

THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER

by

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CHAPTER SIX

Aims

WE read in Scripture of seven hundred left-handed men of the tribe of Benjamin who were experts in the use of a sling (Judges 20:16). By constant practice these warriors had learned to co-ordinate so perfectly the use of their eye and hand that “**everyone could sling stones at an hair-breadth, and not miss.**” But the marvel of that wonderful skill was not so much in the masterly throw as in the perfect aim. These men had learned to fix their eyes on the object they wished to hit, and to keep them there until the stone went straight to its mark.

It is necessary that the Christian teacher have a definite aim or objective.

It is true there is hardly another school in which more work without aim or plan is done than in the Sunday school. Sometimes this is due to the old lesson system of the Sunday school, and its treatment, which is lacking in definite aims. Sometimes it is the pastor or superintendent who is responsible for the curriculum. Especially, however, it is the individual teachers, who are destitute of an aim.

A teacher without an aim is like a ship floundering in the ocean without a compass and without direction. He is flung hither and thither, as the wind of fancy, of a lesson, a book, an experience, or of ordinary laziness, may drive him. Work of such nature will hardly satisfy in the end. There is no joy, no inspiration about it.

Aimlessness in teaching also produces restless and indifferent pupils. Pupils in the hands of aimless teachers neither learn how to understand the detail, nor how to unite it with the whole. Under the best circumstances, what they gain are fragmentary, interrupted, disjointed, piecemeal perceptions. They neither perceive anything of the unity of the Bible and the divine plan of redemption which God has followed for their salvation, nor of the unity of the way of salvation which they must follow.

I. IMPORTANCE OF AN AIM

The Sunday school teacher must have a clear and well-defined aim, and hold tenaciously to it until its accomplishment can be fully realized. Before a teacher can use principles and methods aright, he must have clearly and adequately in mind the ends to be attained. The better he knows where he is going, the more intelligently he can and will provide the means for getting there.

Being sure of the aim of his endeavors, he can make good use of his knowledge of truth, pupils, principles, and methods in the direction of that aim. Learning is never actively engaged in for its own sake; it is always a means to an end. The clearer the conceptions of that end, the better can be the means chosen for the realization of it.

Much can be said about the importance of a right aim in teaching, but at least three very good reasons should be designated.

1. Gives direction and destination.

Aim gives direction to thought, activity, and the processes necessary for effecting desirable changes.

Teaching with an aim implies that the teacher has thought through with a definite purpose in view, both his own activity and the probable activity of his pupils. He has worked out a careful plan, determined upon a starting point, considered the successive steps along the way, and decided upon a destination.

This aim may be for a series of lessons, but it should be kept sight of in the presentation of a single lesson. As a consequence of such aiming, the entire teaching situation is enriched, and the pupils reap the results in terms of realization of the true outcomes of effective education.

2. Determines progress.

Aim makes possible the measurement of progress.

When we know where we are going and the way we are going, we can measure from week to week the advance that has been made. An aim also provides the knowledge by which to determine how effectively the desirable activities have been performed. Do results show that we have persistently kept to our purpose? Without a clear aim, there is no basis for measurement.

3. Provides courage and confidence.

A right aim inspires the worker. "Nothing succeeds so well as success," and no success brings such a thrill as results from earnest effort directed toward the attainment of a high and lofty end.

As the mountain climber keeps his eyes turned toward the peak he purposes to conquer, he has the heart to pass through the intervening valleys, and to climb the lower elevations he meets on the way. So the teacher, with his gaze fixed on a distant aim, has courage and energy in the face of great obstacles to press on, until final success crowns his efforts.

II. SOME SUGGESTED AIMS

What should constitute a clear and well-defined aim for the Christian teacher?

1. Dean Goodrich C. White says that it should include a threefold purpose:

- a. *To lead each pupil to a knowledge of God's will.*
- b. *To lead each pupil to an acceptance of Jesus Christ as personal Saviour and Lord.*
- c. *To develop a Christian character which will be expressed through worship, right living, and efficient service (G. C. White, *Teaching in the Sunday School*, p. 170).*

2. Dr. H. E. Carmack puts it this way:

- a. *Bring the pupil to Christ.*
- b. *Build him up in Christ.*
- c. *Send him forth to work for Christ (Carmack, *How to Teach a Sunday School Lesson*, p. 14).*

Dr. Theodore Schmauk adds a line which we heartily endorse: "The aim of the teacher is to make the Word of God clear and cogent" (Schmauk, *How to Teach in Sunday School*, p. 45).

To teacher and pupil alike it is of greater consequence to know just what the Bible says than any implied inference of what it may teach.

In order that the Christian teacher may not lose himself and go drifting among the speculative and so-called "practical" issues of the day, it is imperative that his aim be closely allied to the study and use of the Bible.

There is an opinion afloat that the exclusive aim of the teacher is to produce right living. We are told that it matters little what a child is taught, so long as he is brought to act correctly. Instead of "**in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,**" the new education aims to bring up children by "development and expression."

It is not what a boy likes, nor what he feels he needs, that is to be the teacher's chief concern.

Only the truth revealed in the Bible has power to transform life and establish Christian character, therefore it is of the greatest importance that the aim of the teacher be governed by knowledge of, and instruction in, the Word of God.

3. According to Dr. M. Reu, the aim of Christian education is:

- a. *Faithfully to impart and anchor in the intellect of the rising generations all the holy truths upon which the life of the mature congregation fundamentally is based.*
- b. *To stir their emotions to a vital interest in these truths.*
- c. *To bend the will so it may run in the paths in which the Holy Spirit in His own time and hour lifts them into personal faith.*

"If I should express it in simple and plain, and at the same time in the most comprehensible and easily retainable way," he says, "I would say, we are to reveal God to our pupils" (Reu, *How to Teach in a Sunday School*, p. 158).

4. Dr. C. E. Eavey contends that the perfect man of God is the inclusive aim. He says:

“A Christian teacher is a human being who has been made a new creature in Christ Jesus. His absorbing purpose is to glorify God; this is the end in view for his life. His teaching and all that he does is the direction of activity for the attainment of this end. To him, the Bible is the inspired Word of God, and, with intelligent conviction, he turns to it to find an inclusive aim for his teaching. As a teacher, he has aims subordinate to his inclusive aim as a Christian, that is, to glorify God. But as a teacher again, he has one inclusive aim, which, in turn, has within it subordinate aims. The practical question which remains after all that has been heretofore expressed is put together, is: ‘What is a clear and definite aim for Christian teaching that is sufficiently inclusive for all other aims to be subordinated to it?’ The direct answer to this question is, ‘The inclusive aim of the Christian teacher is **‘that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works’** (II Timothy 3:17). All of Christian teaching is directed to the one final and only aim of the upbuilding of those taught in perfection of godly character” (Eavey, *Principles of Teaching for Christian Teachers*, p. 54).

III. CHRIST’S AIM FOR HIS DISCIPLES

In determining the aim for the Christian teacher, nothing can be of greater assistance than the study of our Lord’s objectives in connection with His training class. He was the master of all teachers, and the master of all teaching. Sixty out of ninety times that He was addressed, He was called Teacher, and His students were called disciples, or *learners*. Again and again they called Him Teacher. What was the supreme purpose of His instruction? Obviously the answer cannot be found outside of the Gospels. A careful examination of the writings of the four evangelists, who so marvelously agreed in their accounts of our Lord’s life and death, will reveal the following objectives of the Master-Teacher.

1. To reveal God’s gracious and glorious plan for His disciples.

He declared, **“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”** (John 10:10). **“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”** (Luke 12:32).

The life which He brought and of which He taught was eternal, not temporal.

He did not seek to impress His disciples with the benefits of civilization, or wealth, or the cultivation of arts or science. Because eternity is infinitely more than time, our Lord did not consider it worthwhile to discuss the temporal reforms which loom so conspicuously on the horizon. This life, with all of its questions and interests, is so relatively unimportant compared to the eternal program outlined to His disciples that repeatedly He was led to ask those unanswerable questions,

“What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36, 37).

The life which He brought and of which He taught was spiritual rather than material.

It was not the aim of Christ to secure better legislation in order to improve the condition of the laborer, as many of our social workers today would have us believe. He did not seek to have His disciples elected to worldly positions so that they might have wholesome influence with men. More than that, He did not even promise His faithful followers so much as an existence worthy of man, with indemnity in case of death, disease, old age, and invalidity. Why? Because the soul is infinitely more than the body, and the kingdom of Heaven infinitely more than the kingdoms of earth. He constantly fixed their attention on the infinitely more important things. In this world they would suffer hunger, imprisonment, persecution, martyrdom (Matthew 10:16-28), but in all this they were to rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great was their reward in Heaven (Matthew 5:10-12).

2. To win them to active faith in Himself as Saviour and King.

God's offer of the more abundant life was dependent on the acceptance of His beloved Son, who came to die for their salvation (John 3:16).

That this was one of the great objectives of Jesus' teaching is shown by the importance He attached to Peter's confession (Matthew 16:16), saying that upon that rock He would build His Church. He made it plain that His coming into the world was for the purpose of accomplishing God's will (John 6:38), and that to do God's will men must believe on Him (John 6:29, 40). And not only did Christ seek to win people to faith in Himself as Saviour, but also as King. He would have them believe that He was the promised Messiah (John 4:25, 26) and the coming King, of whose glorious reign the Old Testament prophets wrote. He spoke parable after parable about the kingdom of which He was the King.

3. To prepare and train His disciples' to be His witnesses.

This was clearly stated in the first call to His disciples "**Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men**" (Matthew 4:19).

To this end He sent them out to teach and evangelize under His oversight (Matthew 10:5-15), conducting, as it were, a practical work department for His teacher training class. That this was the climax of all the other objectives of His ministry is evident from the great commission, in which He gave final instructions to His disciples, to go and teach all people (Matthew 28:19). And it must be pointed out that the training and commission of the disciples were for the purpose of evangelizing rather than converting the world. This is clearly evident from the fuller explanation of the divine program as it is given in Acts 15:14-17, and from the methods of the apostolic Church, that practically evangelized the civilized world (the Roman Empire) in that day (Romans 15:19-24).

Notice how closely the Master-Teacher adhered to His objectives in His teaching.

When the young materialist requested that He act as judge of an estate and direct an equitable division of wealth, Christ told the story of the rich fool to impress the fact that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth (Luke 12:13-21).

When criticism was made because the alabaster box of expensive ointment was poured on His head instead of the money being given to the poor, our Lord called attention to the fact that this act was a testimony of faith that He was the appointed Saviour of mankind (Mark 14:3-9).

When asked to rebuke His disciples because they prepared for Him a royal entry into Jerusalem and acknowledged Him as King, He declared that if they were silent the stones would cry out His imperial prerogatives (Luke 19:35-40).

When the mother of two of His disciples asked that they be given the highest offices in His kingdom, He taught them that like Himself they were called to be ministers rather than rulers (Matthew 20:20-28).

When after His resurrection it was suggested that the time had come for Him to restore again the kingdom to Israel, He declared that the divine program was for the disciples to be His witnesses unto the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:6-8).

IV. APPLICATION OF CHRIST'S AIM

Having observed the great objectives of our Lord's teaching, and His close adherence to them, let us now apply them to the aim of Christian teachers.

While this subject will be taken up again, when we discuss the application of instruction (Lesson 15), it is well to introduce it at this time. As a result of this study, may we not say that the aim of the Christian teacher is to shape the immortal destiny of a soul according to the Word of God?

And in order to do this, the Christian teacher must:

1. Reveal God's gracious and glorious purpose for His children.

The more abundant life of which Christ taught His disciples, is the same marvelous theme of the Christian teacher. Truly, **“eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him”** (I Corinthians 2:9).

Scripture and science testify to the fact that the greatness of God is unsearchable (Psalm 145:3). Modern astronomy reveals a universe of countless orbs in which the earth is but a speck and the sun a spark. And as if this immensity were not enough, there are an indeterminable number of other universes as vast and incomprehensible as our own. But the privilege of the Christian teacher is to reveal the God whose “greatness is unsearchable,” and His gracious and glorious purpose for His children.

From the Bible and the Bible alone we learn of the interest of the mighty and majestic God in this earth, though it be but a grain in the mountain of creation, and of His great love for the hopeless and helpless people upon it.

Before one can teach he must have a real conception of the priceless value of one immortal soul, and a vision of the far-reaching happiness that is the portion of every child of God.

2. Lead each pupil to receive and confess Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

As our Lord sought to awaken the faith of the disciples in Himself as the only Redeemer of God's elect, so the Christian teacher must recognize his responsibility for so presenting the Captain of our salvation that each pupil will be led to put his full trust in Him and accept Him as his personal Saviour.

To this end the teacher will not fail to make clear the way of salvation as revealed in God's Word, to pray earnestly for each pupil, and to seek by tactful, sympathetic means to bring him to a definite acceptance of Christ. Such decisions must come voluntarily and spontaneously as the culmination of a period of careful preparation, and must be free from artificial or high pressure methods.

Acceptance of Christ as Saviour will be only the first step. The Christian teacher will not rest content until he has led each pupil to accept Christ as Lord of his life, into a place of complete surrender and yieldedness to Him.

3. Prepare and train each pupil to fulfill God's purpose in his life.

God has a plan for every one of His children. He seldom discloses it in early life, but in His Word we are able to find ample directions as to the preparation that will best fit one for God's program.

The young Christian must "**grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.**" To this end the teacher must be a life-builder as well as a soul-winner. It is his responsibility to heed the divine commission, "**Feed my lambs**" (John 21:15).

Those who have come into newness of life must be fed with the bread of Heaven and must be given drink from the fountain of life.

Only as they are so nurtured by instruction in the Scriptures can they develop spiritually. Such development of Christian character results from an increasing knowledge of God's Word and constant obedience to His will as revealed in His Word; from continual acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as Lord of the life, and from daily fellowship with God through prayer.

Spiritual growth should find expression in:

a. Worship.

Through worship the Christian enters into the experience of God's reality and nearness, and into a sense of fellowship with Him. Hence an essential part of the teacher's work is the cultivation of the devotional life of the pupils through the class sessions and through the services of the church as a whole. The training should include the cultivation of reverence, gratitude, love, and faith.

To this end instruction should be given in the use of songs and stories, and the types of prayers best suited to different classes and departments. Such training requires that the members of the Sunday school be given opportunity to worship.

- One learns to worship through worshipping.
- One learns to pray through praying.

Instruction should also be given to help pupils establish daily habits of private prayer and devotional reading. To obtain the desired results, mechanical devices, such as pledges secured and records kept, should always be subordinated to cultivating the spirit of worship and devotion, through this daily observance.

It is the spirit rather than the routine of worship that counts and that should be emphasized.

This training in worship as a means of expression of the growing Christian cannot be given apart from instruction in the Word of God. It bears a vital relation to such instruction and grows out of it. We are instructed as well as inspired to pray. Not only do we have the recorded prayers of eminent Bible characters, including one of our Lord's, but the Book of Psalms abounds in expressions which without question may be regarded as acceptable forms of devotion.

b. Right living.

Someone has said, "The lives our pupils live, measure our success or our failure as teachers." This is true. Unless the truths that have been learned by the pupils find lodgment in their hearts and then give expression in the daily life and conduct, our teaching is in vain. A person cannot profess to believe one way and act another. Until his faith is consistently manifest by his actions, one is of little value as a witness.

Inconsistency must ever be regarded as insincerity. It is the teacher's responsibility to link up the truths taught, with the daily lives of the pupils, in order to help them to be "**doers of the word, and not hearers only**" (James 1:22), that they may be "**living epistles, known and read of all men.**" If Christians possess the truth as well as profess it, their lives will be transformed. Thus it was in the early Church, when Christians were as ready to die as to dine.

Christian character is dependent upon Christian habits and Christian habits are dependent upon Christian instruction.

We inherit a nature, but we acquire a character by repeated acts. These repeated acts, or habits, are being formed in the lives of every pupil while they are receiving instruction. If your pupils are not forming the good habits of attention, interest, and politeness, they are inevitably, every time you meet them, forming habits of inattention, heedlessness, and rudeness.

Schools are habit factories, and a Sunday school where the pupils are noisy, disobedient, discourteous, and irreverent, may be worse for its pupils than no Sunday school at all. Every act of life helps to develop some habit, good or bad.

Although the Sunday school teacher has the pupil but once a week, certain impressions can be made and certain habits established that will prove a blessing throughout life. The teacher's opportunity and obligation are to see that everything in the Sunday school tends to the formation of right instead of wrong habits in the pupils.

Childhood is the time for forming good habits. By the age of twelve many habits are established that will remain throughout life. Before the pupil's conversion, the teacher may instruct and train in habits that will help the pupil to become a Christian. Among such habits are regular and punctual attendance at church and Sunday school, Bible study, obedience to parents, reverence for God's day, God's Book, and God's house. These should be in the teacher's thought Sunday morning and during the week, as far as opportunity can be found to follow up the Sunday instruction. After the pupil's conversion, the teacher's aim should be to train in habits that will develop spirituality. It is well if the teacher may have the co-operation of some agency like the Intermediate or Senior Christian Endeavor Society, where the pupils may get still more definite training in habits of public testimony, prayer, reading and quoting Scripture, and discussion of Christian activities.

c. Service.

Spiritual growth is also manifest in service, to be rendered not only in the distant future, but now.

A growing Christian is an active Christian, ready and eager to serve his Lord. The teacher's privilege and responsibility are to suggest opportunities for a pupil's activity. Such opportunities may be found in the home, school, and church. One of the great benefits of church organization is that it provides work for its members. Once the Sunday school pupil becomes identified with the church, he should be in line for the large number of possible opportunities for service that the organization permits.

If there is a well-organized Sunday school, officers will be needed for each department. A large number of members can be utilized, as teachers and substitute teachers. Many Sunday schools today are employing from one hundred to two hundred regular workers, besides a variable number for special tasks. These opportunities are multiplied when a church operates branch Sunday schools. Then in addition, there are the large possibilities for service to be found in the young people's society. This organization can arrange for tract distribution, visitation of the sick, meetings in local missions, hospitals, and jails, and open air services. Every one can do something.

The training in service should not only include the giving of time and strength, but the giving of money, liberally, systematically, and cheerfully, for worthy causes. Indeed, the giving habit needs to be acquired early, and should be a part of the training in worship.

If those who thus serve can say, "**The love of Christ constraineth us**"; if they heed the admonition, "**Whatsoever ye do in word or indeed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,**" their service will be acceptable unto Him whom they serve.

They will not only experience growth in grace and joy in service, but will receive hereafter the reward to be bestowed upon the faithful.

QUESTIONS

1. Why is it necessary for the teacher to have a definite aim?
2. Give three reasons why an aim is important.
3. What suggestions are given by White, Carmack and Schmauk?
4. Compare the aims of Christian education suggested by Dr. Reu and Dr. Eavey.
5. What were the three objectives of our Lord's teaching?
6. Quote John 10:10 and Mark 8:36, 37.
7. Upon what was God's offer of the more abundant life dependent?
8. Show how our Lord closely adhered to His objectives.
9. What should be the threefold aim of the Christian teacher?
10. How do we know that God has a gracious and glorious purpose for His child?
11. Why must a teacher be a life-builder as well as a soul-winner?
12. In what three ways must spiritual growth find expression?
13. What is the teacher's responsibility for the formation of right habits?

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