

THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER

by

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Organizing Material

MANY have the impression that the preparation of the lesson is complete when sufficient material has been secured to “fill in the time.” It is an unpardonable weakness for any teacher to “mark time” while waiting for the closing bell; he has something more to do than simply to “keep going.”

It is a common mistake to imagine that a religious lesson requires less preparation than a secular one. Indeed, there is much to be learned from successful school teachers who painstakingly prepare for each recitation. In the teaching of every class someone must suffer. If the teacher does not suffer before the lesson begins, the pupils are apt to suffer afterward. Teaching is real work. Lesson material must be organized. There must be a process of elimination as well as accumulation. It is the teacher's business to complete his lesson. He may not be able to teach all there is to teach, but he should complete all that he has planned to teach, and his material should be organized with that in mind. Lesson material may be said to be well organized when it is outlined and fitted into the lesson period. The value and opportunity of the golden hour of the Sunday school must be fully appreciated. It is a solemn responsibility. The lesson material must be selected with the pupils in mind as well as the time at our disposal. There is more than one way to organize lesson material.

I. METHODS OF ORGANIZING MATERIAL

Dr. George Herbert Betts points out four different methods of organization used in preparing material for teaching.

1. Haphazard organization.

The haphazard plan, which is really no plan at all, is all too common among teachers today. It indicates either a lack of preparation or a lack of ability, and neither of these will be found in a well-trained teacher. We have all listened to addresses, and even sermons and lectures, which were constructed after the haphazard plan. It was difficult either to follow or to remember them. If our pupils cannot see that we have a clear understanding of the lesson and have arranged its materials in an orderly way, there will be confusion of thought, dullness of perception, and dimness of impression.

2. Logical organization.

This consists of sorting out the material and selecting only that which can be appropriately related in the development of the lesson. The different parts of the subject matter must be fitted together in the way best suited to its logical relationships. It recognizes the all-important law of apperception and constantly proceeds in the arrangement of facts from the known to the unknown, for there must be logical thinking on the part of the pupil fully as much as on the part of the teacher.

3. Chronological organization.

The element of time enters so fully into our thinking, and such a large portion of the Bible consists of a series of facts which can best be grasped and retained when unfolded in their historical relationship, that this method can be used to great advantage. God's revelation to man was progressive. By this we mean that He did not impart in the beginning a full knowledge of Himself, or completely disclose His plan concerning man. It was only as the centuries passed that He unfolded more and more of His divine purpose to those chosen writers who recorded His Word. For this reason, chronological organization will need to be kept in mind not only in preparing a distinct lesson, but also in planning the entire curriculum of Bible study.

4. Psychological organization.

This method consists of planning the subject matter to fit the mind and needs of the child. It must be reiterated that the subject matter must be within the grasp and understanding of the pupil. If it cannot be adapted to his comprehension, or applied to his experience, it must be discarded. There is no virtue in presenting truths, however significant and profound, if they are beyond the reach of the pupil's experience. Material which is not adapted to the understanding is soon forgotten; or if retained, it weighs upon the intellect and dulls its edge for further learning. "We dare not forget the child when we teach religion" (Betts, *How to Teach Religion*, p. 130).

Modern educators lay great stress on the psychological organization of materials - some do it to the exclusion of every other method. Its weakness, like the experience mode of procedure, is in its departure from the Bible as the content of instruction, and its primary stress on application rather than on acquisition of God's Word.

It is true that we dare not "forget the child" when we teach, but it is also true that we dare not forget that the Bible is the only authoritative revelation that will enable us to teach the truths of Christianity. To have our lesson material Bible-centered does not mean that we ignore the age and understanding of the pupil. In one sense of the word, all teaching material should be submitted to the psychological test of its appropriateness to the age and understanding of the pupil. But we never can apply a psychological test to the value of God's Word; what may be rejected as unsuitable or too advanced on one occasion must be utilized on another. While in the Beginners and Primary departments a psychological organization of material may have first consideration, the chronological is better for the Junior and Intermediate departments and the logical for young people and adults.

II. STEPS IN ORGANIZING MATERIAL

1. Aim of instruction.

The entire preparation will center around the aim or purpose to which the teacher must determine resolutely to adhere in the presentation of the lesson. All of the assembled material will have to be examined in the light of this purpose. In making a preliminary survey of what has been gathered for the next lesson, the teacher should ask, "What can I find here that will meet some real need in the lives of my pupils?" The answer of this question will provide the teacher with the real aim of the lesson. Do not be satisfied with the aim of the writer who prepares the lesson helps for your department. The writer can only make suggestions from the content of the lesson.

The teacher can better determine his aim from the conduct of his pupils.

- Does the lesson teach faith, or obedience, or love, or duty to God or to man?
- Does it suggest such Christian graces as humility, kindness, generosity?
- Does it encourage Bible study, prayer, or Christian fellowship?
- Does it deal directly or indirectly with God's plan of salvation?
- How then can it be made definitely to touch the life of each member of the class?

Decide what your class needs and what they should receive from this lesson. Run over in your mind the various pupils that constitute your class and see what particular individuals among them you are going to reach in a helpful way. Such a knowledge will give not only definiteness to your aim but appropriateness to your method and application.

2. Methods employed.

The age of the pupils will determine largely the methods to be employed; but there are other factors to be considered. A good teacher will probably select several methods in order to make an effectual presentation of the lesson. The organization of the material will have an important bearing on this selection. Much more material will be required for the lecture than the discussion method, and more time will be needed for the reports of assignments than when the teacher takes the leading part in the discussion. If questions are to be used extensively, not nearly as much ground will be covered. All of these circumstances peculiar to the methods employed will have an important bearing in ascertaining how much material can be used in the allotted time. The character of the lesson will also determine its treatment. The conquests of Joshua, or the journeys of Paul, for example, will call for visual instruction, or maps.

3. Material used.

The aim and method having been determined, the teacher will wish to make a careful study of all the available helps. The teacher should prepare more material than is required so that he can feel at ease. At the same time, there must be careful selection and elimination. Not all the material provided even in lesson helps can be used by any one teacher, and he must select that material which will most definitely help in the realization of the aim in mind.

After years of teaching experience, Amos R. Wells wrote: “Learn to simplify your teaching and focus it more upon a few facts and truths. As I remember it, I used to put enough into each half hour for two full hours. The result must have been to confuse my pupils and fill them with dismay. My teaching was all lectures, though usually under the thin disguise of questions and answers. Thus I was all the time pouring into baskets full of holes. If I had to do it over, I would think less of what I was giving, and more of what the pupils were getting (Schmauk, *How to Teach in Sunday School*, p. 282).

Taking into consideration the extra time required for the report of assignments and the development of the lesson through questions, the teacher will arrive at approximately the proper amount of material that can be used in the allotted time. This will include the Bible passages, memory work, pictures, or any collateral material to be considered.

4. Lesson outlined.

The teacher, as well as the preacher, needs to arrange an outline of three or more divisions. For inexperienced teachers, the making of this division will be difficult, and at first they may use the outlines prepared by others in lesson helps. With study and experience, however, they will learn to construct their own division heads - a much better practice than using a ready-made outline.

The outline should provide for several general divisions, or topics, with minor points, illustrations and applications grouped under them. The ease, effectiveness, and conclusiveness with which the lesson is developed will depend largely on the perfection of this outline. Facts should be listed under the topic or division to which they are related and in the order of their importance. If pressed for time, the teacher can then concentrate his attention in the concluding minutes, on the main heads of the outline, omitting the secondary topics. Following this plan, the teacher will not be caught by the closing bell, with the lesson only half presented. Moreover, after a little experience, a good instructor will learn not to introduce a topic in his outline which he cannot at least touch upon in the teaching of the lesson.

5. Questions prepared.

While the best questions will depend upon the response of the pupils and therefore cannot be prepared in advance, it is well to have a set of pivotal questions thought out and set down for guidance. If the lesson is to be developed largely by the use of questions, it is necessary that the greater facts and truths be brought into prominence, and that the pupils recognize the pathway of thought and feel that they are making progress on it as the lesson proceeds. Writing out questions in advance also helps to formulate that type of inquiries that will be thought-provoking and free from those errors that reduce the effectiveness of the question.

6. Illustrations selected.

We have observed in a previous lesson that a teacher cannot depend on an appropriate, spur-of-the-moment illustration. It must be selected and introduced in the outline beforehand. Some teachers begin the lesson with an illustration drawn from the everyday experience of the pupil, to attract attention on the one hand, and to impress the truth, on the other hand.

This illustration may then be referred to throughout, and especially at the close of, the teaching period, for the purpose of showing its bearing on the truth taught. It is well to examine the lesson outline to ascertain what point needs to be made clearer, then to seek to illustrate from common experiences of life, from nature, from history, by story or song. Do not over-illustrate, and thus eclipse rather than illuminate the central truth.

7. Applications suggested.

If we have been pupil-minded as we assembled and organized our material, this important part of the preparation will not be difficult. "How am I to impress upon my pupil's mind the truth which I want him to express in his daily living?" is the pertinent question that every teacher must frequently ask during his preparation. He must ever keep in mind the various individuals of his class and what they most need, or what will be most helpful to the class as a whole.

8. Pupil's co-operation.

There is no part of the preparation that needs more thought than this. Training one's pupils is more difficult than teaching them. More skill is required to lead a pupil to learn something by his own study than to teach him something. In fact, one needs ever to remember that the real task of the teacher is to make the pupil an independent investigator of truth. A definite task for each pupil should be thought out in advance. The pupil's co-operation is to be kept in mind in all.

a. Research work.

The making of assignments for the next lesson is one of the main secrets of securing effective co-operation on the part of the pupil.

These assignments should be:

(1) Definite.

It is not enough to urge boys and girls to "study the lesson." Many times the pupil tries to do this, but not knowing how to study, is overwhelmed and discouraged at the size of the task. Give him something definite to do. Miss Plummer has given twelve excellent suggestions for definite home work (Plummer, *The Soul-Winning Teacher*, p. 99).

It is also essential that the teacher be definite in assigning the sources of help. Pupils need to know just what books to consult, and usually it is well to put the material in their hands, with an offer to help them in their research.

(2) Individual.

Assignments should be not only definite but individual. For instance, one pupil should have this question to look up; another, this topic to report on; a third, this map to draw; a fourth, these Bible references to compare.

The interest, capacity, and ability of the pupil will largely determine the nature of the assignment. Every member of the class should be included if possible.

b. Class work.

Aside from such research work as may be assigned to the pupil to prepare at home, there will need to be very definite plans made for his presentation of this work during the class session.

(1) Questions.

In the preparation of the questions to be used in class, thought must be given to the interests of the pupils not only to be assured of a response, but to “draw them out” to express themselves freely on the lesson.

(2) Topics.

Where the class has a background of Bible knowledge, or will make a real study of the lesson, topics may be assigned to individual pupils to introduce a general discussion. The class will generally feel more free to join in a discussion introduced by one of their own number, than one presented by the teacher. Care will have to be exercised in making the assignments so that the pupil may be depended upon to make a hearty response; failure here may make it difficult to get others to co-operate. It is not well to begin with the timid or backward pupils, but they will be likely to follow after the more assuming ones have participated.

(3) Teaching.

In the older classes, sometimes it is possible for one of the pupils to teach the lesson. However, while this is excellent experience for the instructor, frequently it does not work out so well for the other members of the class.

Therefore it is probably best to limit the responsibility of the pupils to the presentation of a particular portion of the lesson.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between assembling and organizing material?
2. Name four methods of organizing material.
- 3a. Distinguish between the logical and chronological methods.
- 3b. State for what departments they are best suited.
- 4a. What is the weakness of the psychological method?
- 4b. In what department is its use permissible?
5. State the eight steps in organization of material.
6. What attention should be given to the aim of the lesson?
7. Name two circumstances that will determine the methods to be employed.
8. Make some suggestions as to the amount of material necessary.

9. How should the teacher proceed in making an outline?
10. Discuss the introduction of questions, illustrations, and applications.
11. What provisions should be made for the home work of the pupils?
12. What plans should be made for the pupils' co-operation in class?

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