

THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER

by

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CHAPTER FIVE

Preparation

ONE of the greatest tragedies of the church is that so little attention has been given to the preparation of its teachers. Perhaps this has been due to the larger place, in modern times, accorded the pastor and the evangelist. But if we study the program in the apostolic church, we shall discover that while the evangelist founded the church, and the pastor shepherded, or governed the church, it was the teacher who edified, or built up, the church. Nothing can do more to encourage a better preparation for the teaching ministry than a reminder of

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING

In considering the importance of the teacher, we need, first of all, to recognize his

1. Value to the Sunday school.

No matter how large or how well organized a Sunday school may be, it will always pivot around the educational triad - the teacher, the lesson, and the class. Of these, the first and most important factor is the teacher. In fact, the teacher stands as the central factor in the whole Sunday school program. Marion Lawrence said, "The teacher is the highest and most important officer in the Sunday school."

Some superintendents will object to this statement, but nevertheless it is true. Only in an executive capacity does the superintendent outrank the teacher. The office of superintendent, like that of the school principal, is to promote and to protect the all-important work of teaching.

Good teachers make a good Sunday school, and the superintendent who gives his first and foremost attention to the selection and training of a teaching staff, eventually will be at the head of a successful Sunday school.

Emerson said, "Let me select the teacher, and I care not who arranges the course of study."

The president of one of our great universities says that "eighty-five per cent of a college education depends upon the teacher, and not more than fifteen per cent upon the curriculum." The teacher, therefore, is the supreme factor in any school. It is well for superintendents to recognize that the teacher is the key to:

a. Sunday school enlargement.

How does the Sunday school grow? Not by contests. These may provide a temporary increase in numbers, but the net results are so small as to be practically worthless. Nor can we build up our Sunday school by a system of rewards. We cannot pay children for going to Sunday school. This is an unprofitable financial expenditure, and an improper plan for winning their interest and devotion.

The teacher is the key to Sunday school expansion. We cannot possibly have more pupils until we have more teachers. Crowding the classes of incompetent teachers will never build up the Sunday school. Before a superintendent should undertake a canvass of the neighborhood, he should set in motion those agencies that would assure him of the necessary teaching staff to take care of the anticipated increased enrollment. To double attendance, one must first of all double the teaching staff. This is so obvious that it might as well be regarded as an axiom or law.

b. Sunday school improvement.

The teacher is the key not only to Sunday school enlargement, but also to Sunday school improvement.

Take the matter of attendance. None of our churches are able to even approximate the records of our public schools. In fact, there are only too many instances where the attendance is not much better than one-half of the enrollment.

Lack of punctuality is equally distressing. We find that our failure to achieve punctuality in Sunday school is reflected in the late comers for church services. The church presents no more pathetic picture to unbelievers than the half-filled pews and tardy attendance that are only too apparent in many of our churches, Sunday after Sunday.

These failures are largely due to inefficient teaching. A real teacher will create sufficient interest not only to command regular attendance, but also punctuality.

While the Sunday school can assist in these matters by keeping records and encouraging real accomplishment on the part of the pupil, nothing can take the place of the teacher in commanding the interest of the pupil.

Then there is the matter of discipline. Disorder in any Sunday school is a teaching problem. When pupils are really interested, disorder vanishes. The pupils cannot be interested if they have an untrained and unprepared teacher.

2. Value to the pupil.

But valuable as the teacher is to the Sunday school, he is even more important to the pupil. It is the pupil's contact with life and not his contact with books which most powerfully affects his own life.

I wonder how many have been impressed in reading Paul's farewell to the elders at Ephesus (Acts 20:17-38).

I can hardly reread this familiar passage without tears coming to my eyes. Paul had been their beloved teacher for three years. During this time, he says, **"I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house"** (v. 20). **"I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive"** (vv. 33-35).

It was not so much what Paul taught as what he demonstrated in his own life that seems to have impressed these Ephesians. His class had learned to love their teacher. Now look at the final scene. He kneels down and prays with them all. And then, we read, **"they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him"** (v. 37).

How they loved their teacher! They were not thinking so much of what he had taught, but that they would see his face no more. His departure meant that something well-nigh indispensable had gone out of their lives. Such is the teacher's influence upon his pupils.

It takes a \$50,000-a-year [1950] man to guide a client, develop a gold mine, or put a corporation on its feet. Of how much more worth is a Sunday school teacher who takes that unpromising boy, guides him, develops him, puts him on his feet and makes a man of him.

My father was a Presbyterian minister. During his ministry, covering many years, he organized eleven churches, erected four church buildings, and contributed many articles to the religious press. His greatest work, however, came in the sunset days, when he could no longer preach. He gathered the boys of the village in his home and taught them. Three of his boys became Christian doctors, seven, successful Christian business men. Others in his class became Christian ministers. As a matter of fact, no less than seventeen young men who had sat under his instruction were eventually to devote their lives to full time Christian service.

On the tomb of that great Chinese teacher, Confucius, there is this epitaph: "He teaches for ten thousand years." On the tomb of every consecrated Sunday school teacher might well be written, "He teaches for eternity."

II. BASIC TRAINING

If the Sunday school teacher's work is of such great importance, why should he not receive the same adequate preparation for his task as our pastors and our evangelists? While the teacher may be denied recognition and remuneration, surely we cannot deprive him of training. We believe and insist upon Spirit-filled teachers, but can we hope that the Holy Spirit will honor unnecessary and unwarranted ignorance? As teachers we are only instruments upon which the Holy Spirit must play, but surely it will make a difference whether the instrument is in tune or not.

A celebrated pianist cannot afford to ruin his reputation by playing on an instrument that has not been prepared for his touch. If our teachers are to be tuned instruments for God's use, ought they not to be prepared? We want Spirit-filled teachers, but the Holy Spirit is not honored by our ignorance or by our indolence.

It often has been said that teachers are born and not made. The statement represents a half-truth. Teachers are born, but, as someone has remarked, they are not born made. Heredity makes a contribution to every life. It gives the start, the potentialities which can become realities, and its contribution can be neutralized or improved by environment.

Often what is regarded as a natural gift is in reality an acquired habit. 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 (Eavey, *Principles of Teaching for Christian Teachers*, p. 18).

No successful teacher is under any delusion as to the value of good hard work as a necessity for making the most of whatever helpful contributions have been made by heredity and environment.

When we appreciate the office of teacher, we shall come to appreciate the need of preparation. Christ was thirty years preparing for three years of public life. The doctor, the lawyer, or the professional man, spends years in hard study and application, that he may be efficient when the crucial moment arises. It will not do to be obliged to consult a book when the artery is severed and the lifeblood is flowing away. Somebody must "know how," or a life will be lost. Let an unskilled surgeon bungle his work, and a child may become a cripple for life. Such a mistake is a tragedy, but not so serious as the blunder of a teacher who ministers to an immortal soul.

Surely the Lord can use to better advantage teachers who are thoroughly equipped for their work than those who are not. The Sunday school period at best is all too brief. How essential then that every diamond minute of every golden hour be turned to the best possible account.

Only the trained teacher can utilize these precious moments to the best advantage. In order to do so, again and again there must be a reminder of

1. The importance of training.

a. Gives prestige to the Sunday school.

Our Christian colleges are presenting themselves to the public as real schools. They issue annual catalogs, listing the members of their faculties, with the degree of preparation each possesses for his work. They provide evidence of being real schools by noting that they have real teachers on the faculty.

If the Sunday school is to demonstrate that it is an educational institution, where all-important instruction in the Bible may be acquired, we must raise the standard of our teaching requirements. Are we not approaching the day when we shall have the same training requirements for our Sunday school teachers as we have for our public school teachers?

Shall we not gain the respect of thousands, who now have little or no interest in the Sunday school, when it becomes known that we consider the Bible a study of sufficient importance as to require trained men and women to teach it? Are mathematics, history, and science so much more important than the Bible that we require only trained men and women to teach them? How can we justify the training of our pastors and utterly neglect the teachers in the Sunday school? Surely no one will think that the interval of time necessary to pass from the Bible class to a lively group of boys would be sufficient to transform an auditor into a well-trained teacher. Why should the superintendent ask some inexperienced, untrained member of the Bible class if he will teach? Why should he teach? How can he? Instead of the entreating inquiry, "Will you teach?" would it not be better to put the question, "Can you teach?"

b. Gives confidence to the teacher.

Not only does a faculty of trained teachers give prestige to the Sunday school, but it also gives confidence to the teacher. What makes teaching a pleasure? Why should the preparation of a Sunday school lesson ever be considered drudgery? Well, we only dread it and make hard work of it because we are not trained.

A skilled musician does not find playing upon the piano drudgery. He so thoroughly enjoys it that it is hard to keep him away from the instrument. A good cook will enjoy the time she spends in the kitchen. A skilled player will not need to be coaxed to play baseball. We enjoy being engaged in the things which we can do easily or well.

Did it ever occur to you that this is exactly the position of the trained teacher? The trained teacher approaches the study of each week's lesson with confidence, not only on the basis of knowledge secured through time spent in training, but also in the realization that the task of preparing this particular lesson will be greatly simplified because of previous knowledge he has gained. The trained teacher is able to bring the study of many months, if not many years, to bear upon the preparation and presentation of a single lesson.

c. Gives confidence to the pupil.

What is it that enables us to win and hold the respect of our pupils? As has already been pointed out, they will respect us primarily for what we are, but at the same time we must not overlook the fact that they will also be influenced by what we know. Our pupils will admire and follow us because they are convinced that we know what we are talking about. We not only know, but we know that we know. The Christian teacher who is unprepared for his task is at a tremendous disadvantage. How can a boy or girl who attends public school five days a week, and gets the very best instruction from a well-trained teacher, have much respect for an untrained or poorly prepared teacher, under whom he or she sits for only one hour a week! How much value is such a boy likely to attach to that which the Sunday school teacher is supposed to be teaching? Any normal boy or girl is as certain to make comparison between the work done in public school and that done at Sunday school, as he is prone to compare horse and buggy with the modern automobile.

The public school teacher may be a man of opinion, but the Sunday school teacher must be a man of conviction.

Who may hope to sway this indifferent and disinterested world unless he can teach with conviction? This is a great day for opinion, and how divergent the views they express! What we need greatly is conviction. Few, if any, have died for an opinion. Thousands have died for a conviction. The secular teacher may call eternity “a great perhaps,” but no one wants to live or die for “a great perhaps.” Eternity is the Sunday school teacher’s certainty, because his Redeemer liveth! It is the Sunday school teacher’s assurance of his many-mansioned home.

It is the Sunday school teacher’s confidence of receiving the Master’s “*Well done*,” that may be counted upon to shape a life and mold a destiny. No pupil will have confidence in a Sunday school teacher who does not know the Word of God. Only insofar as He has mastered the Textbook is he in position to create confidence that the words he speaks are of far greater significance than all the words of all the teachers in the institutions of secular education in the world.

2. The content of training.

What constitutes a course in teacher training? There are four factors: the textbook, the pupil, the teaching, and the school.

a. The Bible.

It is absolutely necessary that the teacher be familiar with the textbook he teaches. No one ventures to teach fractions or decimals until he has mastered arithmetic. No one is able to teach a single chapter of the Bible to advantage until he has a knowledge of the sixty-six books. To teach intelligently and practically, any portion of a subject, the instructor should be familiar with the whole. One is amazed to find so many Christian teachers who do not appear anxious to master the world’s greatest Book.

Professor William Lyon Phelps, for many years head of the department of English literature, Yale University, made a statement that was widely broadcast. This scholar, familiar as he was with all literature, declared that a knowledge of the Bible was essential if a man was to be considered educated. He said, “Everyone who has a knowledge of the Bible may truly be called educated; and no other learning or culture, no matter how extensive or elegant, can among Europeans and Americans form a proper substitute. I thoroughly believe in a university education for both men and women, but I believe the knowledge of the Bible is more valuable than a college course without a knowledge of the Bible.”

- There is no problem of human life upon which the Bible does not throw light.
- There is no moral or spiritual difficulty concerning which it does not provide direction.
- There are no questions as to the life here or hereafter for which it does not furnish the required help to arrive at a satisfactory answer.

Its materials are so rich and varied that the needs of every age level are adequately met by it.

It is enough to satisfy the inquiring mind of a little child, the questioning mind of the older child, the disturbed mind of the restless youth, and the hungry mind of the young adult. The teacher who has assimilated the truths of the Bible and has relived the experiences which it so faithfully and vividly records, has an inexhaustible source of living water to be shared with those whom he would teach.

b. Related subjects.

In addition to a thorough knowledge of the textbook, the teacher should be familiar with related subjects.

(1) Geography.

Children of school age should be as well posted on the geography of Bible lands as on that of their own country. New interest is added when pupils can visualize the mountains, rivers, and towns of Palestine, but what the pupil would learn, the teacher must first know.

(2) History.

Boys and girls studying ancient history at school will be surprised and pleased to discover that their teacher is well informed on the events and characters that parallel the narratives of the Bible. Tourists spend much time visiting historical landmarks, and sentiment may be developed in the heart of the Bible student as he becomes familiar with the history of the places in Palestine which have been immortalized by the journeys of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(3) Antiquities.

The life and customs of the ancients differ widely from our own. A knowledge of them is essential for establishing a comprehensive setting for every Bible scene.

c. The pupil.

The Bible should not be studied apart from human life. Indeed, a chief source of Bible interest and power is in its portrayal of living men and women. They serve as a mirror in which we see ourselves and others. He who would teach the Bible must know and love people. To know and love people is not an easy assignment. There is a science of human nature that is just beginning to unfold. Teachers are coming to realize that the study of those whom they would teach requires time and techniques, no less than the study of the subject which they would teach. Next to the Bible itself, fascinating and rewarding will be systematic study of the individuals who constitute a given Sunday school class. A grammar school teacher once made this boast: "If I had my hands tied behind my back, and my eyes blindfolded, I could still teach the pupils of my grade, and preserve discipline." She had been teaching this age group for so many years that she believed she was thoroughly acquainted with all their peculiarities. There was no trick they could play, no device they could put into operation, with which they could catch her off guard.

Boys and girls often are better students of human nature than their teachers. They may not always get their lessons, but they also may study their teacher sufficiently to know just when they will be called upon to recite. We must study the child as he studies us, for only in that way can we ever hope to find an entrance into his life.

“The child mind,” says Patterson Dubois, “is a citadel that can be taken neither by stealth nor by storm, but there is a natural way of approach and a gate of easy entry always open to him who knows how to find it.”

d. The technique of teaching.

No textbook, however well prepared, will ever supersede the alert teacher. The radio and moving pictures are effective agencies in imparting information, but they will ever be subordinate to the living teacher. A successful pastor is credited with this statement: “Few pastors have been privileged to be assisted by a more consecrated group of teachers than has been my lot. Many of them had taken courses by correspondence and were exceptionally well informed as to the contents of the Bible, but their consecration and knowledge of the Bible were not sufficient. They still needed the technique of teaching to enable them to gain and hold the interest of their pupils.”

e. Sunday school administration.

Mark Hopkins needed only a log to equip his school, but most teachers require proper surroundings to enable them to do their best work. Knowledge of administration is essential that the Sunday school may carry out its God-given mission. This study best serves its purpose when it instructs superintendents that their major responsibility is to protect and promote the teaching ministry.

III. PERENNIAL TRAINING

The successful teacher will never cease to be a student. He must continually grow in knowledge and in teaching power. The completion of a training course will be the beginning of a program that will keep him fully prepared for his task. We recall that Dr. Thomas Arnold was asked why he found it necessary to prepare for each day's lesson. He gave this memorable reply: “I would rather that my pupils would drink from a running stream than from a stagnant pool.”

In order that teaching may be a delight rather than a drudgery, it is important that the teacher be kept in training for his task. An athlete must constantly exercise. A musician must practice daily to be at his best. Likewise a teacher will find his class a satisfying pleasure if he gives attention to

1. Bible study.

No course in teacher training can ever provide enough time for the mastery of the Bible. At best it can provide us only with an outline of the outstanding facts, leaving the details to be filled in by subsequent study.

Dr. Gaines S. Dobbins says, "It is worth all its costs to acquire a working mastery of the whole Bible (Dobbins, *The improvement of Teaching in the Sunday School*, p. 14).

There are teachers who teach "from hand to mouth" - that is, from one lesson to the next, as if there were little or no connection. Others teach out of the overflow - that is, from a fullness of knowledge of the total context. No argument is needed to prove the superiority of the teacher who possesses a rich background of general Bible knowledge.

Perhaps no other book is so mistreated as the Bible, even by those who love it.

Day after day it may be neglected, sometimes practically discarded in favor of a periodical containing "helps" for a limited set of lessons. More often it is used only for the study of a given lesson, without reference to what goes before or to what follows. What hope is there for Bible mastery without systematic study? There are various methods that can be employed. But method, or no method, teachers should constantly read the Bible.

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan once asked an audience, "If you read the Bible an hour a day in the morning, while you are fresh, in how many hours would you read it through?"

Guesses ran as high as five hundred.

"But the answer," said Dr. Morgan, "is sixty hours" (Dobbins, op. cit., p. 42).

The late Dr. John R. Sampey, of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, proposed an interesting plan for the reading of the Bible.

He suggested three bookmarks; one for Genesis and the books that follow; one for Job and the books that follow, and one for the New Testament. Then read a chapter a day, but read in every section. Devoting a minimum of 15 minutes a day to this reading, the teacher will cover every chapter of the Bible in 520 days, or about 18 months. The total time required will be approximately 130 hours.

The advantages of such a plan are many. A balanced diet is afforded. Interest is sustained. While the Old Testament is being read through once, the New Testament will be read twice. The Old Testament and the New Testament will thus be kept vitally related. In the course of the years, the persistent reader will secure a grasp of the whole Bible that will immeasurably enrich his teaching (Dobbins, op. cit., p. 43).

I would add a suggestion to Dr. Sampey's plan. Where it is possible to have both morning and evening devotions, let the morning be given to the Old Testament, and the evening to the New. The Old Testament readings will alternate between the legal and the historical books, and the poetical and prophetic portion. New Testament interest can be increased if, instead of reading the Gospels one after another, the following plan is observed:

Matthew	
I and II Corinthians	}63 chapters
Galatians	
Mark	
Ephesians	
Philippians	
Colossians	
I and II Thessalonians	}65 chapters
I and II Timothy	
Titus	
Philemon	
Hebrews	
Luke	
Acts of the Apostles	
(As Luke wrote both the Gospel	
And the Acts, these books should	}68 chapters
Be read in succession)	
Romans	
John	
General Epistles	}64 chapters
Revelation	

This plan lends variety and associates the author with all his writings.

2. Pupil study.

Courses in pupil study are not sufficient to provide instruction concerning an individual. No description in a book ever fits the particular problem with which the teacher is wrestling in the form of a Billy Johnson or a George Brown. The books on *child nature* can help one to know principles and laws, but beyond this the successful teacher will have to study his own particular pupils in order to deal successfully with them.

The teacher will not only have to become child-minded, but person-minded. He will soon find himself watching each member of the class with keen interest, listening to conversations that reveal unexpected meanings, observing actions that portray hitherto unknown aspects of character. As the teacher comes to know and to love his class, to understand and to appreciate each individual more fully, he will find that his task has become a source of increased satisfaction, and one that is fruitful in results.

3. Study period.

Certain hours should be set aside each week for the preparation of the lesson.

This time should be recognized as sacred, and nothing should be permitted to interfere with it. This God-given task is far too important for its preparation to be relegated to the spare moments that are left after matters of comparatively little consequence have received attention. If possible, a secluded spot should be sought, and no interruptions tolerated until the work is completed.

There must be system in the preparation, as well as in the presentation, of the lesson. Teachers who have an orderly plan of procedure in working out their lessons will be able to accomplish nearly twice as much in a given period of time. Suggestions along this line will be given in the chapters on the preparation of the lesson (12 and 13).

Perennial training will not only require constant study of the Bible and of the individual pupils that compose the class, but also

4. Personal attention.

a. Physically fit.

No teacher can over-do all week and come to class on Sunday with energy and enthusiasm. Instead of keeping late hours Saturday evening, the teacher's Sunday (Lord's Day) should begin at sunset the night before, that on the morrow he may assume his all-important task in the best possible physical condition.

b. Mentally alert.

A good teacher, like a good preacher, will read constantly, systematically, and intelligently.

At least one good book along his line of study should be read each quarter, and it would be to his advantage to subscribe for several Sunday school periodicals. He will do well if he reads more, but he should not read more than he can digest.

One should not read without thinking, and should not think without writing. It is well to have a notebook handy in which can be entered not only that which every teacher should know, but that which he can use for some specific lesson or can prescribe for the peculiar needs of a pupil.

c. Spiritually alive.

It is not enough to study the Bible in order to meet the needs of others. There must be a personal ministry to our own spiritual requirements. It is the teacher's fidelity to his daily devotions that enables him to present his instruction forcibly.

Teacher, keep ever in prayer, if you would have the power to be quiet and to be masterful under the most trying circumstances. It is only those who keep in fellowship with God who have the poise which is so essential to the Sunday school teacher.

QUESTIONS

1. In what two ways is the teacher important to the Sunday school?
2. What about Paul's teaching impressed the Ephesians most?
3. Upon what does success of any teacher largely depend?
4. Give three reasons why teacher training is important.
5. How does the trained teacher give prestige to the Sunday school?
6. Why does a trained teacher approach his task with confidence?
7. What effect does the trained teacher have upon the attitude of the pupils?
8. What four factors are involved in teacher training?
9. Why is a knowledge of the Bible the most important requisite for successful Christian teaching?
10. What are three subjects related to the Bible with which the teacher should be familiar?
11. Why is pupil study important in preparation of the teacher?
12. How can teaching be improved by a plan of Bible study?
13. Give Dr. Sampey's suggestion for reading the Bible in 520 days.
14. Why is a study period important?
15. Make three suggestions for the personal attention of the teacher.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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