

# THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER

by

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Behavior

God is the author of law and order; Satan, of confusion and chaos. Throughout the Bible we see how disorder always accompanied lawlessness. In fact, the word “**disciple**” means trained in orderliness, and followers of God and disciples of Jesus Christ will be insistent that everything “**be done decently and in order**” (I Corinthians 14:40).

The Bible also declares that “**children are to be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.**” Nurture is instruction, but admonition is discipline. The word “**discipline**” comes from “**disciple**,” and it is well to note that our Lord’s disciples were “trained in orderliness.”

If the Sunday school is the training school of the church, its teachers and officers must exercise discipline as well as impart instruction. Moral and spiritual development requires that in addition to being trained to think, pupils must be trained in orderliness.

There is nothing that interferes more seriously with work in the Sunday school than disorder. No real teaching is possible when a class is beyond control. Disorderly pupils frequently more than counteract the efforts of the teacher. Instead of learning obedience, reverence, and the principles of Christian conduct, the class is provided with exhibitions of disrespect for the teacher and disregard for such sacred institutions as God’s house, God’s Word, and God’s day.

Children who are quiet and orderly in public school, sometimes throw off all restraints in the Sunday school. They feel that the teacher does not possess the same authority as that exercised by the public school instructor, and take advantage of this fact. To be sure, the Sunday school teacher cannot adopt the authoritative methods in operation in the public school. There is not the degree of authority existing in the Sunday school that is possible in secular instruction. There is no truancy law to compel Sunday school attendance, and it is questionable whether the ban of expulsion can be applied to the unruly pupil. The true mission of the Church, after all, is to hold on to the disorderly member, rather than attempt to get rid of him.

But the fact that the methods employed by the public school cannot be adopted by the Sunday school is no excuse for disorder.

Pupils can be trained in orderliness, and Christian discipline can be exercised in every Sunday school when teachers and officers once recognize the importance and the means of attaining it.

The problem of discipline may be an occasional one, or it may be continuous. It may involve a single individual, but may also pertain to a class or an entire department. It may be a matter of thoughtlessness or restlessness, or willful and malicious behavior. There are really not many directions in which we need look for the occasional disorder. Generally we will find that the circumstances, the teacher, or the pupil, is responsible. It is imperative that we locate the exact occasion of the disorder.

## **I. ORDERLINESS OF THE SCHOOL**

Disorder is contagious. One unruly pupil affects another; one distraction leads to another. A disorderly superintendent, who proceeds with a poorly prepared program, invites trouble.

If pupils find the chairs properly arranged, with songbooks in their places, they will likely leave them that way. A book of paper on the floor is only an invitation for more to follow. An orderly atmosphere is conducive to an orderly pupil.

It is well to note how the orderly procedure of everything in a military school contributes to successful discipline. Every officer, meeting strict regulations and moving with predetermined precision, sets a worthy example to the students. Carelessness in attitude and action is a misdemeanor. In the same way, an orderly atmosphere in the Sunday school will command attention and respect. Not only should teachers and officers set a good example, but guard pupils against:

### **1. Discomforts.**

The class should be surrounded with as favorable physical conditions as possible. Not infrequently children are placed in chairs adapted for adults and are extremely uncomfortable in them. Their feet cannot reach the floor, and they cannot lean back without partly reclining. The result is wriggling, weariness, and unrest. Sometimes the ventilation is poor, or there are extremes of temperature. When there is no provision made for the wraps, these must be held and handled, and thus prove a disturbing element. The Sunday school pupil ought to be made as comfortable in his Bible study class as he is while studying less important secular subjects in the public school. Overcrowding means certain disorder. One child, in his effort to make himself comfortable, jostles his neighbor. There is an immediate retaliation. Put two boys in one chair, and usually you will have a fight. Put two girls in one chair, and they'll soon be giggling.

### **2. Distractions.**

There is an army of competitors against which a teacher must endeavor to gain and hold the attention of the pupil. To fail is to invite disorder. It is a common thing to find in many Sunday schools a dozen classes grouped in a single room, not far enough apart to keep from interfering with one another. Separate classrooms are the only guarantee that the teacher will have no contender for the attention of his pupils. Curtains, which afford a certain amount of privacy from, visual distractions, cannot obliterate the sounds that inform the pupils of what is going on elsewhere.

### **3. Disturbances.**

The business of the superintendent is to protect the teacher and make it possible for him to accomplish his task under the most favorable circumstances. Instead, however, officers are frequently permitted to interrupt the study of the lesson with collection envelopes or Sunday school literature. These unfortunate interruptions upset both the teacher and the class, and the lesson is seldom resumed without some loss of interest, which may invite disorder.

Superintendents should use the same business sense and ability in running a Sunday school as they would apply to any other concern. Their teachers should be as carefully guarded against intrusions and guaranteed as much time and privacy for their work as public school instructors enjoy.

## **II. ORDERLINESS OF THE TEACHER**

The pupil's conduct will be governed by the orderliness of the teacher fully as much as by his surroundings.

The teacher will need to be particular about his:

### **1. Appearance.**

Any loud or flashy apparel, any extreme of dress which will occasion attention if not comment from the pupils, should be avoided. One can understand why the uniform dress in military circles, as well as in business houses, has its advantages. No individual's garments stand out conspicuously in comparison with those of others.

Any striking mannerism or pronounced peculiarity that draws attention from the thought of the lesson may be an indirect means to disorder. The teaching rather than the teacher is expected to occupy the center of the pupil's thought, and when the relative position is reversed, mental if not moral confusion follows.

### **2. Self-control.**

Teachers often pray that the Lord will make restless boys and girls quiet and attentive. How many teachers pray for self-mastery? The masterful teacher is the successful one hence everything that tends to make the teacher lose control of himself should be tabooed.

A teacher must first of all learn to control himself. He who cannot control himself is not likely to control others. Many things will try his patience, and he needs to be constantly on his guard lest he become irritated. Pupils recognize the advantages of order and system, but if they discover the teacher in a state of mental confusion, they will disregard the authoritative leadership. Let your authority be covered by all the graces that make pleasant and cordial relationship between teacher and pupil.

The calm, quiet, forceful mastery of our Lord, even when His critics tried to irritate Him with hard questions, impressed His listeners and made them all the more eager to hear His words. In every controversy He remained master of the field.

### **3. Instruction.**

Not only must the teacher be master of himself, but he must also be master of his subject, if he is to be master of his pupils.

Miss Plummer says, "If there is disorder in the class, it is the teacher's fault. The lesson itself should keep order."

The poorly prepared teacher should anticipate trouble. Orderliness in instruction prepares for orderliness in conduct. Nothing leads to disorder quicker than inattention, and back of all inattention is disinterest. A poorly prepared teacher is always out of order.

Every teacher who has inattentive pupils should try the experiment of being thoroughly prepared - having enough material to keep every second of the lesson period full of action. Once a teacher tries this plan for holding the attention through uninterrupted instruction, he will very likely be convinced that it is the best solution to any problem of disorder.

### **4. Tact.**

Lack of tact leads to disrespect. Call mature boys and girls "children," and you will lose control of them sooner or later. In their own eyes, they are not to be classed with the younger generation, and they resent being addressed as juveniles (Coleman, *The Romance of Winning Children*, p. 108).

## **III. ORDERLINESS OF THE PUPIL**

Disorder is of two kinds, the intentional and the unintentional.

The first finds the cause in itself. The second is a result of some other cause. Of four groups of disorderly pupils, only one is to be classified as intentional. In a group there is generally a leader who is the key to the problem. If he can be handled successfully, the others will behave.

### **1. Thoughtless pupils.**

A public school teacher not only learns to judge a home by the kind of child who comes from that home, but she recognizes the limited possibility either of neutralizing or of lessening the influence of the home.

The Christian teacher in the same way must recognize that certain pupils are thoughtlessly rather than intentionally bad. Even though they may have been taught reverence for sacred things, they are so accustomed to disorder in their homes that they have formed the turbulent habit which constantly wars against their best intentions to comply with the teacher's wishes.

The reverence of Catholics for their institutions does not necessarily reflect any excellence on home government, for they have similar domestic problems to Protestants. But the Catholic Church better meets the situation by systematic training in the early years of a child's life. In some parishes the parochial school pupil is marched daily into the environment of the church so that reverence for sacred things may be inculcated into his being and become a part of his life. Protestant children need to acquire habits of reverence to make it easy for them to be orderly in Sunday school. If we carefully watch the conduct of the child in the Beginners and Primary departments, and his regular attendance at the sessions, it should be natural for him to be well behaved in the subsequent departments.

## **2. Restless pupils.**

While the thoughtless pupil may be the victim of an unfortunate environment, the restless pupil owes his shortcomings to his heredity. Many boys and girls are by nature restless, but this should not be considered a liability. It is true that "some boys don't go wrong because they don't go at all" and it is possible to be "so good as to be good for nothing."

Robert Louis Stevenson said, "Give me the boy who has brains enough to make a mistake."

The average boy is an active creature. He delights in doing something, and if his teacher cannot keep him employed, he will usually be able to supply the entertainment himself. Of course, the remedy for this type of pupil is a full program of activities. The teacher who insists upon doing all of the talking is sure to have competition.

Only insofar as the restless pupil is given an opportunity to participate in the lesson can there be any assurance that he will be docile.

While the teacher will not overlook the "quiet" member of the class who also "learns by doing," nevertheless the active pupil will need a major portion of the assignments so that all may benefit by the instruction.

The reason the Daily Vacation Bible School has been able to control restless boys and girls successfully for a period twice the length of the Sunday school, during the hot weeks of summer, is that the large program of expressional work particularly fits their needs. Graded lesson material, with ample provision for the pupils' activities, will be a great aid to the Sunday school teacher in meeting this type of disorder.

## **3. Self-centered pupils.**

These include the "spoiled" child, who is accustomed to having his own way at home - and at school if possible. It is difficult for him not to occupy the stage, at least part of the time, and his contribution will not always harmonize with the lesson. Such a self-assertive pupil needs to be "taken down," but it is not always easy for the teacher to know how to go about it. Miss Plummer relates what one teacher did when one of her pupils blew a whistle in class:

“The teacher said, ‘Why Johnny has a whistle. A whistle is a very good thing. What is a whistle good for?’”

The interest of the teacher seemed so genuine that several were encouraged to reply, in spite of Johnny’s red face. Then the application was skillfully made. The calls of the Bible, the warnings, the admonitions were referred to as God’s manner of attracting attention.

Quick as a flash came the thought, the Bible says, ‘**Blow the trumpet in Zion**’ - a whistle blown for God’s people, a warning we should all heed. The theme was developed helpfully. In the course of the diversion the teacher wanted to see the whistle, took it in her hand, commented a bit on its construction, and kept it until the completion of the lesson, in which were found some ‘whistle warnings’ of value (Plummer, *The Soul-Winning Teacher*, p. 71).

Generally the self-centered pupil can be successfully reprimanded by the ridicule of his companions, and will be properly subdued if the laugh is turned against him. Public opinion as expressed on the playground is a respected teacher.

The child who always wants to be “it,” is soon taught by the consensus of his companions that selfishness and stubbornness mean exile. The penalty of ostracism decreed by this juvenile court is an effective school for the spoiled child.

Excessive egotism may avail with a foolish, fond mother, but it is ruled out by the court of public opinion. For this reason the self-centered child should constantly be exposed to the leveling process of his playmates who can more effectively punish the sin of self-assertiveness than the teacher. Such pupils have not played or mingled widely with other children probably.

#### **4. Malicious pupils.**

Boys and girls who come to Sunday school to instigate mischief and whose evil bent is sufficiently recognized by their companions as to constitute leadership, provide a real problem for the teacher.

It is doubtful if much is to be gained by methods employed to suppress those whose disorder is intentional.

Interest and activity that might divert others from mischief may fail here, and we can no longer depend on the lesson itself to keep order. This does not mean that the teacher is to be imposed upon or permit one unruly member to spoil the lesson period. He will have to be firm in his dealing with such a character. And he can be firm and forceful without losing patience and becoming indignant or even sarcastic. Such action only reflects upon the Christian character of the instructor and accomplishes nothing with this type of pupil.

The teacher who scolds will never be respected or imitated, and the pupil who is scolded will evince his humiliation by a bravado of manner intended to impress his classmates with his indifference.

Kindly and yet firmly the disorderly pupil should be reprimanded, and if the admonitions are not respected, it may be necessary to request him to withdraw. Before reaching such a climax, however, the teacher should plan to make friendly contact with him during the week. More than one obstreperous boy has been conquered by a persevering teacher who took time to visit him, discover his interests, and win his confidence.

John was full of mischief. He was never happy unless he was making faces or playing some prank. His Sunday school teacher complained to the superintendent that she could do little with him, or with the class, for he kept it in a constant uproar with his amusing performances. "Look at him now!" she said to the superintendent. Sure enough, in the center of a group of grinning boys, his facial contortions and comical antics were a source of great enjoyment.

"That's the monkey," said the superintendent, as he went down to see what he could do with him. He grabbed the boy by the collar and shook him lively, while he told him that the Sunday school was no place for monkeys, and that if he did not keep quiet and behave himself he would have to be put out of the school.

Immediately the boy straightened himself and sat in sullen, obstinate silence. Not a word could his teacher get out of him, and he sat that way throughout the rest of the hour. When she spoke to the superintendent about his obstinacy, he said, "That's the mule." However, he resolved to call at the boy's home and have a talk with the mother. He went the next morning when he thought the boy would be in school, but imagine his surprise when, in a dilapidated little house, he found this boy at the washtub helping his mother.

"I have come to see you about John," he said.

"Oh!" said the mother, tears filling her eyes, "I don't know what I would do without him. Since his father died he has helped me with my washings, which are our only means of support. My health is so poorly that were it not for him, I do not know what I would do."

The superintendent did not say what he had intended say. Instead he remarked, "There, that's the man."

In every boy there is the monkey and the mule, but there is also the making of a man. In fact, the combination of these two characteristics will manifest itself in the formation of a manly character.

A boy who is all monkey will never be anything more than a silly child, and a boy who is all mule will "never rise above the level of a sullen beast; but the contribution of both monkey and mule in their combination will produce the man.

## QUESTIONS

1. Show how the word "disciple" is related to orderliness.
2. Compare the difficulties of maintaining order in Sunday school and in public school.
3. Contrast the disorderly conduct of some Sunday schools with that of a military academy.

4. What three things contribute to the disorder of a school?
5. How may a superintendent prevent distractions and disturbances?
6. In what three ways may the teacher contribute to good order?
7. Why is self-control so important for maintaining good order?
8. Name four types of disorderly pupils.
9. Discuss the thoughtless pupil and how his need may be met.
10. How should the problem of the restless pupil be met?
11. What can be done with the self-centered pupil?
12. Suggest a plan for dealing with the malicious pupil.

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