

THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER

by

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CHAPTER TEN

Testing

IN OLD texts on pedagogy, the program of the efficient teacher was supposed to be completed when there had been teaching, drilling, and testing. Modern education has eliminated drilling, but still recognizes the importance of testing. In fact, it is safe to say that there is no teaching without testing.

Most Sunday school teachers would be surprised to find by any fair testing of their work, how very little, comparatively, has been gained by their pupils. They continue to teach week after week entirely oblivious to the fact that little of their instruction is being retained by their pupils. The public schools have opened our eyes to this great deficiency in the Sunday school.

A questionnaire on Bible facts was given to 850 California high school students, with the following results:

64 per cent of these students did not know that Moses was the world's greatest lawgiver;
83 per cent did not know what Gethsemane is, and why it is famous in Bible history;
78 per cent could not quote two verses from the Bible;
58 per cent could not name five books of the Bible;
48 per cent could not name one writer of the Bible.

Dr. Dobbins gave a test to 81 tenth and eleventh grade high school students in a typical southern town. These students were nearly all regular Sunday school attendants. The questions were purely factual, such as:

Who was the first man?
Name the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible).
Who led the children of Israel from Egypt?
Who was the first king of Israel?
Who wrote most of the Psalms?
Name the four Gospels.
Name four of Paul's epistles.

The average grade was 35 percent! (Dobbins, *The Improvement of Teaching in the Sunday School*, p. 153).

In one of the public schools of Chicago, a class in the eighth grade was talking about the battle of Waterloo. One of the pupils, in his enthusiasm, spoke of the Calvary charge. Immediately the teacher went to the board and wrote the two words, cavalry, and Calvary. She asked the meaning of the first word. All the pupils knew the answer - armed horsemen.

“Now,” she said, “here is the word that John used. Tell me what it means to you.”

There was no reply. Finally one of the boys raised his hand and suggested that it was the name of a cemetery in Chicago (There is a Calvary Cemetery there). Another thought it might be the name of a city in Canada (Calgary). The teacher was plainly disappointed.

“How many of you boys and girls go to Sunday school?” she asked. Practically every hand was raised. “And do you mean to tell me that you never heard of Calvary? It seems that you would have known the importance of that place in the Bible, if you had known the importance of Waterloo in history, or of New York in geography.”

It was a revelation to her, and to those whom she told. How little our boys and girls are really learning in Sunday school!

Life itself is constantly testing us. “If teaching is careless, superficial, blundering, the results will be reflected in the failure of our pupils to grasp the truths they should learn, and in the consequent impoverishment of their lives. If our teaching is earnest, thoughtful, skillful, the results will be manifest in the growth and development of our pupils as they incorporate the truths of Christianity in their character and conduct (Dobbins, op. cit., p. 150).

Sooner or later the teacher’s work will be judged, not only of men, but also of God. Those who teach cannot escape the testing of their work. The methods of testing a pupil’s knowledge are quite as simple as the methods of teaching truth.

In fact, those who are willing to include a program of testing with their teaching will find that the only difficulty is the inadequacy of the preparation. The first thing for a teacher to consider in the testing process is to impress clearly and permanently in the pupil’s mind what he wishes him to remember.

Much of the testing may be done by means of

I. THE RECITATION

In a subsequent chapter (17) we shall discover that this is one of our teaching methods. The function of the recitation is primarily to test the knowledge of the pupil. By “testing” this knowledge, we mean “putting it on trial.” We submit it to a rigid cross-examination in order to determine whether it is clear or confused knowledge. The test, therefore, needs to be thorough, searching, and inspiring.

In testing a pupil's knowledge, the recitation must require full and accurate expression. In no other way can the teacher determine what the pupil knows, and in no other way should he undertake to determine it. Recitation should be free. The pupils should be permitted to say in their own way what they understand to be the truth. They will thus employ their personalities as well as their mentalities in the responses that they make. When a pupil states his views, forms his thoughts and expresses an opinion, the teacher has a look into his soul. That look will reveal to the teacher his duty and obligation (Martin G. Brumbaugh, *The Making of a Teacher*, p. 165).

There are three things that need to be kept in mind when we use the recitation as a means of testing. There must be

1. Preparation for recitation.

In the public school, the lesson assigned becomes the basis of recitation at the next class session. Here is an important matter for the Sunday school teacher to ponder. He cannot have a good recitation without proper preparation. Work will have to be assigned in advance of the time when recitation is required (Brumbaugh, op. cit., p. 162).

Only with the young children can he dispense with preparation. When pupils come to class without any idea of what the lesson is about, the result is wasted time. Their minds are unprepared. Not only does the teacher find it difficult to make a contact with the lesson, but it is almost hopeless to expect much in the way of recitation.

If we are to depend largely upon recitation as a means of testing, at least five minutes of the class period will have to be spent in assigning work for the following week. Only in this way can we hope that the pupils will come back the following Sunday to recite willingly and intelligently. Before making such assignments, the teacher will have to go over the lesson carefully, in order that only the more important things, those she particularly wishes to be remembered, will have the attention of the pupils while they are preparing.

Pupils need to be guided in their study. That is the purpose of supervised study in public schools. The brevity of the Sunday school period necessitates that this be done at home. But the teacher will have to supervise the study just the same. This can be done in the careful assignments of the parts to be studied.

2. Conducting a recitation.

Taking for granted that there has been ample preparation through previous study, how is the teacher now to conduct the recitation? There are two methods which may be employed. The first of these is

a. The question method.

A skillful questioner is the despair of inadequate preparation. It is also the power that makes clear to the pupil his limitations (Brumbaugh, op. cit., p. 166).

By wise use of the question, the teacher may unfold the subject systematically. Of course these questions will not be stereotyped, and to a large extent will be prompted by the response of the pupil. The teacher should arrange questions in such order as to unfold the subject of the lesson in logical sequence. Of course he will not be satisfied with answers of "Yes" and "No." Nor will he predispose the pupil to answer in a manner that would please the teacher, rather than give an opinion of his own.

b. Topical method.

The value of the topical method is that there is a good test of expression. It compels the pupil to state a series of connected thoughts, thus throwing upon him the responsibility of organizing these thoughts and of expressing them. For that reason, this method is best suited to more mature pupils. A skillful teacher is required to guide this method of teaching, that it may not degenerate into a discussion unrelated to the topic under consideration. It is perhaps best to combine the question and the topical methods, making use first of one and then the other (Brumbaugh, op. cit., p. 168). The one supreme purpose of the recitation must be kept in view. It is to test thoroughly what the pupil knows, and what he is able to state concerning what he knows.

3. Assigning a recitation.

Who shall be called upon to recite, and in what order? There are three plans suggested for making assignments, only one of which is to be recommended.

a. The simultaneous plan.

This plan calls for the concert method. The few pupils who are prepared lead in the answers, and the others join in. The teacher has no means of knowing who is talking. In this way the indifferent pupils conceal their inadequate preparation behind the others. This plan should be avoided.

b. The consecutive plan.

Some teachers begin at one end of the class, and call upon pupils in regular order. Even some professors in universities and colleges are so lacking in psychological and pedagogical knowledge as to use an alphabetical list for recitation! One day they will begin with the a's, and the next with the z's. Not only does everyone know when he going to recite, but there are some pupils who are seldom contacted. The teacher is merely giving individual instruction, since the only pupil who gives close attention is the one who is reciting, and the one who expects to be called upon next.

c. The promiscuous plan.

A wise teacher will never give any indication as to which pupils he expects to call on for recitation. The same pupil may be called upon twice in succession, but everyone will be constantly on the alert, as the uncertainty will require that each follow closely the response of the other pupils.

Of course, as we have seen in a previous chapter, the assignment is never made to a pupil until after the question has been asked, or the topic has been stated.

In the promiscuous method, the teacher may have a plan of making the rounds of the class, so that none will be overlooked, and none will be called upon too frequently; but this plan should be sufficiently complicated so that his procedure cannot be easily detected by the pupils.

In other words, the teacher should have a key to his method to which the pupils do not have access.

II. THE EXAMINATION

Examinations are counted essential in all schools but the Sunday school.

It is universally understood that if a pupil can in one way or another pass the ordinary class recitations there is no need for any subsequent examinations. But Bible knowledge, if it is worthwhile, must be obtained and tested by the same method as any other subject.

The word examination has a terror for most people. They recall wearisome cramming for school examinations, the burning of the midnight oil for a hasty review of weeks of instruction, and then the painful ordeal of trying to put on paper what has been laboriously memorized. Many will remember the questions they never anticipated, or the problems they left blank because they were unable to solve them. Teachers and pupils alike have hoped that these wearisome ordeals would not be required in the Sunday school.

Yet, if we take our work seriously, if our teaching is earnest, thoughtful, skillful, there will have to be a more exact test than the recitation permits.

One of the limitations of the recitation is that it does not provide an adequate means for the measurement of progress. Something is needed beyond the evidence that the pupil has learned his lesson from day to day. For this reason our public schools, colleges and universities give final examinations. The work of a term, semester, or even a year, is subject to a general review and examination.

Personally, I have never favored determining the promotion of a pupil by a final examination. Because of time limitation, an insufficient number of questions are provided for a thorough examination, and the element of chance also enters in, in that the questions submitted might be answered by some who would fail if the teacher had chosen others.

Moreover, the physical ordeal of submitting the measurements of a term's work to a single hour is not to be commended, even if there were any mental advantages. For this reason, in all my classes I have required every student to prepare a term paper, with a bibliography to show his research work. This independent study and expression I have felt should be recognized as of equal worth to the final examination. When there is a plan of testing the daily work, together with a paper, the final examination need not count for more than one-third.

Perhaps the best policy for the teacher is to test as he teaches. In that way you will fully comply with all the requirements for testing, and yet will not subject your pupils to the ordeal of final examinations. We are told in the Bible that children should be brought up “**in the nurture and admonition of the Lord**” (Ephesians 6:4). Nurture means knowledge. Admonition has reference to behavior. There should be examinations in both of these fields.

1. Bible tests.

The teacher may ask questions and judge the correctness of the answers, or he may have assigned topics and judge the accuracy of the response. Why not give written tests? (Dobbins, op. cit., p. 156).

The pupils are accustomed to them in the public school. Why not in the Sunday school? The objections, that Sunday school work is on a voluntary basis, and that the Sunday school pupils will resent examinations, is based on the assumption that all tests are burdensome and obnoxious. This is not true. The teacher, who is familiar with modern tests, knows that they are really fascinating. They may not be so thorough as the old-fashioned examinations, but they will meet with the pupils' favor.

a. Fields.

In the consideration of Bible tests, there are three fields in which the pupil should from time to time be subjected to a final examination.

(1) Historical

There are historical facts in the narrative of the Bible with which the pupil should be familiar. These can be submitted from time to time for chronological arrangement, and eventually will impress themselves upon the minds of the students.

For instance, arrange in order of time the following facts:

Christ was born in Bethlehem.

David was the second king of Israel.

Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt.

Three thousand were converted at Peter's first sermon.

Gideon slew a great army with only three hundred men.

Peter was delivered from prison by an angel.

(2) Biographical

In this field, the pupils might be asked, for example, to state one fact in connection with each of the following, after they have arranged the names in the chronological order in which they appear in the Old Testament:

Jonah,
Miriam,
Ahithophel,
Esther,
Gideon,
Jacob,
Hannah,
Cyrus,
Nebuchadnezzar.

(3) Geographical

Certain publishing houses, such as Scripture Press, provide outline maps upon which pupils can be required to locate certain cities or places where important events took place. Mimeographed maps can be prepared, tracing them from the original so that an accurate drawing may constantly be before the pupil.

b. Types.

There are at least four types of tests which pupils undertake spontaneously. In the "Junior Pupil," of the *All Bible Graded Series* (*All Bible Graded Series*, Scripture Press, Chicago), the following true-or-false test appears:

(1) True or false

For Luke 2:47-52:

The wise doctors in the Temple were surprised at the wisdom shown in Jesus' answers.
He asked Mary and Joseph, "**How is it that ye sought me?**"
Jesus said He had to be about His Father's business.
Mary and Joseph did not understand what He told them.
The doctors said, "Stay with us."
Jesus stayed in Jerusalem at the Temple after Mary and Joseph found Him.
Jesus went home with His parents to Nazareth.
Jesus was obedient (subject unto) His parents.
His mother forgot all about what had happened.
Jesus kept growing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

(2) Completion

Completion tests are equally interesting, and a little more exacting than the true-false tests, since in the use of the latter the pupil has a 50 per cent chance of guessing right. In the completion tests there are some statements for the pupil to complete in blank spaces left for this purpose. An example appears in the "Junior Pupil," of the *All Bible Graded Series*, where the pupil is required to read II Kings 20:1-3 and take a one-word test by completing each of the following statements with one word:

Hezekiah was sick unto _____.
The prophet who came to see Hezekiah was _____.
Isaiah told Hezekiah that he was going to _____.
Hezekiah sadly turned his face to the _____.
Hezekiah prayed that God would remember he had walked in _____.
As Hezekiah prayed, he _____.

(3) Multiple choice

Multiple choice tests offer a wide variety of opportunity to discover what is, or is not, known.

An illustration may be found in the Intermediate quarterly of the *All Bible Graded Series*. A geographical test calls upon the pupil to select one of the places given in answer to the question:

- Village that didn't see many mighty works because of unbelief? Jerusalem, Nazareth, Capernaum, Bethsaida.
- Mountain on which Jesus gave the Beatitudes? Kurn, Hattin, Mt. Olympus, Mt. Hermon, Mt. Zion.
- Province through which the Jews hated to pass? Berea, Judea, Galilee, Samaria.
- Village where Jesus was always welcome? Bethany, Nazareth, Gergesa, Jericho.
- Body of water that obeyed Jesus' command? The Great Sea, Dead Sea, Sea of Galilee, Jordan River.
- Region that had a revival because a man told what Jesus did for him? Syria, Decapolis, Caesarea Philippi, Wilderness.

(4) Matching

The matching test is one of the most popular with the pupils, since it requires nothing more than the use of lines or numbers.

In the following, taken from the "Intermediate Pupil" manual, of the *All Bible Graded Series*, the pupil is told that the short letter to Philemon contains the names of eleven persons. The pupil is requested to match the names with identifying statements, without consulting his Bible, and to draw a line from the name of the character to the statement concerning him.

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| 1. The "brother" whose greeting Paul sent | Paul |
| 2. Runaway slave | Timothy |
| 3. Philemon's wife | Philemon |
| 4. Philemon's son | Onesimus |
| 5. A great missionary in prison | Archippus |
| 6. A rich man of Colosse | Epaphras |
| 7. A fellow-prisoner of Paul | Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke |
| 8. Paul's fellow-laborers | Apphia |

2. Behavior tests.

When our Lord finished His 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). The Bible tests have to do largely with the hearing of the Word. Now it is necessary to have the doing also tested. This is not so easily done. Life consists largely of habitual ways of behavior. A habit is a regular way of thinking, feeling, or acting that has become more or less automatic through repetition. Children who are to be brought up in the admonition of the Lord need to be assisted in the formation of right habits. The burden of this responsibility lies with the home, but the Sunday school needs to co-operate with the home in the formation of these habits. In these days when drink and divorce have rendered so many children homeless, it is even more necessary for the Sunday school to assume the responsibility of parents.

a. Six point record system.

The six point record system is based upon regularity, punctuality, giving, Bible bringing, lesson study, church attendance. The record system based on these six points does not undertake to measure the results in the life of the pupil, but it does record the measure of success or failure with which the habits are being formed. It can be easily seen that if these habits become permanent in the lives of individuals they will be a valuable contribution to Christian character.

b. Character building.

Next to winning the pupil to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, “the supreme achievement of Christian education is a well-rounded Christian character. By Christian character, we mean that habits, knowledge, attitudes, choices and conduct are organized around Christ as the center so that all life is under His control. The attainment of this ideal is not instantaneous but progressive. Progress toward it is to be measured by character tests” (Dobbins, op. cit., p. 161).

“Self-rating scales are popular and useful in helping one discover one’s strong and weak points. Just as one looks in a mirror to check up on personal appearance, so one might profitably use a series of questions to determine inner qualities of character” (Dobbins, op. cit., p. 162).

An illustration of this may be found in the “Intermediate Pupil,” of the *All Bible Graded Series*. “Check on your Christian life this week. Day by day during your period of devotions, put a check beside every virtue or vice that represents your actions for that day. Perhaps it will surprise you to see yourself as others see you. Be strictly honest!”

	S	M	T	W	T	F	S			S	M	T	W	T	F	S
Pride									Humility							
Narrowness									“Bigness”							
Intolerance									Tolerance							
Selfishness									Unselfishness							
Anger									Self-Control							
Revenge									Love							

Thoughtlessness								Thoughtfulness								
Impoliteness								Courtesy								
Worrying								Peace								
Grumbling								Joy								
Cheating								Honesty								

3. Attitude and choice.

Important as it is to test habits and knowledge, it is even more necessary to test the outcomes of our teaching in the form of attitudes and choices.

The supreme task of the Christian teacher is to shape the immortal destiny of a soul. Each pupil's ultimate decision in the acceptance or rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ is of momentous importance. It is difficult to invent trustworthy instruments for the measurement of the pupil's progress in these spiritual realms. Moreover, regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit. Who is able to fathom His mysterious operations or know the time when conviction is brought to the heart? But the teacher must be ever alert to use to best advantage that psychological moment when the spirit of inquiry will reveal that the hour of decision in that pupil's life has come, and that he, under God, may be the means of leading this soul to the saving knowledge of his Redeemer.

QUESTIONS

1. How did an examination of high school students prove their ignorance of the Bible?
2. What three things are to be kept in mind in conducting a recitation?
3. Why are assignments necessary for successful recitation?
4. Distinguish between the question and topical methods for conducting a recitation.
5. Which one of the three plans for assigning a recitation could be used and why?
6. Compare the examination with the recitation as a means of testing.
7. In what three fields is it possible to provide interesting exams and why?
8. Name four types of Bible tests.
9. Give an example of the completion test.
10. Compare the multiple choice and the matching test.
11. What is a behavior test?
12. Define and illustrate a character building test.
13. What is meant by tests of attitude and choice?

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