
From Home to Church

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Introduction

You may have seen, on occasion, two very handsome young men with chocolate-toned skin darting around in this building breaking about every rule Pastor Russ has ever laid out for young children in the church. They run, they wrestle, they push past, and squeeze through, they're on the floor, on the chairs, pushing buttons, pulling cords, raiding donuts, and ravaging bookshelves. They frequently don't respond too well when they are shown kindness by the adults around them, they at times don't respond when their parents call for them, and they can be impatient, self-centered, and short-tempered. In fact, just this past Wednesday night in an act of ultimate disrespect, the youngest of these two boys mooned me right in the middle of our flock meeting as I was leading a discussion. These boys' mom and dad, as inept as they may be, especially the dad, have a responsibility to train their children what it means to be a part of the church.

At their age, the task, even though quite limited in scope secondary to their immaturity, is really quite extensive. Yes, there are all the behavioral aspects - which if you have any advice for the parents of those children, just let me know, I can pass it on. But even as young as they are, it gets much more involved than this, doesn't it? By age 3 you are already diving into questions like, "Why are those people on the stage playing instruments? What is that basket going by? Why is that pastor pushing people under the water? Why can't I have a juice and bread r with you? Can Superman beat up God? Why do I have to sit here?"

Early on, I think many parents are proactive in using these opportunities to teach their children about what it means to be a member of God's family, to be a part of the church. At some point between early and late elementary, however, that intentional, frequent, and repeated teaching may begin to fritter away. Maybe we think to ourselves that by the age of 9 our children have been in over 800 church services, at flock meetings upward of 400 times...what else could they really need me to explain to them? We assume the learning is happening through some kind of organic osmosis. Maybe we're just too busy and distracted. Maybe we're afraid the questions will take us places we're not equipped or willing to go. Maybe we just don't think there is much more to be said. Afterall, they're not running, they're not abusing the furniture, and they are generally polite.

In any case, we cease to be intentional in regularly engaging our youth over what the church is and what it means to be a part of it. We've taken our foot off the pedal of that "everday-everyway" pattern we noted last week from Deuteronomy 6¹. This is a serious, if not critical, error. During the late elementary, middle school, and high school years their is such rapid cognitive, emotional, and social development that if we do not continue to shepherd spiritual development in a manner that

¹ Deuteronomy 6:1-20 ff.

helps our youth make *biblical* sense out of what they see happening around them, particularly at church, we run the risk that a wrong interpretation, either from their own hearts, or from someone else's lips, will creep in and put in place false teaching that quickly leads a naive and inexperienced youth quite astray.

So this morning, I want to take our time together to very briefly, at a very high level, give you a sense of what a few of the many conversations you might have with your youth could entail. Perhaps foolishly, I've endeavored to identify what I think are some of the more difficult conversations. [Pray]

Conversation 1: This Isn't Heaven, But It's Not the World Either.

Let's begin very foundationally with what can be a major stumbling block for a youth as they begin to be more perceptive and more sophisticated in their observations and thinking. Although the Scriptures make it abundantly clear, the harsh reality of sin and foolishness *in* the church can be disorienting, especially when it lands on your family's doorstep. The New Testament authors are honest and open about this. Let's peruse a few early church "situations" together.

- Beginning even before the church was officially established, Jesus is speaking to its soon to be founders, the future apostles. He is telling them that he is going to be delivered [into the hands of men](#), but they couldn't understand what he was saying. What they could understand, however, is that glory was at stake and they wanted a piece of it. This resulted in an *argument among them as to which of them would be greatest*².
- Early in the church's establishment, there was belief that the Gospel was for the Jews only. Peter has a vision to the contrary and experiences the presence of the Holy Spirit upon Gentiles when he calls them to belief. When he takes this very good news back to the brothers in Jerusalem, [the circumcision party criticized him saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them"](#)³.
- After having made his first missionary journey, the Apostle Paul decides that he and Barnabas should head out for a second round, revisiting those places where new converts had been made but [37 ...Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. 38 But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. 39 And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and departed...](#)⁴
- In the city of Antioch, between what were undoubtedly the two best known Apostles in the early church, a confrontation arises. [11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.\[a\] 13 And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"](#)
- Then there was the church at Corinth... About their communion supper Paul says [17 But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not](#)

² Luke 9:43-45

³ Acts 11:1-3

⁴ Acts 15: 37-39

⁵ Galatians 2:11-14

for the better but for the worse. 18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you... 20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. 21 For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. About the immorality amongst the church at Corinth Paul says It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife.² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you⁶. About the divisions among them Paul says But I, brothers,[a] could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ... For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? 4 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human [just like people of the world (NLT)]?

- And finally, in the joy, joy, joy book of Philippians, Paul finds it necessary in writing to call on others in the church to step in and help two sisters in the Lord. 2 I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 3 Yes, I ask you also, true companion,[a] help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

And we could go on! The early church, just like today's church, had no lack of trouble. So, let's make a few very basic observations together. First, the church is a complicated place. It would be foolish for us to claim to our youth that the church, either today or during New Testament times, was some sort of utopia. You name it, we got it - egoes, racism, prejudice, back-turning, public disputes, public confrontations, bullying, gross sin, disunity, man-worship, and garden variety strife.

Second, we can observe that problems in the church were certainly not swept under the rug. Yup, wow! It is all right here recorded for all of time and not a single jot or tittle will ever disappear. Granted, each one of these instances is recorded with a specific purpose as illuminated by its context, but the Lord could have chosen to simply give us a summary of what he wanted us to know and kept us out of the kitchen - so to say. But, he did not.

Which brings us to our third observation. The New Testament church did not sweep problems under the rug. That was the reason we finished up with the passage from Philippians 4 involving Euodia and Syntyche - because there it is so clear. Paul instructs others in the church to [help these women... agree in the Lord](#)⁷. That was nothing less than a command for the "true companion" and Co. to get involved in the situation with the biblical goal of reconciling these two women so that the [side by side labor in the gospel](#) might continue.

So when talking with your youth along the way, openly engage with them the mess, just as the early church so obviously does. Help them to see that the church is not a spa, it is a hospital. It is not a soccer team, it is a military rescue unit. It is not neighborhood community center, it is an embassy of the King of Kings. As soon as you deny the reality of the sinfulness and foolishness of the people in the church - or yourselves for that matter -, you deny the need for a Savior and his gospel. What sets the church apart from the world is not its morality, its harmony, or its humanitarianism - though all those things should be present - it is its dogged and determined allegiance to the person of Jesus Christ.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:17-22, 5:1-2, 3:1-4

⁷ Philippians 4:3, 2

Help young people to see the church for what it is and the gospel for what it is. Just as you teach them to keep their eye on the ball when a pitch comes in, or their eyes on the road when driving, teach them to keep their eyes on people in the church and to watch as situations play out - to identify the attitudes and actions biblically, and to marvel, as over time, the Lord works to transform his people before their very eyes. For, sooner or later, they will find themselves in the middle of their own complicated situation in the church and being no stranger to the fact that the Lord works in the mess will be of great help to them.

Conversation #2: You're Not Any Different

A major milestone in growth almost all youth must get past is the belief that they are somehow different than those around them at the church. That belief often takes on one of two shapes: I'm better than them OR I'm not as good as them. Both are self-deceits and both lead to the building of walls in the church, or what the New Testament often calls division.

1 Corinthians 12 addresses disunity and dysfunction in the church by using an extended metaphor about the body: *4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good... 12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by[a] one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink⁸.*

In almost every other organization in the world, there is some way of differentiating among members by some aspect that reflects their perceived ability - whether it be grades, stats, rank, title, seniority, beauty, eloquence, bank account, facebook friends or twitter followers, we love to know our place and to put others in theirs. The church utterly rejects this entire frame of mind. The question is not where do I rank, but where do I serve? Who do I serve? How do I serve? There are roles and abilities, to be sure, but these are identified for the sole purpose of knowing where, who, and how to serve. This destroys the logic of the world and often disorients the worldly. Your "rank" out there makes no difference, whatsoever, in here.

Therefore, believers are not free to erect walls based on perceived similarities or differences with others. Parents and youth, you must see that the church in its very nature rejects cliques, embraces bystanders, and breaks down barriers. There is nothing wrong with friends who are closer than brothers in the church, indeed, that is a natural byproduct of Christ's work. But there is something wrong with groups that subtly shut others out based on worldly criteria, individuals who willfully isolate due to a sense of superiority -or- inferiority. This kind of exclusivity is built on perceived differences. Those perceptions are the currency of the world - they have no buying power in the church. The church's economy turns this all on its head! All you have been given that makes you different and special has been given to you to build the body up, to pull walls down, to create unity and combat divisiveness.

As special and unique as your youth is, they are not any different when it comes to what brings the church together - sinners clinging by grace to a Savior who has miraculously rescued them and is day by day transforming them. The true differences that do exist have been given for the common good,

⁸ 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

not division. Disabuse your youth of the idea that they are special in a way that does anything else but indebt them to their brother.

Conversation #3: What's Wrong with Living Together

Being raised in the church is a privilege like no other. It brings with it, however, several risks that families must not lose sight of. Both of my boys love grapefruit. Whole or juiced, it's almost never turned down. A week or so ago, I was quizzing our oldest on where things come from - eggs, milk, syrup, he was batting 100%, and then I said, "Grapefruit?" He was clearly stumped. After a few seconds of crinkling his nose he mutters hesitantly, "Krogers?" Reuben loves grapefruit but he knows nothing of the tree that produces it.

And this is just how it can be with our youth. They have come to love the benefits of living amongst the body, but they either have never met, or have met and don't want to get to know, the head of the body, Jesus Christ. They neither love him nor his word. It is like couples who choose to live together instead of getting married. They want all the intimate and practical benefits of marriage, but they don't want to say, "I do" mainly because they don't.

As your children grow up in the church and rightly enjoy the resplendent benefits of living in its shade, there must be a continuous progression toward clarity with regard to their poise toward Christ. While we only have a moment to consider it, John 6:22-70, describes Christ's response to those who were merely freeloading. As the crowds, exposed to Christ's miraculous power and generosity, continue to seek him out, [26 \[He answers them\], "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27 Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal⁹.](#)

In a conversation that continues with the Jews, it becomes increasingly clear that there is a great distance between what the Jews want - a trade - obedience for benefits - and what Jesus demands - complete and total acknowledgment that he is the Son of God, worthy of all that is due to the Father. He wants their lives, with no terms. [66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.67 So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.](#)

Has your child come to know the Holy One of God? The relationship of your child to the church and the gospel can be a very sensitive point for a family. Every child is different, every family is different, every circumstance is different. What we must guard against however, is the emergence of individuals moving into adulthood, enjoying and participating in all the benefits of the kingdom, but never coming to terms with the King. For those of you wondering if baptism has a role to play in this, it certainly does. But it is not the whole picture as there are many youth baptized in the church at young ages who may be in the position I am describing.

We should attempt to be no less and no more clear than Jesus on this matter: [53 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Whoever feeds on](#)

⁹ John 6:26-27

my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. If the real, palpable, and even gritty, nature of the gospel is distasteful or completely lost on your youth, perhaps a conversation is in order. Perpetual “living together” in the long run, benefits no one. In the long run, Christ will not have it. I commend John 6 to you for more thought on this.

Conversation #4: Yes, We Really Are Serious About Protection

If you are here at the Chapel long enough, say one or two years, you and your children will be exposed to the process biblical of church discipline. If you spend a lifetime here, as many of you have, you will have witnessed it multiple times. Church discipline is the means that God has given us in the Scriptures to attempt to rescue sheep who are running headlong into danger. That is, members of this body who have chosen to consciously and persistently - despite counsel, warnings, and challenges - continue in sin that clearly takes them off of the path of growing in godliness.

We read an example of this in 1 Corinthians 5 at the beginning of this message, and we can read specific instructions in Matthew 18 - 15 “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector¹⁰.

Though there are a number of biblical rationale for church discipline, I want to mention just two this morning: Protecting you and protecting God’s glory. At the Chapel we have watched sin ravage, maim, eviscerate, and even end, lives. We’ve watched it destroy families. Destroy friendships. It has turned husbands against wives, children against parents, man against man, woman against woman, and sheep against the shepherd. The polluting, destructive, and lethal effects of sin are real. As a church we must address it by biblical means to contain its life-stealing attack on the individual caught in it and those around them. Those biblical means do not involve harming, punishing, or manipulating. Rather, they are replete with gospel-driven, hope-filled, compassionate and serious calls, sincere challenges, careful rebukes, specific instructions, and sober warnings, by a progressively growing number of people, to repent, to reconcile relationships, and to be restored. Ultimately, if the individual refuses such grace and help, they are put out of the church where, perhaps, they will be reached by the message of the gospel afresh.

If we fail to take biblical action in the case of those caught in sin, the purity of the church will surely dissipate and we will soon have a group of people that are indistinguishable from the world. When that happens, we fail to protect God’s glory. It is being defamed because his people no longer represent the power of his grace to transform his children. The church is reduced to just another hypocritical movement as riddled with inconsistencies and failures as a political party, always talking but never delivering. God is not glorified by a perfect people on this side of heaven. He is glorified by a forever repenting people who demonstrate to the world that the gospel is true by their love and unity.

Might I suggest that once your child is old enough to understand the basics, and that would certainly include all youth, that with every time church discipline occurs here at the Chapel, you take extended time to talk it through. Review the Scriptures, review what you are witnessing together, clarify what a believer’s actions are to be in such a situation as it moves through its various stages. And because

¹⁰ Matthew 18:15-17

discipline generally happens over a long period of time, there will be plenty of opportunity to pray together as a family for God's grace in the lives of all those involved. There may even be the opportunity to "go to your brother..."

Conclusion

Well, I still have two more conversations that I wanted to share with you - but I'm trying hard to stay within the allowed time this week. If you are interested, you can take a look at the manuscript and see those conversations tucked in at the end of the document following this conclusion.

So what do you need to remember...

1. First, the church is a complicated place. Your home is complicated place. No need to hide it. Call it what God calls it by using words from the Bible to accurately describe what is happening. Then, watch attentively together for the beauty of the transforming power of the gospel. Like a shooting star, it will light up what can appear to be a black and inky sky at times. And since we're talking astronomy here, also remind your youth that night is nothing more than a temporary shadow. Morning always comes.
2. Second, talk again and again with your youth about this metaphor of the body. As their powers of perception increase, make it a habit of talking about the gifts, skills, and abilities of others. If your youth is a believer, help them, and invite your flock to help them, understand the areas in which the Lord has gifted them. Talk frankly about how you see them handling themselves socially - in ways that bring the body together or pull it apart. Help them explore the self talk that supports the idea that they are some how different from other youth in a way that makes exclusivity okay. Urge them to see that when their biblically legitimate differences are exercised in the manner God intended, they will serve the common good, bringing his people together in a way that gives him glory.
3. If your youth seems to have developed a love for the benefits of the church, but not its Christ, wisely and carefully engage them in gospel-centered conversation. We're not Jesus, we can't see hearts¹¹ but because of the call to raise our children in the Lord, we do have the responsibility to be careful observers of our children and to impart wisdom to them. Be careful to listen first. Be careful to have worked through your own understanding of the situation with the counsel of the Scriptures and other mature believers. And be careful to not go years while watching your son or daughter enjoy the bride but never come to be known by the bridegroom Whatever harm you fear you may do in having such a conversation is decidedly far less than the harm done by never having it.
4. Finally, never let church discipline go unexamined with your youth. It is serious and it is sober but it is endowed with the weight of God's glory. Through these discussions there is almost a guarantee that an understanding of who God is in his holiness, and who is people are to be in their godliness, will take place. Such discussions can only land in one place, on the beautiful and merciful gospel of our great Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Let's Pray.

¹¹ John 6:64: 64 But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.)

Additional Conversations

Changing in the Open

Life in the body is to be characterized by a constancy of change. All believers are regularly about the business of putting off and putting on - this is the process by which we grow up into who we are as members of God's family. Paul says in Colossians 3... 8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self[c] with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator... Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony¹².

Putting off and putting on is not always a graceful act. Ever get your shirt stuck over your head? Have a clasp you cannot reach? Mismatch your socks? Tie your tie too long? Change takes a great deal of humility and we often need the help of others. In essence, it is regularly recognizing that I am wrong, I am sinful, I am foolish. By grace, I can become more loving. Because this happens in the church, it will often have a public aspect to it. Other people will see you changing AND you will see other people changing... Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,[b] 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God¹³. Prepare your teen for this. It requires a huge amount of grace toward others as well as genuine lowliness from ourselves - yet, it is exactly what the church is called to and it is exactly what brings the Lord so much glory - 5 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. 17 To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.[a] Amen¹⁴.

Saturation with Truth, Maturation in Relationships

How do youth grow? How do they mature in the Lord? Families often search for answers in all the wrong places - when THE answer is sitting in their laps...

In Ephesians 4 Paul sets out a pattern of body life and growth that situates a church's maturity squarely on top of its people growing through the teaching of truth in the church. 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds[a] and teachers [these are people with Word/speaking/teaching ministries],[b] 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, [for how long and unto what end?]13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood,[c] to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 [and what is the enemy of mature manhood that this teaching is to counteract?]

¹² Colossians 3:5-17

¹³ 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

¹⁴ 1 Timothy 1:15-17

so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes [wrong teaching from both inside and out can keep me from becoming mature in a way that allows me to productively engage the body, that may even cause me to harm the body]. [can you summarize this one more time? sure!]¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love¹⁵. I'm not sure I could ever say enough about how thoroughly this passage interconnects our life as a body together with the ministry of the Word. What youth and their parents must understand is that the means God has ordained for growing and maturing is through teaching the Word, applying it to life, in the context of the church. The temptations to find other methods is constant - but nothing can supplant this simple dynamic presented in Ephesians 4. This is how we grow.

¹⁵ Ephesians 4:11-17