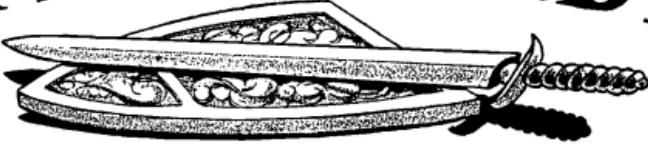


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## Teaching For Learning (XVI.)

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(Many months ago we started this series, trying to get a good look at ways to improve our teaching program. This is intended to be the last in the series, there being 16 in all. Many kind words of encouragement have been spoken and written to me over these past months. I must say thanks to all who have expressed an interest because it is exciting to know that so many people are interested in effective teaching. The question most often asked, "Is this information available in one place?" must go unanswered for the time being. If there is sufficient interest, my suggestion would be a workbook, with lessons, objectives, attitudes and actions spelled out in the use of the book. The content would be the same as has appeared on these pages. We will wait and see. The Author)

If it is possible to summarize effectively everything that has been said in this series, then there wasn't much need of taking up so much space in saying what was said. So this will only hit the high spots and add a point or two.

The most important single point we have tried to get across is that teaching is a skill. Just as Paul was a tent maker, he was also a skilled teacher. Christ is called the Master teacher; but he often fails to get credit for the skill he used in accomplishing his teaching success. If we choose to imitate Christ's teaching, we will have to do more than imitate his doctrine; we must also imitate his methodology. What were some of his techniques?

He used everyday language. He used everyday examples. He had clear-cut objectives. He knew exactly what he wanted his listeners to be able to do when he was through teaching them. He knew how to create interest. He struck at the heart of each subject, then approached it from different angles to make sure everyone could understand what was being said. He had no movie projectors, but he produced some of the best "verbal visuals" ever conceived. The expression, "I will liken unto..." still brings vivid pictures to our minds. We can picture fig trees, and water being drawn from the wells, and houses built on the sand. We see the shepherd looking for the lost sheep and the Pharisee standing in the temple boasting. Christ was certainly a great orator, but we sell him short if we think that is why he was a great teacher.

Over and over we must say to ourselves, "Teaching is a skill." Then we must go about finding out what it takes to become skillful at this trade. There are techniques that work and those that don't. We must find the ones that do. We must develop a concern for the learner by setting some objectives that actually tell us what we expect the learner to be able to do when we are through with this class and this quarter and this year. We must figure out ways to measure to see if these objectives are being met. We must get the students involved. They must get excited about learning. There must be participation with eagerness. The literature should not be depended upon to the extent that we merely let the students fill in the blanks and answer True or False.

The material studied should have meaning for the students. The words of the lesson should be understood and the students should be able to tell what the key words mean to him. The age of the students and their background and their ability to learn should be taken into consideration. As much as possible, they should be telling you what the lesson is all about, rather than the other way around. The class should move fast, and there should be an air of excitement about every session.

Each teacher should develop his own style, but he should know why he has chosen the one he settles on. If it is the easiest or the most natural one, it probably is the wrong one. Doing what comes naturally probably means lecturing most of the time, or always doing the same thing, week after week. There needs to be a change of pace, not just from week-to-week, but even within the 45 minute session itself. Sometimes the teacher talks, sometimes they write on the board. They paste pictures, they put things on the flannel board, they tell you where to put things on the same board. They act out events, or draw them on paper or make designs in the sandbox. They have a debate or they teach a portion or all of the lesson. They take tests, they give each other tests. They play games, they compete for individual scores or they try to

help their side win. Again, they are involved.

Each lesson should have an objective stating the desired student behavior. The attitude and application that is desired should be determined beforehand. The techniques to be used should be spelled out. The teacher should come prepared with more material than can be used. The substitute teacher should be familiar with the material to be covered and with the students as well. The substitute should sit in on classes when he doesn't have to teach so the students will know him just as he knows them. The teacher who isn't going to be present should think enough of the students and his obligation to God to let someone know when he is to be absent, and be sure the substitute is notified well in advance.

Teaching is a skill, but it is also a privilege that deserves respect and honor. No one should have to be begged to teach. One who has the ability to teach, or the capability to learn to teach, can in no way justify his unwillingness to teach others, unless his personal life is such that he is unfit to be put before a group of learners. Most of us get far too few opportunities to talk to those who do not know God. Chances are, we fail to take advantage of many of the opportunities that actually are present. But in every congregation there are those who are not Christians that are the best prospects we will ever get a chance to teach: our own young people. To the person who really wants to carry out the great commission in the teaching of the Gospel, we must say, Look to your own! A "captive audience," wanting to be taught, with a time and place set apart for the teaching. Right in our own classrooms are the future leaders of the church, and each of us has the opportunity to teach some of them.

A few are gifted with the ability to teach well without working at it. Others must learn the skill. For most of us, learning how to teach means studying and practicing and seeing what we did right and wrong. Let us close this series with a look at the four levels of teaching: At the bottom is the "unconscious Incompetent." This poor creature who is a very poor teacher, but doesn't know it. He goes on in the same old way, perhaps lecturing in a dull, monotone manner, unaware that he is wasting his time and the students'. We can do nothing towards improving this fellow, because he can't be changed until he reaches the next level, which is the "Conscious Incompetent." Now we have a fellow that is bad, but fortunately, knows he is bad. He is looking for help, and the chances are pretty good that he will find a way to improve his methods. He is willing to try something new; he is willing to admit that maybe he isn't getting through to his students. We can work with him because he wants to become better. If we can show him the tools of the trade, he will start getting results, and he will know why. This means he now has been raised to the third level, the "Conscious Competent." This person is a good teacher and knows why. He knows what will work and what won't for him. He has experimented, changed, measured, reviewed and constantly looked for more and better ideas. This fellow knows his capabilities and his limitations. He knows about teaching. He probably would make a good teacher trainer.

There is a final level, though, and it is one that gives us a hard time, because he is the fellow that is a good teacher by nature. Somehow he just always does the right thing, says the right thing and gets the right results. The trouble is, he doesn't know why he does what he does. He is in the small class of people we will call the "Unconscious Competent." He's good, but he doesn't know what it is that makes him good. The one teaching assignment that he would probably fail at would be in trying to teach others how to teach. The only bad thing about having these kinds of people around is that it leads folks to say, "Well, good teachers are born, not made. You either have it or you don't." If we haven't accomplished anything else in this series, I hope we have proven that such a statement as this one is very, very untrue.

We can all teach somebody something. Those who have not taught should learn to do some teaching, even as substitutes. Those who teach regularly should learn to teach better. The greatest message is waiting to be taught to those who desire the greatest reward ever promised. With God's help, let us press on!

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