

THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER

by

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Part II: The Teacher

CHAPTER FOUR

Personality

I. THE INFLUENCE OF PERSONALITY

OUR PERSONALITY is such that we either influence, or are influenced by, everyone with whom we come in contact. One is either marked by, or puts a mark on, every person he meets.

As Miss L. Flora Plummer states it, "Whenever we break through the conventionality which we are prone to use for protection, and enter into the inner circle of the heart of a friend, associate, or companion, we become infected with the perfume, or taint, in the atmosphere of his personality" (Plummer, *Soul-Winning Teacher*, p. 35).

Because teaching, unlike preaching, is a personal relation and involves the close association of instructor and pupil, the teacher should be:

1. A strong personality.

"Teaching," says Edward Thring, "is the communication of life from the living to the living."

It is this influencing of life that makes personality such an important pedagogical requisite. "The teacher's life is the life of his teaching." He will teach a little by what he says, more by what he does, but most by what he is. It is this all-important fact that has given point to the oft-repeated saying, "What you are speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say."

2. A Christian personality.

When a man surrenders his will to God, he does not lose his personality.

While his powers are no longer devoted to impressing his own will on others, they are now bent on the promotion of the will of the One to whom he has surrendered his own leadership. Paul's life was just as forcible after his surrender to Jesus Christ as before. From that hour, for him to live was Christ (Philippians 1:21), and everyone who came in contact with him was electrified by the power of his Christian personality.

A real class will study their teacher. They will break through the bars of conventionality and perhaps discover more about their teacher than he has learned about them. His faith, courage, and convictions will speak infinitely louder than his words. Contact with a personality that is charged with the Spirit of Christ can hardly fail to light the spark of desire in the soul of another for a richer, deeper experience in Godlikeness.

When Christ is the only true pattern, His followers are epistles “**known and read of all men**,” and the example of a consistent Christian life counts more toward helping others reach a higher standard than any amount of instruction.

And in living a blameless life before his pupils, the teacher will be fully rewarded by their expressions of confidence and loyalty. There is nothing more thrilling than to have a child look up into your eyes with full confidence and trust, or defend your statements against all comers.

Such a pupil was one day mentioning something his teacher had said, when someone interrupted him (Ibid., p. 39).

“It is not so.”

“It is so; my teacher said so.”

“But it is not so, nevertheless.”

“If my teacher said it, it is so; and if it is not so, it is so if my teacher said it.”

3. A Christian enthusiast.

Some time ago a leading American merchant, who had in his employ many exceptionally successful salesmen, was asked by a magazine to suggest half a dozen of the world’s greatest salesmen.

To the astonishment of all, he named Paul, Luther, Wesley, Whitefield, Spurgeon, and Moody.

“These men were eminently successful as salesmen,” he wrote, “because they had implicit faith in the house they represented, and perfect confidence that its goods were absolutely needed by the trade. This inspired them with a courage and enthusiasm in the presentation of their wares that demanded and secured attention, and the house was kept busy filling orders.”

The Christian teacher represents the same “house” as these great Christian personalities, and there is the same need today for God’s Word that there always has been. Success, however, will rest upon the enthusiasm the teacher has for the task, and this enthusiasm will largely be in proportion to his faith in the great enterprise to which he has been called.

He must have:

a. Faith in God.

There is no doubt that the Christian teacher believes in God, but how far does his faith go? Does he believe in God as Paul and Luther and Moody? Has he a triumphant, aggressive faith?

b. Faith in the Bible.

This was a marked characteristic of Jesus. He had absolute faith in His message. Again and again He said, "**It is written**," because He believed in what was written. No one is going to be enthusiastic over the Bible unless it is the Word of God, but if the Omnipotent and Omniscient One has written to man, the marvel and the wonder of that message should stir the heart of every teacher.

c. Faith in the task.

Why are you teaching? Is it to please the superintendent? Is it because you think it your duty? If that is all, there will be no enthusiasm for your task. But if God has called you to it, you may rest assured it is the one thing that will give you most pleasure. God does not call men promiscuously to service, and if He has set aside this particular task for you, it is well to remember that He has no one else in all the world who can accomplish it as well, and that you are in the center of His will in fulfilling His purpose for you.

II. THE IMITATION OF PERSONALITY.

Bishop Huntington has made a valuable contribution to Sunday school teachers in his remarkable booklet entitled *Unconscious Tuition* (McKinney, *Practical Pedagogy in the Sunday School*, p. 53).

The argument of this experienced author is that the teacher is unconsciously exerting an influence over the pupil continuously, and therefore should be very careful that his influence be of the highest character. One has but to watch a group of young children at play to be convinced that much of what they are doing is an imitation of their elders. What are some of the things about the teacher that the pupil is likely to imitate?

1. Order.

Order in a Sunday school begins with an orderly superintendent. Order in a class begins with an orderly teacher. Recognizing this truth, the teacher who wishes for order must first of all be orderly. Instead of scolding the pupils, he will show them by example just what he desires.

2. Reverence.

Reverence for sacred things is best taught by example. Instead of telling children they must reverence the name of Jesus, the thoughtful teacher will always pronounce that name in such a way that the children instinctively will realize he reverences it.

Instead of telling them how to regulate their voices when engaged in prayer, he will modulate his tones so as to produce a quieting effect upon the pupils. The way he speaks, the way he handles his Bible, will speak volumes about reverence.

3. Practiced teaching.

There is a time in the life of adolescents when it is almost impossible by argument to convince the young doubters concerning certain things. They are, however, all eyes, when they see the truth lived. Incarnated in one who teaches it, the effect is powerful. Hence, to get others to believe and to do according to the truths for which the Sunday school stands, due regard must be paid to this trait of imitation.

The realization of these truths, which have such high pedagogical value, should be encouraging to teachers. There are those whose training may have been limited. Others are not fluent in expression. In fact, today there are many teachers who seem to feel that their instruction is having little influence upon their pupils. All these need the reminder that their lives are speaking much louder than their words. There is no limit to what may be done because of the trait of imitation.

III. THE RECOGNITION OF PERSONALITY

I shall never forget two important truths that Dr. David James Burrell, our teacher in homiletics at Princeton Seminary, impressed upon us again and again.

First of all, he said,

1. Be yourself.

Attention has been called to the fact that personality knows no duplication. How well this has been borne out in history.

There was only one Julius Caesar, though the memory of his prestige was so great that for centuries after, the rulers of Rome called themselves Caesars.

There was only one Oliver Cromwell, and the commonwealth which he founded ended with the passing of that militant Puritan.

There was only one Spurgeon, one Moody, one Billy Sunday, though many have unsuccessfully imitated their methods. God has made every one different from everyone else. That difference can be made an important contribution to our success in life.

While it is true we unconsciously imitate others, if we submerge our own selves in the substitution of other personalities, we will be failures.

The second thing is,

2. Give yourself.

The contribution of personality calls for more than an expression from the mind, or an act of the body. It calls for the concentration of the whole being.

Naturally, we do not give ourselves until our contribution has become a part of us. It is only when the things we have learned have been appropriated and applied that we can put our heart and our soul into our task.

Happy is the teacher who can say when he has finished his instruction, "I am weary in the work, but not of it." Teaching is a toilsome process. When it commands all our energy, as well as our thought, it will prove tiring.

Perhaps there is nothing more exacting of physical strength and endurance than a competitive game of football, and yet one who has engaged in intercollegiate contests has said that the expenditure of mental and physical energy in the presentation of a lesson could leave him as exhausted as a game of football.

IV. THE TRAINING OF PERSONALITY

Many young people get the impression that personality is a gift, and that there is little which can be done for its improvement.

It is true that much is acquired by heritage, and that a personality cannot be duplicated. But childhood and adolescence provide the opportunity for the development, and in adult life the improvement, of personality. The teacher may study himself to discover his weak points, or to improve the desirable qualities that his birth and training have established. This scrutiny is important, but it must be more than simply beholding oneself in a glass. If nothing more, then he **"goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was"** (James 1:23, 24).

The teacher must see and do, if there is to be improvement.

1. Physical improvement.

A person of good physique commands the attention and draws the interest of others. His appearance creates a favorable impression, no matter how disappointing later impressions may be. Therefore, a teacher who can present an attractive appearance has an initial advantage. The matter of dress is important in preparing the way for a favorable hearing. Untidiness of person, or extremes in dress, must be avoided. If a person presents a clean, well-groomed appearance, it gives evidence of a reasonable measure of self-respect.

Certainly there is truth in John Wesley's comment: "Cleanliness is next to godliness."

Good health will also improve personality. Without it, the buoyancy of spirit and the evidence of energy so essential to effective work, will very likely be lacking (Eavey, *Principles of Teaching for Christian Teachers*, p. 82).

Many troubles, such as poor discipline, lack of interest in the work, want of sympathy between teacher and pupils, often have their source in the defective physical condition of the teacher. It is most difficult for a teacher who is not well physically to be at his or her best in mental life and spiritual life.

Voice is another factor that discloses the personality. The voice can be improved. The weak voice should be strengthened, and the loud, harsh voice, modulated. The tempo should be studied, so there may at times be rapidity of expression, and at other times pauses for impression.

Inflections should be studied, so that a question may be detected before the sentence is completed. The voice is such an important factor in teaching, and has such large possibilities for effectiveness, that every teacher should give some time and thought to voice training.

In classes in observation and practice teaching, the appearance, physical condition, and voice of the teacher are always criticized.

2. Mental improvement.

It has already been pointed out, that the teacher must be a learner if he is to share with the pupil in the learning process; but he will have a program of study not merely that he may be informed. This is important, as we shall see in a subsequent chapter. But he will discover that the attention he is giving to intellectual development is also affecting his personality.

The teacher who has a well-organized program of study, and adheres to it faithfully, will become mentally alert, which is one of the most essential requirements for attaining that place in teaching to which every ambitious instructor should aspire.

3. Spiritual improvement.

Character itself does not make anyone a Christian (Eavey, op. cit., p. 89).

This is the work of God. But a Christian, and especially a Christian teacher, because of his greater influence by way of example must be a person of the highest moral standards. Impurity, compromise with wrong, indulgence in questionable practices, will have to be abandoned.

The Christian teacher must “**abstain from all appearance of evil**” (I Thessalonians 5:22). The Christian teacher will walk circumspectly through the maze of this world’s evils. He will ever recognize that his “**citizenship is in heaven.**” His life will be so permeated with the purpose to do the will of God that for him to live will mean occupation with spiritual and not with material things. As a teacher, his supreme desire will be to give his life unreservedly in service, sacrifice, and interceding prayer, for the eternal destiny of pupils whom God has entrusted to his care.

It might be well, in conclusion, to point out that there is a danger of giving too much attention to our personalities. There is always a danger of losing ourselves through the imitation of others.

Our personality will develop, not by measurement on a comparative scale, or by morbid self-analysis. Rather should we subject ourselves to a searching scrutiny when we fail, or when we succeed. This will reveal points of weakness and of strength, as well as the clues to those things we should set about to improve.

Life at its best must be the ideal of the teacher. It is the teacher's life, first of all, to which the pupil will look. And the teacher who is striving for life at its best will more and more embody those traits which he would wish to develop in his pupils. If we look to the things we do, the thoughts we think, and the character we express, our personalities will take care of themselves.

QUESTIONS

1. Name the three important characteristics of the Christian teacher.
2. How does the teacher instruct by his life?
3. Why would some eminent church leaders be most successful salesmen?
4. What three traits will mark a Christian enthusiast?
5. Name three things about a teacher that the pupil is likely to imitate.
6. In what two ways can a personality be recognized?
7. What does physique have to do with a personality?
8. How will good health improve personality?
9. In what respects does the voice affect the personality?
10. How is the personality affected through intellectual development?
11. Why are the highest moral standards necessary for a Christian teacher?
12. What is the danger of giving too much attention to our personality?

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