

# THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER

by

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## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### Methods

IN A PREVIOUS lesson it was pointed out that the supreme purpose of the Christian teacher is to shape the immortal destiny of a soul according to the Word of God. This must be kept in mind as we consider the general mode of procedure to be followed in teaching, as well as the specific methods which may be employed in the development of the lesson.

#### I. MODE OF PROCEDURE

There are two historic lines of reasoning recognized in the process of thinking, the deductive and the inductive. In deductive logic, reasoning is from general truth to particular truth, in which no more is inferred in the conclusion than is implicitly contained in the premise. Inductive logic, on the other hand, reaches a general conclusion by reasoning from a number of particular propositions. In religious teaching today, these historic plans of procedure are represented by the expository and the experience modes.

##### 1. Expository mode.

The plan of this procedure is to take the statements of Scripture as general truths and deduct from them, verse by verse, particular lessons. These applications may be made one by one as the Scripture is unfolded, or gathered at the end of the study and driven home to the heart of the scholar. This mode answers the question, What does the Bible say? It sets forth the thought of the writer of Scripture as he intended it, and makes the impression on the mind of the scholar which the writer himself desired to convey. This is an exact, faithful, reverential, and effective mode of teaching the Word of God. Excellent as it is, this plan is not without limitations.

Three difficulties are encountered.

##### a. Lack of time.

One cannot explain the historical background, the terms and expressions, and the content even of a single verse, without consuming a larger proportion of time than the only too brief hour the Sunday school session allows. In consequence, very little ground can be covered in the period usually allotted to teaching the class.

b. Lack of interest.

Interest of necessity starts from the viewpoint of the pupil, and the untrained teacher will experience difficulty in making a point of contact between the thoughts of modern children and the writings of ancient times. His difficulties in awakening interest are further increased by the unfamiliar language of Scripture and the spiritual significance of its content.

c. Lack of application.

While “**all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,**” few pupils, especially children, have had sufficient experience in Christian living to appreciate the application of all Bible truth. Expository teaching presupposes some understanding and experimental knowledge of Scripture.

## **2. Experience mode.**

The experience mode is the favorite plan of modern educators, and is just the reverse of the expository mode. It proceeds from the experience of the pupil, or some application that has been made, to find by inductive thinking the great underlying truth of Scripture.

A preacher exemplifies this plan of procedure when he chooses for his sermon a topic, rather than a text, that fits into the language and experience of his hearers, and from that point leads his audience to discover some basic Bible truth. He does not experience difficulty in arousing interest, nor does he lose time in unfolding the meaning of unrelated verses, or explaining the obscure words or phrases. Moreover, application is assured, since that is the point from which the beginning is made.

This mode likewise has its limitations. It is more likely to wander at random over Scripture and make its study a secondary aim. The teacher naturally is more concerned about what the Bible teaches than about what it says, so that this mode is really one of interpretation rather than instruction. It is liable to create human applications and then seek to substantiate them from Scripture truth. It tends to center the study in human experience rather than in the Word of God, and by a forced interpretation of a biblical passage ignore its relationship to what precedes and follows. It often reveals a profound ignorance of the Bible as a whole in its efforts to associate an unnatural application.

Since it is the supreme purpose of the Christian teacher to shape the immortal destiny of the soul according to the Word of God, it is most important that a mode of procedure be followed that will impart that content of Scripture before attempting to apply it. The distinguishing fact of biblical religion is the approach of God to man, and therefore, it is an implanting rather than a developing. Revelation presupposes capacity for reception, but it also presupposes ignorance.

“**All Scripture is profitable for instruction**” suggests that the content of Scripture must first be implanted before it is serviceable and applicable, or rather, before “**the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works**” (II Timothy 3:16).

The superiority of the expository mode for this purpose is obvious.

Speaking in its favor, Dr. Schmauk says:

“It is the one way to make pupils acquainted with Scripture. It sets up the Scripture itself as the only rule of faith and life. When a section or chapter of the Bible has been studied under this expository plan, the pupil becomes possessed of the real and full meaning of the Scripture, and accepts the Word of God as the writer understood it when he wrote it” (Theodore E. Schmauk, *How to Teach in Sunday School*, p. 110).

If the Bible speaks with the authority of the Word of God, it cannot be taught any other way. Granted then that the expository mode should be chosen as the mode of procedure, how may its difficulties be overcome? In the same way that mathematics may be attractively presented and successfully taught to any pupil.

Interest can be aroused not only by a knowledge of the child, but also by a comprehensive, graded development of the subject, while application can be assured by a program of correlated expressional activities. Time will be required, it is true, but why should not children devote as much time to the study of the Bible as to the study of mathematics? However, aside from the adoption of a correct mode of procedure, success in teaching will rest largely on the methods selected for the development of the instruction.

## **II. METHODS OF DEVELOPMENT**

All pupils cannot be taught by the same method. All lessons cannot be equally well presented by the same method. A good teacher will be familiar with all methods.

Five are suggested:

### **1. Story-telling.**

The first great gift, especially in teaching little children, is the ability to tell a story. It is the favorite method in the Beginners and Primary departments, and can be used to advantage even with Juniors. As a large portion of the Bible is narrative, it may be readily seen how excellently the reproduction of Scripture content in story form fits into the expository mode of procedure. Jesus, Master-Teacher, was a good storyteller. His recorded stories have never been surpassed as models of graphic character painting by means of action and spoken word. What constitutes a good story?

Dr. Goodrich C. White says that it must be:

a. Interesting.

Probably there is no other teaching method by which attention can be more easily gained and held. This is because of the interest aroused at the outset. The Bible tells a thrilling, fascinating story, so that any part of its narrative can be made interesting.

b. Dramatic.

Story-telling, because the eye as well as the ear is enlisted, is sometimes called the dramatic method. It presents a moving drama linked together by verbs of action. All the great Bible stories possess conflict, plot, suspense-characteristics that make a dramatic story. Verbs will abound, but adjectives will be used sparingly. Sentences will be short. Language will be simple. By look, gesture, and facial expression the teacher himself will act and will gain admittance through the eye-gate when ears may be dull of hearing.

c. Full of action.

Action is essential. And “full of action” does not mean “full of words.” Often action is intensified by the restriction of words. The stories Jesus told are of achievement. He did not use a single word to describe the Good Samaritan, but his character was clearly pictured by his deeds.

d. True to life.

The impossible never appeals like that which is in the realm of achievement for every boy and girl. A fairy tale does not leave the pupil any hope of realization. The true story will command the larger interest. It is the element of truth that characterizes Bible stories and makes them superior to all others (White, *Teaching in the Sunday School*, p. 45).

In addition to Dr. White’s suggestions, it may be said that stories should have few characters if the boys and girls are not to be confused. Moreover, stories should have direct discourse to permit a simple presentation. The characters should talk instead of the teacher’s attempting to report what they are saying. Children like to see life, even in inanimate things.

## 2. Recitation.

While the story is excellent to gain and to hold attention, it has its disadvantages. A pupil fed too richly with stories will not grow mentally. His intellectual development requires that he be more than a listener. It is necessary that the mental process of listening give way to more active participation. The pupil must do some work. The process of absorption must give way before the more active process as assimilation and reproduction. Education is in reality a drawing-out process, and for this reason the recitation method should be used. It is employed most effectively in the Primary and Junior departments.

Dr. Schmauk points out some of its advantages:

(1) It gets the pupil to work on his own initiative. He prepares the lesson, and comes to the recitation with some familiarity, if not mastery, of the subject.

(2) If the assignment is memory work, the subject matter will be definitely marked off and limited in the mind of teacher and scholar. It provides an opportunity to drill and to test the memory.

- (3) The pupil is more apt to take away a few definite and well-fixed facts and truths.
- (4) The teacher, through his questions and the replies he receives, will gain a better insight into the pupil's mind.
- (5) It provides the teacher an opportunity to train his pupils to use language correctly, naturally, and fluently.
- (6) It enables the teacher to discover the pupil who is intellectually lazy, and to give him more frequent occasions to express himself (Schmauk, op. cit., p. 72).

No recitation will be successful if conducted merely as a piece of routine. To insist that the pupil merely recite in the language of the textbook will dull his originality and fail to call forth any activity except that of memory.

### **3. Discussion.**

While the recitation brings the pupil into action by requiring his reproduction of the lesson, this method has its limitations in that the pupil merely transmits knowledge without making it his own. He may acquire knowledge without appropriating it. For this reason the discussion method is employed to advantage, especially in adolescent and adult classes. Under this type, there is a continuous development or gradual construction of the lesson.

In stimulating the spirit of inquiry and in arousing personal interest, it has no superior. No other method is as well adapted for securing individual expression or application of the lesson.

One of the greatest difficulties, next to starting a discussion and keeping it going, is to direct it along the line of the lesson. Some member of the class may manifest major interest in a minor item and much time may be lost before the class can be brought back to the main track. These side departures make it extremely difficult to complete the lesson in the given time. Another disadvantage lies in the over-talkative pupil's monopolizing the time, thus giving no opportunity to the reticent, retiring person who needs experience in expression.

But with all of its difficulties, this group discussion or conference method, when properly managed, remains the most nearly ideal of all teaching methods.

Not only does it encourage expressional activity on the part of the pupils, but it forces them to form their own judgments rather than passively to accept or unthinkingly to reject those presented by the teacher. It hardly need be added that a profitable discussion will depend in no small degree on what previous preparation has been made both by the teacher and by the class.

If the members of a class take this method seriously, each will feel a sense of responsibility for the conduct of the session. Every member will take his turn at "carrying the ball." To the extent that each person participates to the limit of his ability, attention and interest will be sustained.

#### **4. Research.**

We have explained that in the technique of teaching the great aim is to make the pupil an independent investigator.

There is no better method for this than that of research.

Here the teacher assigns to each pupil a part of the lesson to investigate. During the lesson period each member of the class presents his part, which is commented upon, given an evaluation, and organized by the teacher into the combined result of the work for that day. This method can be used effectively in adolescent and adult classes, provided books and materials are available for research, and the class is sufficiently small to give each member an opportunity to report his findings. One of the principal difficulties is to maintain the interest of the rest of the class while one of the members is presenting his assignment. For that reason it is recommended that:

a. Reports be brief.

If possible, every member of the class should participate, and the time should be proportionately divided among them, with ample time for the teacher to sum up the findings. Full attendance of the class is an important factor.

b. Reports be correlated.

Interest can be sustained when the parts so well fit into each other that curiosity will be aroused as to the outcome of the completed preparation. The teacher can accomplish this by making suitable assignments and distributing them to the best advantage.

#### **5. Lecture.**

What the story-telling method is to children, the lecture method is to adults. It permits the presentation of the lesson to a class of unlimited numbers, and permits close adherence to the teacher's preparation. It makes possible an uninterrupted and properly connected discourse leading up to a practical conclusion.

Like the story-telling method, it acceptably serves the expository mode of procedure. Both time and effort are saved when the teacher is afforded full opportunity to present his preparation, for there are no minutes wasted getting to the point or in waiting for some slow-responding pupil. Moreover, there is no danger of a carefully prepared lesson getting sidetracked by an unexpected suggestion from some member of the class. The lecture method permits a smooth, easy, direct, and systematic development of the lesson.

But all of the above advantages are lost if the class is not closely following the lecturer and thinking with him. And it is quite possible they will not be. Some members of the class may sit perfectly passive, taking no thought of the lesson during the lecture, and doing nothing about it afterward.

Mental and spiritual as well as physical growth, come through activity. And this activity can be insured only when the pupil is expected to take part in or contribute to the development of the lesson.

So serious are the limitations of the lecture method that it must be put down as the least to be preferred, and should be used only when the brevity of time and the large number to be reached demand a direct discourse.

Only teachers who possess strong personalities and are capable of winning and holding the undivided attention of the class will achieve success with this method.

## **QUESTIONS**

1. What is the expository mode? State its difficulties.
2. Explain the experience mode and its limitations.
3. How may the difficulties of the expository mode be overcome?
4. Name five methods of development.
5. What is the story-telling method, and in what departments can it be used most effectively?
6. What are the four elements of a good story?
7. What is the recitation method and where should it be largely used?
8. Point out four advantages of the recitation method.
9. Distinguish between the recitation and discussion methods.
- 10a. Why is the discussion method the most nearly ideal?
- b. Upon what does its success depend?
- 11a. What is the research method?
- b. How can it be made effective?
12. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the lecture method?

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