

Christian Education in Biblical Perspective  
Teacher Convocation  
II Timothy 3:14–17  
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We will be looking at II Timothy 3. I was asked to speak to the convocation on education for this time. My credentials began at East Carolina University, not exactly the Athens of the East but in my sophomore year, I made the dean's list. Unfortunately, it was the wrong Dean, and he informed me that I could not come back to East Carolina to play baseball or anything else there. I hadn't worked in this thing called class or education. In my opinion if you can fog a mirror, you can graduate East Carolina University, but I succeeded in flunking out and was on my way to Vietnam in the Marine Corps after that.

Now, I'm constantly amazed that I get the privilege to be involved in a congregation that has two wonderful educational initiatives – Briarwood Christian School and Birmingham Theological Seminary. I get the opportunity to serve on boards of two seminaries and serve as adjunct faculty in a number of them. I always sit and think, how did I get from there to here? It's obvious that it's by the grace of God, God's sovereign, amazing grace. One of the reasons it's happened is because I realized the role of Christian education in my conversion and in my life. One of the reasons I'm grateful to be here is because I realized the importance of Christian educational leaders, teachers, coaches and counselors.

I took stock of my Christian life as I begin to make progress and sense God's calling in my life. I then realized I was going to be involved in education the rest of my life. I'm even called in the Bible as a title, Pastor Teacher. Then I took a look at the role of education in Christianity. I think the best way for me to do this is to simply read a text and give some thoughts from it. This is a text of the biography of one of the most amazing men who God called to serve, who was trained under one of the most amazing men that God ever called to train up others. His name was Timothy and the one that trained him was the Apostle Paul. Paul, knowing he was going to die, the very last thing he writes is II Timothy.

When you know you're going to die, you're going to write and/or communicate to someone special. Timothy, Paul's son in the faith, is who Paul wrote to – the one that basically he's putting his mantle upon, as Elijah did with Elisha. From that, we get some biographical insight into Timothy and Paul's heart for Timothy and I think there are a couple of things there that are more than applicable to you and me.

First, let's take a look at that biographical note in II Timothy 3 and many of you are familiar with this passage because it's the one that affirms the inerrancy and infallibility of God's Word, that God's Word doesn't come from man about God but it comes from God to man. That specifically comes from II Timothy 3:16-17 but I want to back up some.

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

Note the order in verse 14 – continue in what you have learned, have believed, know. We believe in verbal plenary inspiration and that means we believe every word is God given and

verbal plenary means the grammatical construction which includes the order of words. There's a reason the law of God comes in the order it does, the fruit of the Spirit comes in the order it does. There is a reason for order in the Scripture – not only the vocabulary of the Scripture, but the grammar of the Scripture is that which God has given to us.

When he says 'firmly believed' it refers to saving faith, not empty, vain faith for that doesn't firmly believe, but saving faith that is God given for by grace. Ephesians 2:8-9 says [8] *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* So, this saving faith is a gift of God to connect you to Christ as Lord and Savior and Timothy firmly believes, but he can't believe it until he hears it.

He hears it from those he has learned it from. Praise God by God's grace, he has firmly believed it. We cannot give our students faith, but we can give them the word of faith, who God is, what God has done, and what they need to know about Him in order to come to Him and believe in Him. Now, in Timothy's case, we don't know who all he learned these things from, but we do know it included Paul. It included his mother and his grandmother. So note that he has to learn it and believe it.

Here is another point I want to give you. You cannot and nor should you think that you can give your students saving faith, but you can bring them the truth in love. They can hear that they might learn and you're objective, though, while you can't give them faith in Christ, that is your objective. It's not just they get a good grade on the test and you get a good evaluation at the end of the year. You want them to believe in the God of the Word, when they learn the Word of God in your class and in your discipline. Then according to this text, they firmly believe it, knowing from whom they have learned it, and that that would be you as well as others.

When the text says 'from childhood you have been acquainted with sacred writings' there we see elementary education and secondary education and the importance of God's Word which is the task of education. It goes on to say 'which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus' and there is the ultimate success of education – that they've learned of Him from Him, and they've come to Him.

Someone asked me one time, 'What is your hope and prayer in every educational institution?' That it would be a great commission school that has a great commandment culture of loving the Lord with all their heart, mind, soul and their neighbor of as themselves and every student will be able and equipped to walk out of there not only with a new heart, a new record, a new life, a new family, a new home, but a renewed and renewing mind where every thought is taken captive unto the obedience of Christ (II Corinthians 10:5).

Here are a couple more thoughts. You are engaged by God's calling in Christian education but before we deal with the adjective Christian, let's look at the noun education. What do we mean by education? We could do a conference on that, but I'm just going to give you a couple of thoughts about what is education, period, whether it's in what, wherever it's found. If someone said to me, what is it you want an educator to do as a teacher or what is education in general? I believe an educator and true education is marked by these five things.

Number one, you're giving people the ability to observe life accurately and clearly. You are giving them the lens through which they look at life accurately. You're giving them a world view. When I see that rainbow, what do I think of and what do I

know in terms of God's creation as to how it gets there? What do I know in God's work of redemption and in the covenant with Noah, why He plants it there and what is it pointing to? When I see the mountains that have been raised up out of valleys and valleys made into mountains, how is it I look at this in terms of God's creation laws and God's purposes? We give people the ability to observe.

In other words, God has revealed Himself in general revelation, and God has revealed Himself in special revelation. An educator wants people when they look at life, whether it's through the lens of a math class, a science class, a history class or a Bible class, we want to give them the ability to see that, and process that.

Secondly, an educator then gives people the heart and desire when they are observing it through the filter given them in education, they thoughtfully analyze it.

Thirdly, they come to logical conclusions. Now our God is supra logical. Our God is supra rational, but He is never irrational or illogical. So, we want them to be able to observe phenomena all around them when it comes to them.

Fourthly, we want them to be prepared to respond to the opportunities and challenges of life.

Fifthly, that means we want our education to contribute to the formation of their life. We call it lifestyle. We want them to come out with a lifestyle as educators. Now add the adjective. I will confess to you that I was not listening much in my 11th grade English class, and I remember the teacher, her name was Mrs. Swain. She's one of the sweetest ladies that's ever lived, but I do remember one day she said – “if you want to communicate well, focus on adjectives and adverbs and remember this; the adjective and adverb always controls.”

So, in a baptism where people are named, you're baptized in the name of Christ. I have all kind of names that I have by virtue of creation. I'm a man. I'm a man who is a husband. I am a man who is a father and praise the Lord. I am a man who is a grandfather, which is God's reward for not killing my kids, but educating my kids and in God's Providence, I'm an American. I have an ethnicity in God's providence and in all of that, those names are in my life. They don't jettison when I become a Christian, but they are all defined by the Name at my baptism. I am a Christian man. I am to be a Christian husband. I am to be a Christian father, a Christian grandfather. It is the supremacy of Christ and who He is that calls me to be and do what I'm supposed to do. What I was named in my sin I don't want to ever name me now. I want Christ to be exalted and that's always because of God's grace. That didn't start with me. I was just the beneficiary of God's work in my life.

So you're an educator. You want to teach people how to observe life, how to thoughtfully analyze what they're observing, how to logically come to conclusions, how to respond to it appropriately, and then finally create a lifestyle that's ever maturing through that educational process, but now that is modified by this; you are a Christian educator. That means you're giving them the framework of God's Word to understand life. You want them to see life through the Scripture, which is able to equip us for every good work; not only through the inerrancy of Scripture, but the sufficiency of Scripture that equips us for all of life.

When I went to college, I will never forget this. After I was converted, I went back to East Carolina, got my grade point average back up. I actually found out my head could be used for something other than a baseball cap and a golf visor. I said to my wife, when God called me into ministry, “Honey, I can finish school here and there's a lot of ministry I can do at East Carolina, but I don't think I'm going to get equipped for ministry here.” So, I began to look, and it came down for me to three colleges. I love all three of them – Toccoa Falls Bible College,

Columbia Bible College, and then Covenant College. I end up going to Covenant College, which at that time was under the unbelievable impact of Dr. Francis Schaeffer and the importance of world view education, to look at all of the world through the lenses of Scripture. This is a Christian college. I thought I'd get history, science, history and math Bible but I was getting history, science, math, philosophy, humanities and Bible is the framework, the foundation and the filter by which I'm learning everything. I said to my wife, "Please pray I'll be a good steward of this for the next three years."

This is what education does. It's a great commission, education, a great commandment, culture, and people that think Biblically taking every thought captive unto the obedience of Christ. So Christian education does education through the framework, foundation and the filter of God's Word and by reliance not upon our abilities, not upon our technology but upon God. I'm praise God for technology, although I don't understand any of it. I have to ask my two granddaughters usually how to operate it and to understand it. I've never yet figured out how to put an app on my phone yet, but praise the Lord, I have two granddaughters where I just give it to them and it's done.

Here's what I do know. Whether it's my preaching, teaching or whether it's in a classroom or wherever you are, we are utterly dependent and reliant upon the Holy Spirit to make us faithful, accurate, clear, and by God's grace, productive, because only He can bring the fruit in the lives of those that are listening to them. Only He can give eyes to see and ears to hear. Yes, we can have an orderly and ought to have an orderly classroom. Yes, we ought to give the best resources we can possibly do, but ultimately, the Spirit of God has got to take it home, because the issue of education is to deal with the heart through the mind. The heart of the problem is the problem with the heart. The new heart comes from speaking to the mind to the heart, utterly reliant upon the Spirit of God.

I love the passage in Luke 24:13-35 where on the road to Emmaus there are these confused disciples who can't make sense of what has just happened and there are these women telling them Christ has been resurrected. Jesus is walking alongside of them as peripatetic teaching is going on, and He says, "Why are you so sad?" And they start telling Him everything.

Then it says in Luke 24:25-27, 32, [25] *And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! [26] Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" [27] And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.*

[32] *They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?"* So, those who were slow of heart, had a burning heart. He opened their eyes, open their mind and opened their heart. Only He can do that but we can open the Scriptures and teach our discipline in our class from the sufficiency of God's infallible and inerrant Word.

So you are framed by God's Word as a Christian educator, you rely upon the Spirit of God, and you bring all the focus to Christ and there you come to the focus point; that they might fix their eyes upon Jesus, that Christ is preeminent in all things, and they have to be taught their need of Christ, the sufficiency of Christ, and that Christ is their life. Christ is not an additive. Christ doesn't fill in the gaps. Christ is our life, for to live is Christ.

As I close, I want to make just three comments for you to think about. When you think of education don't just think school for education goes on in a family, a Sunday school, a playing field, etc. Education is going on all the time. I have a little qualm here. We say 'Here's their curriculum, and then out here is their extracurricular.' Actually, I don't think out there is extracurricular because whether it's a choir or a football field or a baseball field, I think they're doing some serious learning. I like to think of that as part of the curriculum, because I do believe in peripatetic. I think you model and you mentor.

If you take our greatest education goes on in the classroom then I've got news for you. They're watching us in the hall. They're watching us in life and that is what brings it home. As you walk by the wayside and as you live, they are watching. Educators not only do it by talking, but by walking. Educators not only mentor, but they model. So as you walk with the Lord, think Christianly and begin to work in their life, my first comment is remember this; Christian education is foundational to life. God's Word is comprehensive.

That's why in Matthew 28:18-20, the Great Commission tells us to make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to pass a test? No. Teaching them to observe all that I (Jesus) have commanded you. It's not because their works save them, it's because they need to know their Savior. They need to know how to follow their Savior. They need to live dependent upon the Savior and lifting Him up. Yet they need teachers. Christian education is foundational to the Christian life.

Secondly, Christian education is perpetual. It never stops. We never start for the II Timothy text says to continue in what you've learned. Dr. Frank Barker went to be with the Lord earlier this year and I miss him every day. Whenever I would come in to the office and go by his to stop and see him, unless he was talking to somebody, there was always one of two things he was doing. He would either be reading or he'd be praying. Would you like to know how much I've learned about life from that? Not only what he taught about it, but what he did about it? Here's something I'll never forget. Infallibly and almost inevitably he would look at me and say 'Harry, how's it going?' "Good." "Well, praise the Lord. What have you been reading?" I'd say "What is it you think I need to be reading?" The last time he asked me that was three weeks before he died. What do I need to be reading? Great teachers never quit learning because they want their students to always learn.

I have news for you. We're not only going to learn the rest of our life here; we're going to learn forever in eternity. We'll never know Him exhaustively. We can know Him intimately. We can know Him accurately. We've got plenty to learn forever.

Thirdly, and finally, Christian education is directional. You're pointing people to Jesus, not to you. I had a great moment in my life as a youth pastor. One of my pastors who I was youth pastor for, came up to me one day, and said, "How's it going?" I said 'Pretty good, I think the kids like me.' He said, "Well, I'm glad to hear that, but that's not why you're there. Don't confuse them liking you with them loving Jesus. That's why you're there." My success is not that I'm successful or I'm liked or I'm applauded. My success is to be faithful so that they know Jesus. Certainly, be as likable as you can and speak the truth in love, but the objective that you have to remember is, it's not about you. It's about them knowing Him now and forever through a math class. Turn algebra into an evangelistic crusade. There are many of us who will thank the Lord for you, and that's what God can allow you to do. I've met such teachers and I'm grateful to look out upon such teachers.

A book I was reading recently, I highly recommend to you. It's titled Black Dragon: The Experience of a Marine Rifle Company in the Central Pacific, by Steven D. McCloud. It follows

a rifle company in the Marines that fought through World War II. They were almost in every major engagement. McCloud is a good writer who sent me the book and wrote me a note. It's a bestseller and a great read. He said in his note, "Harry, just follow this rifle company. When I tell you this, I'm summing up the book, but don't not read my book. This company was just made up of some boys that were in the Marines in World War II, and they had a job to do; win the war. They went over there and put their mind to doing their job; win this war, and then get home. Not all of them got back home living, but they went to win that war." I love this quote from him, 'Everyone went to win and they went to win as one.'

That's what I pray for you, that we go to win for Christ as one because it's about Him and those we teach, not us. We get poured out and that's what fulfills us. Then we get to go home and we get to praise God for the fruit He grants us. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for the moments that we could spend together in Your Word. I thank You for Jesus. Thank You for all that You do in our lives and through our lives. I want to thank You for every one of these very gifted people (educators) who love you, the love for their students and their love for their calling, but yet we live in a sinful world. We have sin within us. We have sin outside of us. We have sin in the lives of those whom we're trying to teach and we have all of the inadequacies of those who are around us, but give us the grace to love each other, function together, united by Your Word, Your Spirit in the preeminence of Christ for the glory of the Father, and that You might lead others to Yourself and matured them for life through us that their life is in Christ. I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.