

THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER

by

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Application

THE educational process involves four steps: acquisition, assimilation, appropriation, and application of knowledge. The acquisition of knowledge may be likened to the hasty reading of a book. Its contents are not assimilated until by further reading we fully understand and remember its information. When certain passages are marked with the thought of future usefulness, we have made an appropriation of knowledge. Finally, when in an article or address some quotation is made from its pages, or some truth expressed is reproduced in the life, there is an application of knowledge.

The real test of a teacher's work is not what he says to his pupils, but what his pupils say and do as a result of his instruction. Education is not completed in the acquisition, but in the use of knowledge. An educator is one who "leads out," and this leading-out process results in the application of truth. In the last analysis, the pupil is not merely to learn facts, but to apply them. The teacher cannot be constantly with his pupils. There are many influences that tend to counteract his instruction. This is all the more reason that our teaching should be vitally related to the lives of our pupils; and if it is to be so related, the teacher must know as much as possible about their problems. The teacher may also seek to keep parents informed as to the work the Sunday school is trying to do, and to enlist their cooperation in providing opportunities for real application of the Sunday school lesson.

As we have already seen, the supreme purpose of the Christian teacher is to shape the immortal destiny of a soul according to the Word of God. The imparting of biblical knowledge is a comparatively simple matter. The development of Christian character is far more difficult. Yet the teacher has not done all that is required unless there is evidence of a response in the life of the pupil. When the practice of righteousness can be observed in the life of a pupil, the teacher may then be assured that he has sufficiently impressed biblical truths in his instruction so that they are being expressed in action. We cannot, of course, separate character and Christian living. Character develops through living, and in turn expresses itself in living. The Christian life is the outward expression of the Christ-formed character within.

We have already learned in child study that the basis of character is habit. Habit is often called "second nature." When habits are fixed and become our master, we may well say with Wellington, "Habit is ten times nature."

All application of truth should first address itself to the establishment of habits that will prove a blessing throughout life. Among the habits aimed at by the Christian teacher are Bible study, prayer, reverence, worship, obedience, and unselfishness. These should be in the teacher's thoughts in the preparation of the lesson, as well as in the teaching of it.

We have also previously learned that character is strengthened by expression. Character does not grow through dreaming or wishing or talking. Character grows through doing. The habit of doing nothing, like the habit of doing wrong, is bad. Instruction and inspiration that do not find expression in action, harden our sensitive natures, and make us less ready to respond on another occasion. It is obvious that expressional activities must constitute a large part of our teaching program if positive, active Christian character is to be developed in our pupils.

One cannot study the teaching methods of our Lord without being impressed with the emphasis which He laid on the application of His instruction.

After the Sermon on the Mount He said, **“Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock”** (Matthew 7:24). **“Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven”** (Matthew 7:21).

When He declared, **“By their fruits ye shall know them”** (Matthew 7:20), did He not mean that the quality and value of a man's religion will be manifest by deeds and actions? Christ's class was in itself a life-sharing project. When they enrolled for His instruction they discovered that He would teach them in terms of activity. They did not learn in a formal schoolroom, but by sharing His work with Him. Later, when they had learned to live as He lived, and adopted His spiritual attitudes toward God and their fellow men, He sent them out to complete their training by some practical experience.

In the same way the Christian teacher can help his pupils to form Christian habits of thought and action. They can be taught to pray, not so much by defining or describing prayer as by entering actively into the class prayer period. They can be taught to study the Bible, not so much by telling them of its excellencies as by providing a lesson which will in its preparation and recitation require the pupils to use the Bible. They can best be taught reverence, obedience, unselfishness by the practice of these virtues.

In making the application, there are three important considerations.

I. THE APPLICATION OF THE WORD OF God

The shaping of the eternal destiny of a soul must be in accordance with the Bible and not apart from it. Only the Word of God provides the principles for Christian living, and to attempt to build character independent of its instruction is useless. Modern educators, in their zeal for the application of truth, have lost sight of its acquisition. In focusing their attention on the experiences of the pupil, they have intimated that the contents of a book written centuries ago are not suited for modern application. But the Bible is the changeless book for the changing age, and its contents will always be profitable for instruction.

To expect the pupil to start with nothing and build up a Christian or religious faith solely from his everyday experiences is tantamount to attempting to reach port on an ocean voyage without chart, compass, or pilot. The Bible is full of life experiences.

It is absurd to imagine that a teacher cannot enter into a child's life unless the subject of his instruction is some topic of current events. That Bible school lessons should center on sports, social activities, and pupils' experiences, to develop some moral truths in their lives, is lamentable. It is time that modern educators realized that it is possible to teach the Bible and still aim that teaching directly at the greatest life needs of our pupils.

Bible-centered and life-centered lessons are not the impossibility that so many present-day leaders in religious education imagine. The determination of these educators to apply Bible truth before a knowledge of it is acquired would indicate that they have by-passed the supreme authority of the Bible.

Although our Lord laid great stress on application in His religious program, He always based it on the Word of God. When He went into the synagogue at Nazareth, He read and expounded the first two verses of Isaiah 61. And His exposition was an up-to-date application. He said that the words of this ancient prophet were fulfilled that very day. Again, after His resurrection, He met the disappointed disciples on the road to Emmaus, and, as a master-teacher, drew out from them in conversation the reason for their perplexity. And how did He meet this situation in real life-how did He comfort these sorrowful disciples? Why, **"he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself"** (Luke 24:27).

Certainly this was Bible teaching if there ever was such teaching. But it was applied instruction. It was aimed at the greatest need those two disciples felt at that hour.

As David R. Piper has pointed out: "We must put equal emphasis on two facts which are not contradictory but correlative in Jesus' method. He taught Scripture directly by the expository method and used the Scripture as authority, and yet He taught for the specific purpose of applying the meaning of Scripture to some real life question, problem, or need of those whom He addressed" (Piper, *How Would Jesus Teach?* p. 59).

II. THE APPLICATION TO THE TEACHER

No teacher can successfully make application of truth to others until he has first applied it to his own life.

Dr. J. McConaughy says: "If our pupils are to learn of Christ through us, we must be sure that we really know Him ourselves - that we have been saved from sin by His death on the Cross, and are kept from falling into sin by the help which He daily gives us."

Boys and girls must constantly see exemplified in their teacher the truths he seeks to apply to their lives.

Our Lord's supreme work of teaching was accomplished by His daily demonstration of the truths that He taught. He taught humility when He placed a child in the midst of the wrangling disciples. But far more impressive than that object lesson was the memorable occasion when He personified meekness by girding Himself and washing the disciples' feet (John 13:14, 15).

He taught the lesson of forgiveness on more than one occasion (Matthew 6:15; 18:21,22), but it was His look of forgiveness on Peter, after he had denied his Lord three times, that led the impetuous disciple to hurry out and weep bitterly (Luke 22:61, 62). Perhaps our Lord's supreme exhibition of forgiveness, when on the cross He prayed, "**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,**" led the hardened centurion to acknowledge that Jesus was a righteous man (Luke 23:34, 47).

How did Christ come to teach His disciples how to pray?

He had spoken on this subject previously more than once, but the disciples did not seem impressed. On this occasion, however, we read,

"And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1).

More than one young man has testified that while he had forgotten the instruction of his mother, he never could eradicate from his mind the picture of her kneeling in prayer in his behalf. The teacher who exemplifies his instruction in daily living will make an indelible impression on the hearts and minds of his pupils.

No lesson will really be a helpful lesson to the class if it has not been a helpful lesson to the teacher. Its application must be backward toward the teacher before it will go forward toward the class.

- What has this lesson taught me? is a good question for the teacher to ask.
- Am I better qualified for my work after studying this lesson than I was before?
- Am I an exemplification of the truth I am trying to give the scholars?

Marion Lawrence says, "This is the crucial part of a teacher's preparation, for after all, the teacher's life is the life of his teaching."

III. APPLICATION TO THE PUPIL

The application of the lesson is closely related to the aim of the teacher, which has already been discussed (Chapter 6); but it will now be in order to give a fuller consideration to this phase of the subject.

In the preparation of the lesson the teacher should plan for the particular needs of his pupils. Every member of the class has specific needs, but application of the instruction can be included under four general heads:

1. Salvation.

It is of first importance that every pupil be reminded of his personal responsibility for a decision for Christ. In a class where there are unconverted pupils, all instruction should have for its goal the personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. There is no more essential application of truth than that which leads to the cross. Before the pupil's conversion, the teacher should teach and train in habits that will help the pupil to become a Christian. Among such habits are attendance at church services, Bible study, reverence for God's house and His day.

2. Spirituality.

After the pupil's conversion, the teacher should use his opportunity to train in habits that will develop spirituality. As the Sunday school is chiefly a teaching service, the principal habit that should result from attendance is that of Bible study.

The departmental program, however, will afford an opportunity to train in worship. Classes may be selected in advance and prepared to plan and lead these worship periods. This preparation should involve a study of the elements of true worship, a searching of the Scripture for the acts involved in worship, and a study of the worship program of the local church to see how the pastor plans a worship service for his congregation. It will also lead to the reading of prayers, hymns, and devotional books, as well as other books or periodicals which will help the class to understand and appreciate the experience of worship. Especially should the pupils be encouraged to develop skill in singing religious music and to get enjoyment from it. Almost every child can sing, and all children respond to the appeal of music adapted to their understanding.

The prayer life of the pupil must also be given attention if he is to **“grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.”** Time taken from the class period for a prayer meeting is not wasted, especially if every pupil can be encouraged to participate. Public attention to prayer will prove a reminder if not an encouragement to fidelity in private devotions.

3. Stewardship.

The development of the spiritual life of the pupil includes the obligation of bringing him to see his personal responsibility not only for his use of time, but also for the practice of stewardship, which includes a recognition of his use of his possessions.

Pupils should be led early in life into giving money for missionary purposes, and as far as possible it should be money which they have earned. For a child to be given money for an offering does not train him in stewardship. It is the pupil's real sharing of his possessions that leaves the impression and teaches the lesson.

One of the great truths that the Sunday school needs to learn is that we are “raising” children and not money, and only as the spirit of sacrifice and of sharing enters into the child's offering is there any real gain accomplished.

“Not what we give, but what we share,
For the gift without the giver is bare;
He who gives himself with his gifts feeds three,
Himself, his hungry neighbor, and Me.”

The purpose of giving in the Sunday school is to train a generation of liberal, systematic, cheerful givers. The pupils, then, must know to what they give and why they give, and they must give because they want to give.

4. Service.

The teaching material should be applied in order to bring the pupil to see his personal responsibility not only for his time and possessions, but for his talents as well. The wise teacher will keep his eyes open for every possible opportunity to find something worthwhile for his pupils to do. He will endeavor to make his instruction a laboratory course in religion, finding in human needs the opportunities for real service.

a. Home.

There is no more important place for service than the home. Children need to see their responsibility for its greatest happiness. They should be encouraged to share in the care of the home and not to shirk their share of its tasks. They should have a definite part in the hospitality which the home extends to its friends and neighbors, and take pride in demonstrating its attractiveness to others.

b. Church.

Next to the home, the pupil needs to be impressed with his responsibility to the church of which he is a member. This calls not only for fidelity to its services and systematic, proportionate contributions to its support, but for an active participation in its work. Younger pupils who are not church members can be enlisted as recruiting officers to secure new members for the Sunday school, or to look up those who attend irregularly or have dropped out entirely. Others can be enlisted for messenger service, for in a wide-awake Sunday school there will be articles to be gathered and distributed, and many things which children can do as well as their elders. Service can also be rendered in the class or the school in the distribution of supplies, or decoration of the rooms for special occasions. Older pupils can help in taking a census, which will be used to build up the Sunday school enrollment.

c. Community.

In addition to service in the local Sunday school and church, opportunities for it will be found in the community. The successful enlistment of the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts in many valuable forms of community enterprises contains a valuable suggestion for the Sunday school. The Boy or Girl Scout takes great pride in doing acts of kindness without personal reward, and the Sunday school can command the same spirit if the proper appeal is made.

d. World.

From the community, the program should extend to the world, for there are things to be done for God's children in other lands. Missionary boxes and gifts of money can be the expression of genuine and intelligent interest in the lives of those to whom they go. Pupils must be brought to see their responsibility for the evangelizing of the entire world.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the four steps of the educational process?
2. What does the application of knowledge have to do with the establishment of character?
3. How did our Lord teach in terms of activity?
4. How can the Christian teacher help his pupils form right habits?
5. Why must all applications be based on Bible teaching?
6. Show how our Lord was always careful to observe this important principle.
7. Why must the teacher first apply Bible truth to his own life?
8. Illustrate how our Lord demonstrated this principle.
9. For what four general needs of the pupils should the teacher plan his application?
10. In making applications, why should the salvation and spiritual life of the pupils always be given first consideration?
- 11a. Make two suggestions for the pupil's practice of worship.
- 11b. Make one suggestion for the practice of stewardship.
12. In what four fields of service may pupils be encouraged to apply their instruction?

~ end of chapter 15 ~

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