

THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER

by

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CHAPTER THREE

Reaching the Spirituality

THUS FAR we have considered the task of every teacher, first to reach the mentality and then the personality. But the Christian teacher must go further than this. He must reach the spiritual nature - the God-consciousness of man. Of the three planes of life, the highest is the plane of God; the central, the plane of man; the lowest, the plane of the beast. Two great facts are revealed by a study of these planes:

1. The animal cannot ascend to the plane of man.

This is one of the strongest arguments against evolution. Here is an impassable chasm.

2. Man can pass from one plane to another.

His endowment of self-determination enables him to sit like a king between heaven and earth. He can descend and live on the plane of the beast, or he can rise to heavenly places and hold communion with God. Christianity teaches us that there is only one Supreme Being - God. God has manifested Himself through the book of Nature as well as through the book of sacred Scripture.

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard . . . The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple” (Psalm 19:1-3, 7).

Above all, God has revealed Himself to man through His only begotten Son.

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person . . . ” (Hebrews 1:1-3).

Now, while men may learn about God through their senses, in the same way as they have been conscious of the world about them, these faculties are not sufficient for a personal or soul acquaintance with Him.

There are other means which must be employed if God is to become a reality in every thought and life. One of these is

I. FAITH

1. Definition.

The Bible defines it as “**faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen**” (Hebrews 11:1).

Faith is sometimes called a sixth sense, to be employed especially in the spiritual realm. It is not to be exercised independent of the five senses through which man acquires knowledge. It is rather as a supplementary avenue through which he can penetrate realms inaccessible to the five senses.

Faith in its widest sense is belief in what another states, simply on the ground of his truthfulness. It is dependence upon a person or thing as trust-worthy. Faith is within the reach of the lowest intelligence, and makes its appeal to the keenest intellect. The vine clinging to the tree is a type of it. The infant in its mother's arms is an example of it. Faith, in a narrower sense, is the religious faculty of the soul. It is the power to believe in God and to fear, love, trust, adore, reverence, and worship Him.

There are two kinds of religious faith:

a. Natural faith.

Natural religious faith is the power to worship a Higher Being (Norlie, *An Elementary Christian Psychology*, p. 162).

Every human being, even in his natural corrupt state has this religious faculty. The natural man is corrupt on account of having inherited a sinful nature. When Adam sinned, he lost the image of God and passed sin and death on to his posterity. His whole being was poisoned with sin, and his understanding became dark. Despite his sinful and lost estate, man has ever retained a certain belief that there is a God. He has possessed a certain longing, although secret perhaps, for the worship that was forfeited by Adam's transgression. This natural religious faculty, like the other powers of the soul, is of high value, although it is corrupt and cannot save a man.

Evolutionists say that all religious ideas, including that of God, have been the result of a process of natural improvement. This is contrary to God's Word. Man was created with a religious faculty.

Our first parents knew the Creator to be a true God. After sin came into the world, this knowledge became more and more dim. Men began to worship the things God had created instead of the Creator.

Instead of man evolving from a crude beginning to a higher level, the Bible shows that wherever he has been left to himself, his religion, as well as his morals, has degenerated.

b. Supernatural faith.

God, in the eternal counsel, has made provision for man's salvation- in the fullness of time the Lord Jesus Christ came to save. He saves from sin and death and eternal punishment those who believe on Him as their Saviour. This faith in Christ is supernatural faith, or Christian faith (Norlie, op. cit., p. 145).

It is the firm conviction of the truth of what God has revealed in the Bible. It believes that God and His Word are trustworthy. It relies wholly upon God and His promises of salvation through Christ. While natural religious faith is common to all men, supernatural faith is possessed only by those in whom the regeneration of the Holy Spirit has created an unshakable belief in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In natural religious faith there is a feeling of hostility to God, **"because the carnal mind is enmity against God"** (Romans 8:7). The natural mind is afraid of God, with the fear of a slave or of a criminal. In supernatural faith there is a feeling of love to God **"because he first loved us"** (I John 4:19).

The Christian fears God only in the sense that he fears to displease Him. He cries out with Joseph, **"How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"** (Genesis 39:9). Christian faith not only transforms fear into love, but also opinion into conviction. Whereas the natural man expresses an opinion, the spiritual man speaks with conviction.

Interest that expresses a personality becomes enthusiasm. The word *"enthusiasm"* literally means *"God in you,"* and strictly speaking is the possession only of those who have supernatural faith.

II. CONSCIENCE

The word *"conscience"* is seldom heard in a class of modern psychologists (Norlie, op. cit., p. 145).

Many psychologists do not believe in the conscience. If they do give it any consideration, they insist that it has been acquired and is not a gift of God. However, the teaching of the Bible is very plain. It states that the Gentiles, who were not the recipients of the law given to the Jews, have **"their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another"** (Romans 2:15).

1. Definition.

From this passage we must infer that conscience is the voice of God in the human soul.

Conscience tells a person what he ought to do and what he ought not to do. It approves what is right and disapproves of what is wrong in thought and word and deed.

1. Conscience is the moral faculty of the soul, the power to know and feel and will in matters of right and wrong. The word conscience does not occur in the Old Testament, but appears thirty-two times in the New Testament (Norlie, op. cit., p. 150).

2. Evidences.

Although not mentioned by name, we find evidence of its presence in the Old Testament.

- When Adam and Eve had sinned, they were immediately seized with shame and fear. They went and hid themselves.
- When Joseph's brethren were called to account by the governor of Egypt, their consciences reminded them of their base treatment of their younger brother. **"They said one to another, we are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us"** (Genesis 42:21).
- When Pharaoh of Egypt had his dream, the conscience of the chief butler reminded him of his promise to the imprisoned Joseph. He confessed, **"I do remember my faults this day."**

Conscience was known to the ancient Greeks and Romans. The Greeks pictured an accusing conscience very vividly. The guilty souls were entrusted to three Furies whose hair was made of living snakes, and who drove the culprits with stinging lashes to the underworld abode of the wicked, a place called Tartarus.

It is not necessary to prove that conscience exists and that it is a part of man's birthright. The life, language and literature of every people abound in examples of conscience at work. Scarcely anything in the story of mankind has been more conspicuous than the phenomenon of moral distinctions in the world. The massive volumes of history testify to the presence of conscience in every kindred and nation. Every religious system recognizes it.

Missionaries declare that even the most benighted heathen are not without moral codes and moral sins. No man need look far to find conscience at work. He can find it in himself.

Conscience is a God-given faculty to assist, like faith, in acquainting men with God's righteousness.

3. Judging.

Conscience appears as a judge, making accusation against us. This judge is no respecter of persons and makes no distinction between the rich and poor, the ignorant and the intelligent. He persists in accusing us until he has either been obeyed or driven away. Even when silenced for the time being, he is sure to return for another accusation. Thus conscience judges if a man has done evil. But if a man has done what is right, then conscience is quick and sure to approve.

Conscience has been called the "supreme court of the soul."

All questions of right and duty are submitted to this court. Here God's laws of righteousness are contrasted with the selfish interests and low standards of men. Here the lawyers argue back and forth with consummate skill and untiring energy until a judgment is rendered. In this trial the conscience is the court room, the prison, the lawyers, the judge, the jury, and the judgment, all in one (Norlie, op. cit., p. 150).

4. Training.

a. The Bible.

Although conscience is a voice of righteousness within us, it is nevertheless not infallible.

It may make mistakes of judgment, and it may reverse its judgment. The conscience clock, to keep perfect time, needs to be regulated and corrected. It is commonly accepted that instinct and intelligence are a part of the human being, and they form the basis of his later training and his activities throughout life. But instincts can be perverted. Intelligence can be abused or neglected. In like manner the sense of righteousness can be perverted or neglected.

The world always exercises a strong influence over a weak conscience. The world's standards are imperfect. If conscience is governed by public opinion, sooner or later it will differ from the teaching of God's Word.

Just as faith is inspired and quickened by the reading of the Word of God, so conscience is quickened and corrected by God's standards of righteousness.

Job's conscience was satisfied in his argument with the three philosophers that he had done no wrong, but when brought face to face with the presence and purity of God, he cried, "**I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes**" (Job 42:6).

It required a vision of the Lord sitting upon the throne, high and lifted up, to cause Isaiah to cry, "**Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts**" (Isaiah 6:5).

It was when Peter had seen the divine power in the miracle of the fishes, that he fell at Jesus' feet, saying, "**Depart from me; for I am a sinful man**" (Luke 5:8).

b. Environment.

While conscience is a God-given gift, it needs to be encouraged in order to be active.

Like the still small voice of the Holy Spirit, it can be grieved through inattention and neglect. The alarm clock is a faithful reminder to the early riser, if its voice is always heeded, but one may become unconscious of its presence simply by habitually neglecting to respond to its call.

Conscience, then, can be greatly strengthened by environment.

At birth, the child possesses no standards of good and evil. His standards are formed from his environment. If the environment has been good, his first efforts to depart from it will be accompanied by pangs of conscience. He has an active tendency toward the conduct he has learned as good, so that he cannot take a step far from it without a struggle. Moreover, his conduct is determined not so much by what he has been taught, as by what he has observed. It is what the home and school spontaneously condemn or approve that helps to strengthen conscience.

Public opinion as expressed by parents and teachers becomes his standard of values, the measure of his conduct and the reach of his conscience. The conscientious child is the product of an atmosphere wherein “**whatsoever things are lovely and of good report**” are conveyed spontaneously.

III. PRAYER

1. Definition.

One theological definition defines prayer as “an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgment of His mercies.”

- Prayer is spiritual expression.
- Prayer is the practice of faith in God.
- Prayer is the foundation of spiritual life.
- Prayer is the eternal breath within the nostrils of men.

Dying men seldom pray and the dead never pray. No one can hold his breath and live. Neither can one refrain from speaking to God and be alive spiritually. No man can live whose spinal cord is broken, and no man can exist spiritually who has severed his connection with Heaven. Prayer is perfectly natural, as breath is to the man who lives. Man has no great difficulty in breathing except when dying. He breathes to keep from dying, for he knows that without breath he will be dead. Living souls cannot easily give up prayer. They will cling to it although they may be obliged to give up everything else. To them it is a matter of life and death. When we pray naturally and easily and continually, we are spiritually alive and well. When we pray infrequently and with difficulty, we are dying. When we cease altogether, we are dead.

2. Importance.

Why has God ordained prayer to be the practice of faith in God?

a. Prayer proves the *rule of God*.

God is a King. It is the right of a king to hear and answer the petitions of his subjects. Prayerlessness ignores, if it does not despise, the Ruler of the universe, by refusing to consult or petition Him about any need or grievance. The prayerless man has placed himself outside the pale of civilization by denying to the Ruler the right to hear the petitions of His subjects.

If he admits there is a God, while at the same time denying He hears prayer, he has brought his God down to the position of a petty savage chieftain who lives for his own pleasure without regard for the welfare of his subjects.

b. Prayer proves the *right of God*.

God is a Judge. It is the right of a judge to hear and answer the prayer of a plaintiff. For men not to pray to God as the arbitrator of their affairs and the just judge of their adversaries; is an index to the spirit of anarchy. In that state there is no recognition of judicial power, but every man is his own judge and jury. Prayerlessness is ethical anarchy. It ignores or despises the Judge of all the earth by refusing to consult or petition Him about affairs and grievances.

c. Prayer proves the *recognition of God*.

God is a Father. It is right for a father to hear and answer the cry of his child. If you confess the fatherhood of God through the blood atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then deny that He is influenced by the cry of His child, you degrade Him below the level of the beasts and the birds. They heed the cry of their young in distress and hasten to their relief. God must hear the prayer of His child or be branded as infamously heartless. A prayerless man is a Fatherless child. When you pray you prove that you are reconciled to God through the death of Jesus Christ, and God must recognize you as His adopted child by hearing and answering your prayer.

3. Training.

While prayer is spiritual expression, and it is possible for a little child to say “**Speak, for thy servant heareth,**” and a wayward sinner to cry, “**God be merciful to me a sinner,**” nevertheless there is much to be learned about this very important subject.

a. Instruction.

(1) The Bible.

The Bible is perhaps the only book containing biographical sketches that has included the prayers of so many of its eminent characters. It does not merely prove the power and give the marvelous results of prayer; it has also included the exact prayers which were used so that they may serve as a pattern to others.

Most of these prayers are brief, but the oblation of Solomon at the dedication of the Temple occupies one of the longest chapters in the Bible (I Kings 8) and is a model of style for public worship. Many of the Psalms are models of acceptable devotion.

Other parts of Scripture represent God as speaking to man; here man is represented as speaking to God. By these recorded prayers, therefore, we test the utterances and feelings of our hearts, also whether our petitions are expressed in a manner acceptable to God.

Prayers that contain the language of such divine poetry are devotional utterances pleasing to God.

(2) Christ.

In answer to the question, “What rule hath God given for our direction in prayer,” a doctrinal statement says: “The whole Word of God is of use to direct us in prayer; but the special rule of direction is that form of prayer Christ taught His disciples, commonly called the Lord’s Prayer.”

While commonly called the Lord’s Prayer, it would be better to designate it as the “*disciples’ prayer*.” That would distinguish it from our Lord’s great intercessory prayer in John seventeen.

Truly Christ taught His disciples a model prayer, but He also exemplified His instruction by a marvelous life of prayer. The Gospel of Luke records nine distinct occasions when He was in prayer.

- He was praying when He was baptized;
- He was praying when He chose His disciples;
- He was praying at the time of His greatest popularity;
- He was praying at the time of His greatest unpopularity;
- He was praying at the time of His glorification;
- He was praying at the time of His greatest agony;
- He was praying at the time of His greatest physical suffering;
- He was praying at the time of His death, and
- He was praying at the time of His ascension.

b. Practice.

If prayer is the practice of faith in God, it is necessary that it should early become a part of life.

(1) Private.

As a child comes to love his parents he may likewise come to love God.

His worship will be the expression of his feelings toward the God with whom he has become acquainted through observing the worship of his parents. Gratitude will probably be the underlying cause of his love and reverence. Its expression will be found first in the songs and prayers that he is taught.

As soon as a child becomes familiar with the set prayers he has been taught, he may be encouraged to add expressions of personal gratitude, or make petition for some childish need his enlarged experiences may suggest. Sometimes, after asking God’s blessing upon father and mother, the child will think of some relative or playmate. Again there will be petitions for something that is on the heart of the little one. These tendencies to individualize his prayer should not be suppressed. They are a manifestation of his unquestioned faith in the power and goodness of God. God in Heaven is often very near to the life of a little child.

(2) Public.

Ability to pray in public is only the natural result of much prayer in private. While the individuality that finds expression when others are not present should not be entirely submerged in formal prayer, nevertheless one must remember that he is leading in prayer. It has been well said that in public prayer one either leads or leaves his audience.

Prayer is the most important factor in worship, and training in worship means that Sunday school pupils must really have an opportunity to worship. A part of the Sunday school program must be set apart for this purpose. One learns to worship through worshipping. One learns to pray by praying, and this does not mean listening to someone else pray. The constant consciousness of God in the life must be cultivated.

The teacher who comes to have a sense of responsibility for the cultivation of the devotional life of his pupils will wish, in addition to co-operating in the worship service of the Sunday school, to help them in the establishment of the habit of daily private prayer and devotional Bible reading.

It is important to create an appreciation of the value of the practice. A given time set apart for private devotion, and held sacred for that purpose, contributes greatly to spiritual life. But when it does so contribute, we may be sure that the observance of that daily hour is something more than mere habit.

We must seek to form the habit of daily devotion, not as an end in itself, but as an aid to the cultivation of the spiritual life.

CONCLUSION

We have noted three steps or objectives in the task of the Christian teacher, and that these three objectives may be related to the three divisions of the human being - body, soul, and spirit. We have also noted that it is important for the Christian teacher to take all three steps in reaching the pupil, and to take them in their order.

When the teacher has observed this important law in approaching his task, he will be encouraged to find that what has been merely instruction in reaching the mentality, has become opinion when he has gone further and contacted the personality, and that through the spiritual aids of faith, conscience, and prayer, opinions have become convictions.

The pupil was intelligent when his mind was stored with knowledge, but became interested when the personality was contacted, and enthusiastic when led into the realms of God-consciousness.

The pupil may merely have (acquisition) if the teacher has only stored his mind with knowledge, but when his interest has been kindled he expresses a like or a dislike. And when the pupil's spiritual faculties have been reached, his convictions and enthusiasms lead him to love or to hate.

Knowledge is power, but the acquisition of knowledge in itself does not guarantee success.

Knowledge is power only when it is conquered, harnessed, and set to work. Moreover, education is not merely the conquest of knowledge; its reality and finality is the conquest of ourselves.

Until a young person's training has brought about the all-important conquest of body and mind, his education is a failure. Knowledge then will not serve us until it has been conquered - until we have conquered ourselves. But while the appeal to the personality is the emphasis upon self-control, the appeal to the spirituality stresses God-control. For it is only God-controlled personalities that can be trusted to exercise self-control.

The teacher who reaches the mentality is preparing the intellect for knowledge, but the teacher who reaches the personality is preparing the pupil for life, while the Christian teacher, in going beyond this and reaching the spirituality, is preparing the pupil for eternity.

QUESTIONS

1. Prove that God-consciousness is common to man.
2. In what respects do men learn about God through their senses?
3. What is faith?
4. Distinguish between natural and supernatural faith.
5. What is conscience?
6. What evidences of conscience are given in the Old Testament?
7. In what respect does conscience act as a judge?
8. What is the relation of the Bible to conscience?
9. How does environment affect conscience?
10. What is prayer?
11. State three facts that prove the importance of prayer.
12. Name two sources of instruction in prayer.
13. What practice in public prayer should be encouraged?
14. What objectives should be attained when the teacher reaches the mentality and proceeds in an orderly manner?

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