various subjects, one at a time, and summarizes each topic based on the entirety of Scripture.

Addresses: What are the essential doctrines of the Christian faith?

Gospel Proclamation—an explicit and comprehensive presentation of the essential truths of the Gospel, leading to a clear understanding to the person and work of Christ and what it means to respond in true repentance and belief.

Addresses: Why do we need to be saved? How are we saved?

Moral and Ethical Instruction—acquainting students with the nature, role, and importance of God's laws and commands, the wisdom literature, and the moral and ethical teachings of Jesus and the apostles. This instruction is necessary for understanding God's character and standards and our need for the Gospel, and for guiding believers in righteous and godly conduct.

Addresses: How are we to live?

The Philosophy and Methodology of Our Teaching Resources

We believe children can grasp deep truths when taught in a careful, intentional, age-appropriate manner that constantly points to the end goal:

That the next generations know, honor, and treasure God, setting their hope in Christ alone, so that they will live as faithful disciples for the glory of God.

Toward this overarching goal, our curriculum and devotional materials incorporate a teaching philosophy and methodology that, in age-appropriate ways, are characterized by the following:

Nurture Faith

Our aim is to see that children experience true conversion and grow in Christian maturity. Therefore, our teaching resources stress an appropriate balance between clearly articulating the essential truths of the Christian faith and the essence of Gospel-living (Christian discipleship). Keeping this two-fold balance will challenge both believing and unbelieving children and students. Furthermore, it is important to note that, while not every lesson explicitly presents the entire Gospel, every lesson presents essential Gospel truths. Also each curriculum as a whole clearly communicates the Gospel.

Build Precept-Upon-Precept

Just as children are taught the alphabet before they are taught to write words and then sentences, biblical instruction is best grasped when taught incrementally with an intentional, step-by-step, age-appropriate approach³. Therefore, much care has been taken in the development of our curricula so that each lesson and each curriculum as a whole builds upon and expands upon the previously learned truths and concepts. This precept-upon-precept approach lays a strong foundation for helping children know and grasp deep truths, and also encourages them to increasingly respond to God's word in faith.

Instruct the Mind

If children are to know, honor, and treasure God through Christ, they must become well acquainted with His Word. Toward that end, they must be given the proper tools and skills needed for rightly studying, interpreting, and applying Scripture. Beginning in earnest in first grade, our curricula use an interactive teaching model that guides students to personally engage with the Bible. This model fosters critical thinking and reasoning skills that are important for confidence in and a defense of the Christian faith.

Engage the Heart

While we fully acknowledge that only God can bring Spirit-wrought, grace-dependent faith in Jesus and walking as His faithful disciple, we believe it is our responsibility to guide, inspire, and implore students toward a personal and sincere response to God's truth. What is learned in the mind needs to transform the heart and will. Therefore, the curricula include elements meant to challenge and graciously entreat students to love, trust, obey, and delight in God through Christ.

Influence the will

We believe true saving faith will be evidenced by a growing desire to walk in obedience to God. While this is dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit, God does expect His children to exert effort, choosing daily to trust Christ, submit to Him, and follow in obedience. Therefore, each

³ We understand that it is sometimes necessary to combine age groups in the classroom setting. Therefore, our materials give a targeted age range that includes multiple age levels.

lesson includes Scripture and discussion prompts that guide, challenge and encourage students to specific Christ-like thoughts, words, actions, and attitudes. Additionally, these discussions are set in a context of showing the surpassing worth and lasting joy of living life fully surrendered to the perfect will of Jesus.

Explore Further

Here are some free seminars and other related resources from Truth78 that provide further explanation and practical application of topics covered in this article:

Seminars

Making a Strategic Plan for Teaching the Whole Counsel of God
Teaching the Difficult Doctrines in Children's Ministry
The Importance of Biblical Literacy for the Next Generation
Engaging Active Minds in the Learning Process
Reaching the Heart: The Importance of Application
Communicating the Gospel within the Whole Counsel of God

Booklets

Discipleship Through Doctrinal Teaching and Catechism
Helping Children to Understand the Gospel