

THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER

by

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Part V: The Teaching

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Laws

THE success of any teacher is in a large degree dependent upon his enthusiasm for his task, his love for his pupils, and his thoroughness in preparation. All of these characteristics can be cultivated.

In the teaching of the lesson, it will be found that inspiration in presentation is largely the result of perspiration in preparation. Success in teaching can be assured to all who are willing to be guided and corrected by the recognized principles of pedagogy.

But does not that conflict with the work of the Holy Spirit? Ought not every teacher who is living the surrendered life be guided and directed by the Holy Spirit? Is not the Holy Spirit dishonored by the teacher who seeks to be guided by the laws of pedagogy? Not at all. One does not dishonor the Holy Spirit in complying with the laws of gravitation. One does not dishonor the Holy Spirit in becoming acquainted with the laws which govern the working of the human mind.

No one was more fully led by the Holy Spirit than our Lord Jesus Christ and yet no one more consistently observed the laws of pedagogy. It is true that He did not write a text on the technique of teaching, and as far as we know none was in existence in His day. It is obvious however, that He and the teachers of His day were masters in the art and practice of teaching.

The seven laws of teaching (old, but reliable) by John Milton Gregory not only embody the principles of pedagogy employed by our Lord, but they also constitute excellent rules for the evaluation of the work of a teacher (Gregory, *The Seven Laws of Teaching*, pp. 3, 4).

I. THE LAW OF THE TEACHER

Dr. Gregory says: "Good character and rare moral qualities are desirable in an instructor of the young; if not in his actual work, at least to prevent harm from his example. But if, one by one, we dismiss from our catalogue of needful qualifications for the work of teaching those not absolutely indispensable, we shall find ourselves obliged to retain at last, as necessary to the very notion of teaching, a knowledge of the subject matter to be taught."

The first and foremost law, then, is: The teacher must know that which he would teach. In secular education a knowledge of the subject constitutes the very heart of teaching. We dare not permit the inference that religious instruction is of so much less importance that the mastery of the Bible is not essential. Knowledge is the material with which the teacher works, and therefore it must be complete. Imperfect knowledge is reflected in imperfect teaching. A man cannot teach effectively what he does not know. A lack of knowledge of that which is to be taught cripples and cramps the entire process of instruction more than anything else.

Miss Plummer says: "In our study of the Scripture we should strive to be thorough. We should dig deep; the best jewels are mined far below the surface. Accuracy is always in demand. The bookkeeper's columns must be correct to a cent. The carpenter's joints must fit exactly, otherwise his work is botched. Each lesson thoroughly mastered gives added power for the next, but every lesson skimmed over only weakens us for that which awaits us in the future. The difference between success and failure, between feebleness and power, is that of invincible, persistent determination on the one hand, and lack of energy and a yielding before difficulties on the other" (Plummer, *The Soul Winning Teacher*, p. 44).

The teacher should know more than he can teach. It is not sufficient to know just enough to fill in the time. There must be earnest study and close investigation in order to have a complete grasp of the lesson. Unlike the preacher, the teacher needs to be sufficiently well informed on the subject to answer any question his pupils may ask. More than that, instead of a feeling of incompetence and subservience to his preparation, the teacher who is a master of his subject can watch the effect of his efforts on the class and direct with ease the trend of their thought and participation.

II. THE LAW OF THE PUPIL

Long before Spurgeon became London's famous preacher, he had acquired a reputation as a children's worker. In his instructions to teachers he says: "Get the children's attention. If they do not hearken, you may talk, but you will speak to no purpose whatever. If they do not listen, you go through your labors as an unmeaning drudgery to yourselves and your scholars, too. You can do nothing without securing their attention." This counsel is in keeping with the second law of pedagogy-The pupil must attend with interest to the lesson to be learned.

Dr. McKinney says: "In looking forward to meeting his class on Sunday, the teacher who is interesting to his pupils prayerfully prepares for accomplishing three things for his class. His first endeavor is to gain their attention. He next puts forth every effort to retain that attention throughout the study period. But his most difficult work is to turn that attention into interest" (McKinney, *Practical Pedagogy in the Sunday School*, p. 90).

It is easy to gain and hold the attention of an interested pupil. A peremptory command or a sleight-of-hand performance may briefly divert attention, but real interest alone will sustain it. As Dr. Goodrich C. White suggests: "We must find a way to give boys and girls things to do that seem worthwhile to us and at the same time will seem so worthwhile to them that they will crowd other things out of mind" (White, *Teaching in the Sunday School*, p. 22).

III. THE LAW OF THE LANGUAGE

We have discovered the teacher with his important equipment of knowledge on the one hand, and the pupil with his requisite of interested attention on the other. The next step is to set up a successful medium of communication between them. This law may be stated thus: The language used in instruction must be common to teacher and pupil. The teacher may have a much larger vocabulary than the pupil, but it must be remembered that only insofar as the teacher limits himself to the language of the pupil will his instruction be comprehended. The language employed must of necessity differ for every department, if not for every age in the Sunday school. To this end Dr. Gregory suggests that the teacher:

1. Study constantly and carefully the language of the pupils.
2. Express himself as far as possible in their language.
3. Use the simplest and fewest words that will express his meaning.
4. Use short sentences of the simplest construction.
5. Explain the meaning of new words by illustrations.
6. Test frequently the pupils' understanding of the words he uses.

IV. THE LAW OF THE LESSON

This law, which deals directly with the lesson or truth to be taught, is fundamental to all pedagogy. It may be stated thus:

The truth to be taught must be learned through truth already known. All teaching must begin at some known point of the lesson. If the subject is entirely new, then a known point must be sought so that by comparison with something known and familiar there may be understanding. This law of association or contact is basic for all mental development. The new can be understood only in terms of the old.

Our Lord was a master of the law of apperception. His hearers were all familiar with the Old Testament. For this reason He constantly built new truths on these well-known facts.

- His crucifixion on the cross was to be similar to the lifting up of the brazen serpent in the wilderness.
- His burial and resurrection were likened to the experiences through which Jonah had passed.
- The times of His return would be like the days of Noah and the days of Lot.
- He described things which were to come in terms of things that had already happened.

To observe the law of apperception the teacher should:

1. Make contact with former lessons.

What has previously been studied lies in the realm of the known. If the teacher has taught former lessons this will be familiar ground to both instructor and pupils. Every review, in one sense, is a demonstration of the law of apperception, and those who are faithful in their attention to reviews best observe this principle.

2. Proceed by graded steps.

An athlete does not set his mark at an unattained height and then attempt to jump it. He starts at a lower level which he knows from previous experience can be successfully cleared, and then advances inch by inch until a new record is established. In the same way the pupil must fully grasp each step before the next is taken. Each new idea mastered becomes a part of the pupil's knowledge and serves as a starting place for a fresh advance.

Like a series of lamps on a highway, the new idea adds its own light to what precedes it and throws the increased illumination forward for the next discovery.

3. Illuminate by illustration.

The illustration is nothing more than a retreat to familiar ground. When the advance is more rapid than the mind can follow, temporary retirement to known scenes permits the lagging understanding to catch up.

D. L. Moody recognized the possibilities of making his messages clear to the masses by frequently interjecting illustrations.

Figures of speech such as similes, metaphors, and allegories, have sprung out of the need for relating new truth to old and familiar scenes and experiences.

V. THE LAW OF THE TEACHING PROCESS

The teacher is sometimes compared to a chauffeur who starts and guides his car. The pupil is carefully fed with such short and simple portions of the Bible as he can assimilate and apply. But to the teaching material it is found necessary to apply the spark of interest to ignite the fuel and produce action. Once the teacher has thoroughly aroused and fully interested the pupil, all that remains is to take his seat and guide and direct the latter's activities.

In a word, the real work of the teacher is to stimulate and direct thought, or as stated in the fifth law: Excite and direct the self-activities of the pupil, and as a rule tell him nothing that he can learn for himself. If the pupil does not think for himself there are no results in teaching.

In fact, the great aim of the teacher is to make the pupil a discoverer of truth.

The learning process actually begins when the pupil becomes an independent investigator. It is well to recognize that knowledge can be obtained without a teacher, and that we have successful self-made men who have never had the privilege of attending schools of higher learning. What then is the use of schools and the necessity of a teacher?

The teacher is needed to provide the most favorable conditions for self-learning. True teaching is not so much imparting knowledge, as stimulating the pupil to acquire it for himself.

How can thought be stimulated?

Three suggestions are given for the teacher:

1. Provide thought-material.

The action of the mind is limited practically to the field of its acquired knowledge. The pupil who knows nothing cannot think, for he has nothing to think about. In order to compare, criticize, judge, and reason, the mind must necessarily work on the material in its possession. For that reason it is necessary first to store the pupil's mind with the facts which will serve as the basis of his thought. Modern education which seeks to draw out knowledge from a child's experience without first implanting it, is attempting to pump out information from a vacuum. True, education is a drawing-out process; but no one has been able to tell how any teacher can draw out knowledge that has not previously been implanted.

2. Ask questions.

The most important stimulus used by nature to stir the mind is the ceaseless questions the world and the universe are always addressing to man. The object or event that excites no question will provoke no thought. Questioning is not, therefore, merely one of the devices of teaching. It is really the whole of teaching. It is the exciting of self-activity on the part of the pupil to the discovery of truth. To ask a question is to set the wheels of the pupil's mind working.

3. Provoke questions.

Even more important than asking questions is arousing the spirit of inquiry. In fact, the educational process begins only when pupils ask questions. The eternal questions of childhood are echoed in the mature mind that grapples with the problems of the universe.

The falling apple had the question of gravitation in it for the inquiring mind of Newton, and the boiling tea kettle propounded to Watt the problem of a steam engine. The pupil's question is not only an index to his mind, but an index to himself. His question is a manifestation of self-realization and self-seeking. By encouraging the pupil to ask questions, the teacher stimulates a natural quest for knowledge, as well as a natural desire for expression.

VI. THE LAW OF THE LEARNING PROCESS

It has been seen that the teacher's work consists largely in arousing and guiding the self-activities of the pupils.

Attention must now be given to the pupil's response to the teacher's efforts. The learning process involves more than manifesting interest and giving attention. There is a clear and distinct act or process which the pupil must perform. This act or process is to form in his own mind, by the use of his own powers, a true concept of the facts or principles of the lesson. This law of the learning process may be stated thus: The pupil must reproduce in his own mind the truth to be learned, then express it in his own words.

Contrary to general opinion, the work of education is much more the work of the pupil than the teacher. While we can learn rapidly from others, and original discovery is a slow, laborious process, yet no true learning is wholly a repetition of the thoughts of others.

The discoverer borrows largely of facts known to others, to which he adds that which he learns from his own experience. The teacher conforms to this law insofar as he brings the pupil to be an independent investigator.

There are three distinct stages of learning, each one carrying the pupil farther toward the mastery of his lesson.

1. Reproduction.

It is possible to reproduce the exact words of the lesson by committing it to memory. This is all that is attempted by many pupils, or required by teachers who have little conception of how much is involved in the learning process. If the pupil does not understand what he has memorized, apart from the mental discipline, he cannot be said to possess the lesson. A man may purchase a book and place it in his library, and yet make no use of it whatever.

2. Interpretation.

There is a decided advance in the learning process when the pupil is able to give more than the actual words or facts that he has learned. When he can express his own opinion on these facts it is evidence not only that he understands what he has been taught, but that he has learned to deal with his own thoughts as well as the thoughts of others.

Failure to insist on original thinking by the pupils is one of the most common faults of teachers. In questioning, instead of so frequently using the word "what" which calls for only factual answers, a good teacher will employ the word "why," until the pupil is brought to feel that he is expected to have an opinion in the matter.

3. Application.

Education is not the acquisition but the use of knowledge, and no lesson is fully learned until some effort has been made to apply it to everyday life.

The pupil who finds a use for what he has learned in his lesson becomes doubly interested. What was idle knowledge then becomes practical wisdom.

Knowledge is power only when it is conquered, harnessed, and set to work. While to express an opinion exercises only the mind, to apply knowledge, affects the will and involves the very life of the pupil. Practical applications are persistently neglected. Many a Sunday school pupil is "**always learning, but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth**" because there has been no personal application of the lesson to his own life.

VII. THE LAW OF REVIEW AND APPLICATION

Business sessions are opened with the reading of the minutes of the last meeting, and closed with the minutes of that day's proceedings. There is a review of what transpired both at the beginning and end of the meeting. The first is necessary to establish a closer relationship with former sessions, and the second, to carry over the day's proceedings to the next assembly.

We have already noted the importance of making contact with former lessons at the beginning of the session. It is equally essential that the outstanding truths of the day's instruction be carried over to the next lesson, and that they be vitalized in the lives of the pupils.

The law of review and application may be expressed as follows: The completion, test, and confirmation of the work of teaching must be made by review and application.

There are three aims in the review, or recapitulation, of the lesson:

1. To perfect knowledge.

A review is more than a repetition. A new lesson or fresh topic never reveals all of itself at first. It often distracts the attention, and its novelty may dazzle the mind. When you look at a picture for the first time you will miss many of its details. These will be revealed only as you return to examine it more closely. A second reading of a book will bring out facts that were entirely missed at the first perusal. There is no book like the Bible for rereading to find new material. Even a review of familiar passages never fails to reveal new light or disclose new lessons.

2. To confirm knowledge.

Memory depends on the association of ideas. Each review familiarizes and strengthens these ideas through an added association. A person may be introduced to a group of people and not be sure of all their names, but when another stranger is presented a few minutes later, his knowledge will be confirmed and his memory strengthened.

The lesson that is studied but once is likely learned only to be forgotten, but that which is repeatedly reviewed, becomes a part of our equipment of knowledge. Not that which a pupil has once learned and recited, but that which he permanently remembers and uses, is the correct measure of his achievement.

3. To apply knowledge.

Frequently, practice makes a skilled artist, and frequent and thorough reviews render knowledge ready and useful. The Scripture texts which most influence us are those which have become familiar by use and which arise in our minds as occasion demands. The plastic power of truth to shape conduct and mold character belongs only to the truths which have become familiar by repetition. If we would have any great truth sustain and control us, we must return to it until it becomes habitually fixed in our lives.

The “**line upon line and precept upon precept**” rule of the Bible is a recognition of this truth.

In conclusion, the review is not an added excellence in teaching, but one of the essential conditions of all true teaching. Not to review is to leave the work half done.

QUESTIONS

1. Show that the work of the Holy Spirit is not dishonored by an acquaintance and compliance with the laws of pedagogy.
2. What is the law of the teacher?
3. Why must the teacher know more than he can teach?
4. What is the law of the pupil?
5. Suggest four ways in which the law of the language can be observed.
6. Upon what four things will interest depend?
7. Define the law of the language, and name four ways in which the teacher can observe this law.
8. State three ways in which the law of the lesson can be observed.
9. What is the law of the teaching process?
10. Suggest three ways in which thought can be stimulated.
11. Define the law of the learning process, and state the three distinct stages of learning.
12. What are the three aims of the law of review and application?

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