

THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER

by

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Part I: The Task CHAPTER ONE

Reaching the Mentality

WHAT is a teacher? A teacher is one who helps somebody else to learn. In other words, the teacher cooperates with the pupil in learning. He does not seek to perform before an audience made up of listening pupils, but undertakes with them an activity in which they are busily engaged. There is no teaching unless there is learning. The teacher has not really taught unless the pupil has learned. The object of our teaching is to make something happen in the life of our pupil. The test of our teaching is what happens in the life of our pupil.

The pupil-teacher relationship is all-important. Whether or not the teacher is primarily a helper in the learning process, will depend not only upon the teacher's interest in his instruction, but also upon the pupil's attitude towards his teacher. A pupil will not receive much help from a teacher he does not like. Teachers will never interest pupils in anything in which they are not themselves interested. A teacher can render help by guiding a pupil. One who has been over the road can best direct the footsteps of the traveler who is taking it for the first time. The teacher can also help by inspiring the pupil. In his pupils the teacher is so frequently confronted with laziness, indifference and ignorance: This resistance to learning challenges all the patience and resources of the instructor. A teacher is co-operating with his pupil in helping him to learn when he can arouse that pupil to share his own interest in the instruction.

How does the task of the religious teacher compare with that of the secular teacher? The work of instruction in the Sunday school is much more difficult than in the public school. Religion and morals are more difficult to teach than arithmetic and geography. The lesson materials are not so well graded and adapted as the public school texts. The lessons are taught weekly, instead of daily, and the time for instruction is brief. Children do not prepare their lessons, and so come to class lacking the background of knowledge and the mental alertness so essential for receiving instruction.

How does the task of the Christian teacher compare with that of the religious teacher? Christian teaching is much more than religious teaching. Religious teaching finds its materials anywhere and everywhere. Hymns, prayers, poetry, paintings and sculpture, the themes of which are religious, things of beauty in the natural world, vocational problems, social problems, political problems, economic problems, and problems of every imaginable sort are put into the curriculum of religious education, with a view to making lessons life-centered.

"Religious education has appropriated much from secular education, without being conscious of the fact that the latter is too young to be a trustworthy source from which to borrow" (C. B. Bavey, *Principles of Teaching for Christian Teachers*, p. 14.).

- Secular education deals with the material, while religious teaching is concerned with the spiritual.
- Religious education magnifies technique at the expense of content.
- Christian teaching realizes its responsibility for the proclamation of the gospel message, and therefore does not permit the message to be eclipsed by the method.

While Christian teaching recognizes that there are sources of spiritual inspiration and guidance outside of Scripture, it gives the Bible the supreme place. For it, the Bible is the infallible, inspired Word of the eternal God, given to man to reveal his destiny and the plan for his salvation. By the Bible the thoughts of men will be judged, the works of men will be rewarded, and the lives of men are to be guided.

The task of the Christian teacher may be divided into three parts or objectives. Failure will follow not only the neglect to reach all of the objectives, but also the attempt to reach them out of their proper order. The three objectives may be compared with the three divisions of the human being-body, soul, and spirit.

The majority of psychologists, especially those who reject the Bible, do not concede that man is a threefold creation. They divide him into body and soul, and the latter generally includes the mind. The Bible reveals a threefold nature. Both soul and spirit refer to the immaterial part of man, but from different points of view. The distinction between the threefold divisions may be better understood when we speak of the body as having world-consciousness, the soul, self-consciousness, and the spirit, God-consciousness.

World-consciousness concerns a knowledge of the things about us. Through his five senses man is constantly gathering information and learning many things about this marvelous world in which he lives.

The distinguishing factor between the human race and brute creation is the mind. It is that part of the body so mysteriously distinct - man's intellectual powers - to which the teacher is to make his first approach. In reaching the mentality, the teacher's object is to stimulate the acquisition and assimilation of knowledge.

I. ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE

1. Sensation

Sensation is the great door through which the knowledge of the outer world comes into the mind.

For this purpose, we find, the body and mind are closely connected.

Throughout the body there is a vast network of nerves which connect with the brain, the center of the nervous system. The five senses have been called the "royal roads to the mind." Information is being constantly gathered by means of the eye-gate and the ear-gate, and the senses of taste and touch and smell. The teacher can awaken and stimulate the senses. Thus he quickens the acquisition of knowledge. A man may walk through the world with his eyes open, and yet not see. Sailors may travel around the world and know very little of it beyond certain places of amusement. On the other hand, Benjamin Franklin, with senses ever alert for picking up information, could not cross the English Channel without making observations that were useful to mankind.

2. Perception

Perception is the ability to interpret the information given by sensations.

In sensations one is aware of the existence of an object. In perception the object is given a distinct meaning, that is, the distant object is recognized as an automobile.

"Sensations are the raw material of knowledge. Percepts are the first objects made from this raw material. If sensations be likened to iron ore, then percepts may be likened to iron bars and sheets from it" (O. M. Norlie, *An Elementary Christian Psychology*, p. 89).

Apperception is the perception of things in relation to ideas we already possess. This is one of the basic principles of learning. Only through relation and comparison with the known can we grasp and understand the unknown.

II. ASSIMILATION OF KNOWLEDGE

The acquisition of knowledge for the intellect is similar to the acquisition of food for the body. When we sit down to partake of food, our primary object is acquisition. Knowledge, in the same way, is acquired through the five gates provided for that purpose. In the partaking of food we have only begun the process in accomplishing the real purpose for which we eat. While it may be true of some people that they live to eat, the majority eat to live. The food enters the body. What is now necessary in order that it may be a real contribution to life? GOD in His wisdom has prepared, in the human body, digestive organs which enable the body to assimilate the food acquired. There is a definite purpose for partaking of food, so also we have a real object in obtaining knowledge. Knowledge is power, but in order that it may be harnessed and put to work, it is necessary to do more than acquire it. Knowledge to be retained must be assimilated. For this purpose we possess memory. Memory records, retains, recalls, and recognizes past experiences.

1. Recording of knowledge.

This recording process is sometimes called "memorizing," or learning by heart.

We can write most successfully on the mind of a child because the storehouse of knowledge is not yet crowded with a multitude of facts.

A sense of duty is a fine incentive to recording facts, as practice is in trusting one's memory. Memory grows in trustworthiness, by being trusted.

Strong, as well as repeated impressions live through memory. Vividness of impressions, especially with children, is due to primacy. The first visit to the city; the first day of school, make a deep impression. Special occasions such as Christmas, and birthday anniversaries, will register strongly in the mind. Were these occasions more frequent, their record would be less vivid.

2. Retention of knowledge.

Even more important than power to record, is power to retain. In the study of psychology and pedagogy there has been no faculty of the mind so emphasized as memory, and no phase of memory more stressed than retention.

Marvelous feats of memory have been recorded.

- Cyrus the Great could name every soldier in his army!
- An outstanding actor could repeat word for word the columns of a newspaper, after reading them.
- Petrus D. Ravenna recited all the sermons that had been given in his hearing during a certain religion season (Norlie, op. cit., p. 79).
- A well-known mathematician was able to write long columns of figures upon a blackboard as they were given to him by the audience and then turn around and repeat them backwards from last to first.
- Harry Nelson Pillsbury, the great American chess player, was able to play, blindfolded, with a dozen men, and win every game. On one occasion, in pointing out a mistake, he was able to recall every move that had been made without seeing the chessboard.

3. Recalling of knowledge.

Frequent repetitions made according to plan and purpose, are an excellent aid to successful recall. But the call should be made on the same track over which it has originally come.

Knowledge, to be recalled, must be taken gradually. The brain like the stomach must have rest between meals. Students who hastily force study for final examinations never do as well as those who master the daily assignment. Instruction that can be introduced by a survey of the whole, can much more readily be recalled, because it provides in advance a connected view of the entire subject.

4. Recognition of knowledge.

Recognition is the identification of knowledge and the ability to relate it to previous information.

Thus a tune heard before is recognized and identified.

Memory is absolutely necessary for apperception [clear perception]. We cannot compare or relate new impressions with old unless we can recall them. With memory, our mind can project itself backward and forward through time and space, and the events of today can be understood and enjoyed by the experiences of yesterday.

Memory, therefore, has well been called a tax-gatherer of the past, and a treasurer of the mind (Norlie, op. cit., p. 100).

The older we become, the more we are prone to indulge in reminiscences. Augustine, in his Confessions, cried, "Great is this power of memory, exceeding great, O my God-an inner chamber large and boundless."

QUESTIONS

1. What is a teacher?
2. What is meant by the pupil-teacher relationship?
3. How does the task of the religious teacher compare with that of the secular teacher?
4. How does the task of the Christian teacher compare with that of the religious teacher?
5. What are the three objectives of the Christian teacher?
6. What may be said of the distinction between the body, soul, and mind?
7. What are the two objects of the teacher in reaching the mentality?
8. What does the teacher have to do with sensation?
9. Distinguish between sensation and perception.
10. In what four ways does memory assimilate knowledge?
11. Mention several outstanding feats of memory.
12. Why is memory necessary for apperception?

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