

THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER

by

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CHAPTER TWO

Reaching the Personality

WE HAVE seen that the teacher is one who helps somebody else to learn. We have also seen that the learner has a capacity for knowledge, and have noted the means by which it is acquired and assimilated. We have been studying man's marvelous intellectual equipment, and the means by which knowledge can be introduced and preserved. But, while we have been reaching man's mechanism, we have not reached man. It is one thing to teach the Bible, and quite another to teach John. The fundamental of teaching is getting a response. It is quite possible to store the mind with knowledge and even stimulate the memory to retain it without in any way affecting the individual.

I. DEFINING PERSONALITY

1. The immaterial being.

What is personality? In the first chapter we said that the human being was a triad creature, composed of body, soul, and spirit, and that while the body was the instrument for world-consciousness, the soul was the expression of self-consciousness. The soul is the immaterial, invisible, immortal part of man. It was created by God and placed in the body of clay that He had made. It was not made of dust, and does not return to dust.

“Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.”

In the process of creation, man became a “**living soul**” (Genesis 2: 7). I am a “**living soul**,” but I have a body which is “**dust of the ground**.” The body is the machine, but the soul is the machinist. The body is man's servant. Through it he learns the facts about the physical universe, and with it he adjusts himself to the world in which he lives, or makes the world over to conform with his ideals. Man is not the slave of his environment.

We need not be disturbed because we cannot describe the soul or locate it in our physical organism. Sometimes it seems to be wholly resident in the body, for it drives the body and in turn is affected by the body. Again, as in dreams and imaginations, it seems to be able to transcend the body.

Old Testament writers do not try to define the soul, although they assume its existence. They speak of the longing soul, the thirsty soul, the sorrowing soul, the striving soul. Their use of the word makes it synonymous with man's real self. It is affirmed but never argued that the soul derives its existence from God, therefore it is imperishable. Man is more than a cunningly devised organism of muscle, nerves and brain cells. He is a God-given individual, with the power of choice, will, and self-control. Personality exists where there is intelligence, feeling or emotion, and will. It is more than mere consciousness that is possessed by an animal. It is self-consciousness. It is more than mere determination, since even animals determine their actions in the light of external circumstances. Man has self-determination, or the power to act in accordance with his own free will, which is frequently contrary to the influence of external circumstances.

2. The sovereign being.

Bodies differ from each other, and it is impossible for us to find two that are exactly alike in every detail of construction. Even twins will have some physical difference which enables us to distinguish them. But even if it were possible to find two bodies exactly alike, we have yet to discover the duplicate of the soul. In fact, we generally distinguish twins by personality traits rather than physical differences. One of the most profound thoughts for mankind is that each individual has been created directly and differently. His personality is distinctive, and when he does not attempt to ape someone else he comes to be recognized and appreciated because he can be distinguished from everyone else. We find not only that the soul is not duplicated, but that each is highly privileged. The mechanic can have absolute control over the machine, no matter how complicated it may be. This, likewise, is the soul's privilege and power.

Above all, man has a will that is entirely his own. *Will is the name for the mind's power to act.* It is personal, and ties persons and things to itself. In an active will man conceives of himself as having dominion over other selves or other objects. The will is the personal self, conscious of its power over its environment. It moves everything else to suit its own purpose. It transforms people and things to its own ends. A dominant will exercises great power over other wills.

II. CONTACTING PERSONALITY

How does the teacher contact the personality? He must do more than hear a recitation. A lesson is not necessarily learned when it has been committed to memory. Even when the pupil understands the meaning of the words memorized by him, it may be only a rote-recitation that he gives to his teacher. The lesson may have reached his mind, but not his soul.

Dr. H. Clay Trumbull tells of an experience he had when a young man teaching a Sunday school class of wide-awake boys (Trumbull, *Teaching and Teachers*, p. 19).

It was in the days of the old question book, long before the advent of the uniform lesson. The book used was one in which every answer was printed out in full just below the question. The ordinary practice of the pupil was to memorize the answers, while the teacher's task was to hear the recitation.

Now it happened on a certain Sunday, the lesson was “*The Walk to Emmaus*,” and the first question was, “Where is Emmaus?” As Dr. Trumbull started to ask the first question, he recalled that the pupil on his right had been absent the previous Sunday. So instead of asking the anticipated question in the book, he inquired, “Where were you last Sunday, John?” Quick as a flash the answer came back, “Seven and a half miles northwest of Jerusalem.”

“Well,” said his teacher, “you certainly are excused for not being here.”

But, Dr. Trumbull points out, the lesson he learned that day was that hearing a recitation could by no means be called teaching. The memorizing of words is in itself no more the securing of ideas than is the buying of books the securing of knowledge. Teaching is not complete unless it in some way affects or influences the pupil.

1. The receptive contact.

Teachers whose only aim is to reach the mentality are making only a receptive contact with their pupils. This is a common teaching practice, whereby one seeks to hand down to the learner an accumulated stock of knowledge and learning. When I was teaching in the higher commercial school of Kobe, Japan, I noticed that my Japanese students were accustomed to take copious notes, writing down verbatim almost every word they heard in the classroom. These were later copied into a vast array of notebooks. By the time the student graduated, he would have accumulated several shelves of well-filled volumes.

On one occasion a graduate carefully packed away these valuable notebooks in a large trunk, which was later taken down to the wharf to be placed in the boat in which he was to embark for his home in Tokyo. In getting the trunk on board with some other baggage, the rope broke and the trunk plunged into the sea. The heart-broken, bewildered student gazed upon the sad catastrophe and then telegraphed his father, “I do not know what to do; I have lost my education.” He had acquired knowledge without appropriating it.

2. The responsive contact.

In sharp contrast to the receptive contact is the responsive contact. It deals with persons. *Its end is the growth and culture of persons, the enrichment of their character, and the enlargement of their outlook on life.*

A responsive contact is made when you give first consideration to the interests and understanding of your pupils, and the questions which they ask. Your aim will be not only to secure a response from the pupil, but to make him feel responsible for his instruction. A study of the nervous system will better enable us to understand our objective. Running from the brain in all directions is a double set of wires, which transmit the most delicate stimuli. One of these wires is the sensory nerve. Its function is to carry communications to the brain.

Paralleling it is the motor nerve, which conveys the return communication from the brain. The sensory nerve receives the impression, the motor nerve returns the expression. The sensory nerve is the servant of external influence. The motor nerve is the executive of the personality.

It can readily be seen that while part of the mechanism of the human body is for the purpose of receiving impressions, an equal amount has been reserved for the use of the operator. Getting a response or reply to our impression is an evidence of life.

In the dark I stumble over the dog. Almost immediately there is an expression to my impression. But that yelp of the dog, while an evidence of life, is not an intelligent or individualistic expression. Only impressions that stimulate an intelligent response are the evidences of a personality. Leadership will be developed in proportion to the opportunity we give in our program for individual thought and expression.

3. Teaching that interests.

The teacher has reached the mentality when he has imparted information, but his contact with the personality will depend upon interest.

Attention is the first response of a personality to the stream of knowledge that is flowing through his senses. In another chapter more will be said about the importance of gaining attention.

However, it is difficult if not impossible to sustain attention without interest. Interest sometimes has to be created, but generally it is alert and curious about anything that concerns self. It is strictly a personal relationship.

a. Personal information.

Dr. A. H. McKinney illustrates this with the account of a lady walking on the beach of one of our popular summer resorts (McKinney, *Practical Pedagogy in the Sunday School*, p. 97).

Her attention was attracted by a group of persons some distance away. The group soon increased to a crowd. On inquiring, she learned that the body of a man had just been recovered from the waves. Pressing forward to learn more, she was startled to find that it was her own son. Mere attention was instantly changed to deep interest, for she had been touched at a vital spot.

Newspapers understand the value of the personal field. The slogan of many a country paper is, "Every name in print a subscriber." The country editor has learned that his subscribers are primarily interested in having their names appear in his paper even if they are not connected with any extraordinary happenings. What has to do with ourselves and our immediate friends will always command our interest.

Teaching that interests must be related to the everyday life of the pupils. The teacher who does not know the everyday life of his pupils has no point of contact through which to interest them.

b. Comprehensive information.

Interest will never attach to what the mind cannot grasp. It is like the static that comes over the radio and prevents a clear hearing of the broadcast.

Language chosen to express the thought may not have been sufficiently simple to be understood. Empty words devoid of meaning will never stimulate interest. Information that is beyond the grasp of intelligence cannot secure interest even if provided in language that can be understood.

It may concern matters with which there has been no previous contact. Information must have sufficient connection with personal experience, and be sufficiently close to things that are known and appreciated if it is to be comprehended. The new must be related to something old and familiar in the mind to meet a warm welcome.

c. Living information.

The soul is the expression of life.

It is only natural then that interest attaches to action. It is the movement we detect in the window display that arrests our attention more than the beautiful decorations and the unique design. Words of action captivate more quickly than adjectives of explanation and description. The story that is full of life and movement makes stronger appeal than a beautiful painting. The soul not only responds to life, but seeks to put life into others. The reason we learn by doing is that we are more interested in doing than we are in listening. All good teaching, therefore, will appeal to interest by providing the fullest possible opportunity for participation in the lesson. The pupil is not only interested in living things, but is anxious to make his own contribution to keep them alive.

d. Vivacious presentation.

Life begets life. A teacher who is full of life is seldom troubled by lack of interest and attention. The teacher is the model unconsciously accepted and imitated by his class. He leads the way in interest. A mechanical and lifeless teacher cannot command interest. After all, a great school must be the expression of great personalities. It is the pupil's contact with life and not with books or inanimate things that really affects his own life. It is hard for us to realize how successfully the apostles and their successors carried on by an oral ministry. Textbooks were unknown and even the words of the Lord Jesus were not committed to writing until thirty years after His resurrection. But the apostolic school was the burning expression of great personalities. Their characters were caught, not taught, and the world's contact with their lives and not their books made an indelible impression upon it.

III. DEVELOPING THE PERSONALITY

1. Appropriation of knowledge.

Let us again refer to the physical realm. We eat to live, but the acquisition and even the assimilation of food has not as yet contributed to that end. It must be appropriated to be of any real value. God has marvelously arranged the mechanism of the body so that when food is properly digested, it is taken up by the blood and carried to the extremities, to restore worn out portions. Thus the food eaten and digested actually becomes a part of us.

In the same way, only when knowledge is appropriated and enters into our life sufficiently to govern and influence our acts is it of any personal value.

The teacher has not finished his task when he has taught his class so much subject matter - so many facts, maxims or lessons. Indeed he shall need to teach them all these things and teach them well, but he must ask himself, "What have these things done for the boys and girls of my class? What has been the outcome of my teaching? How much effect has it had on their life, character, and conduct?"

The evidence of real learning is to be found in the changes or modifications of behavior that occur in the life of the learner. In other words, has the teaching-learning process made a difference in the pupil?

How do we know knowledge has been appropriated?

Largely from the response that is secured from the question "Why?" As long as one is content to use the word "What" in making his inquiries, replies may be only factual knowledge that has been acquired and stored in the library of the human intellect. But when the question "Why?" is asked, the operator must do more than tap his resources of knowledge. He must express himself.

a. Expressing an opinion.

Knowledge is appropriated when a personal opinion has been expressed. "I think" is the response of the individual to his reaction to the inquiry. The solicitation of personal opinion will call for self-expression, and constitute a distinct contribution of the personality.

When our Lord was seeking self-expression on the part of His disciples upon the all-important matter of His deity, His first question was of an impersonal nature, "**Whom do men say that I am?**"

There were various replies. One had heard that He was Elijah, another, Jeremiah, while undoubtedly several reported that He was known as a prophet. So far our Lord was simply gathering information from His disciples. But now He makes a personal and direct appeal, "**Whom say ye that I am?**" The answer of the spokesman Peter was the recognition of the Twelve that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God.

b. Expressing a desire.

Our feelings, as well as our opinions when expressed, betray our personality. Our desires may include wishes, longings, and hankerings.

- The wish is a less vehement form of desire.
- A longing is an impatient and continued species of desire.
- A hankering is a desire for that which is out of one's reach.

Deliberation occurs when there are conflicting desires. It is a process in which each conflicting desire pleads its own cause before the soul. One argues, "Take a drink - the taste is good." The other argues, "Do not take a drink - the consequences will be bad." Deliberation takes time. It is a state of hesitation. Deliberation implies uncertainty. It is a state of doubt (Norlie, *An Elementary Christian Psychology*, p. 133).

Choice is the power to decide between clamorous desires.

The "Shall I?" or "Shall I not?" of deliberation, is settled for the time being and perhaps for all time. When two courses are opened, choice is the power of the personality to decide to take one rather than the other. Within limitations, self is free to choose. However, unless choice is a free act, the will is not a free agent. The Declaration of Independence proclaimed that all men were created equal and therefore were entitled to freedom of choice.

Purpose is prolonged choice.

Just as choice is preceded by deliberation, it is followed by a struggle to maintain itself until action takes place (Norlie, *op. cit.*, p. 134).

In this democracy where freedom of opportunity abounds, the chief executives in many instances chose to be President long before they were elected to their high office. But their choice was followed by a resolution which developed into a purpose in which they persevered until they attained their goal.

2. Application of knowledge.

We had a purpose in partaking of food at the dinner table. The food, as we have seen, was necessary to repair worn-out tissues of the body. Therefore, it was our activity that required the provision of the bodily needs and the renewing of our strength. Man needs food to sustain him in his activities, and the active man generally possesses a good appetite for his meals.

It is the application or use of knowledge which is the real end of education. It is not the knowledge we acquire, but what we utilize that affects the personality.

a. Personality strengthened by experience.

We learn by doing. It is possible to have a good choice and a noble purpose without carrying them out in action. Action is the capability to do what we determine to do (Norlie, *op. cit.*, p. 134).

Action is the execution of the choice.

Experience is the best teacher, but we also grow by doing. We develop through experiences. Every time use is made of knowledge acquired, the personality is strengthened. We are all reacting agents to impressions, developing our own personality by our own activity.

Since expression is the action of the executive, constant expression develops his personal powers. When some particular act which he has appropriated is indulged in again and again, it becomes a habit. Habitual actions are tendencies to repeat what has been done before, time and again. "As the twig is bent, so the tree is inclined." A lazy youth, a slothful man. Every act performed leaves its trace along the pathway, and every repetition deepens the trace.

b. Personality established by habit.

Descartes claimed that individual thought is the evidence of the personality, but the power to think and act individually is necessarily dependent upon the acquisitions of habits of thought and action. We can form habits of thinking and acting that will forcibly influence our own thoughts and actions. Most actions are in some degree controlled by individual thought. The mechanical contribution of habit is always personal.

There is no greater reflector of the individual than his habits.

Habit is that which enables us to do easily, readily and with growing certainty that which we do often. Every act leaves in the structure of the body and mind a capacity to repeat itself. This tendency to repeat movements and thoughts habit. Bad habits are our most persistent enemies. Good habits are our most helpful friends. The most important thing in all education is to make our habits our ally instead of our enemy.

IV. PERFECTING PERSONALITY

History records the achievements of its great men. It is well to observe however, that while volumes may be written about good men and bad men, little is said about weak men. Only the reigns of kings who possessed the requisites for leadership and ruled with a strong hand occupy a conspicuous place in the pages of history.

A dominating personality requires a strong will - one that overcomes obstacles, conquers temptations, and wins victories over natural propensities. A weak will is a negative will that forgets its ideals, yields to temptation, is deaf to duty and follows the line of least resistance.

The sluggard, the drunkard, and the coward are all types of the weak-willed. Perfect control and accurate execution are evidences of strong will (Norlie, op. cit., p. 136).

QUESTIONS

1. What is personality?
2. How did the Old Testament use of the word "soul" imply personality?
3. In what respects is man a sovereign being?
4. Distinguish between the receptive contact and the responsive contact.
5. In what respects does the nervous system become the executive of the personality?
6. What is the key to gaining and sustaining attention?
7. In what four ways can interest be stimulated?
8. What is meant by vivacious presentation?

9. In what two ways can a personality be developed?
10. How do we know when knowledge has been appropriated?
11. What do deliberation, choice, and purpose have to do in the expressing of a desire?
12. How can personality be strengthened and established?

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