

THE PRIVILEGES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS

The teacher's work is delightful but it is difficult. Every class furnishes a heavy task for its teacher and contains some pupil who is a problem and a severe strain on the teacher's patience, perseverance and faith. It is a work with eternal issues and unless the Great Teacher is by his side, he cannot really teach.

The true teacher must live in an atmosphere of prayer. Prayer before he teaches, while he is teaching and after he has taught that his mistakes must be overruled, and that the truth may be implanted in the hearts of his pupils by the Holy Spirit. Proper alone will give him confidence, solve his problems, bring new light out of God's word, and will quicken his mind to devise new methods of approach to his pupils. In other words, it will be his normal school. A teacher without prayer may have success but it will be on the surface, there will be few, if any, permanent results. By prayer he wins for his work the Supreme Partner and then he cannot fail.

No one can teach the Bible in the best way unless he is a man of the Book. He must love the Word of God. If he does not read it with delight as men read the most absorbing novels, why should he be surprised if his pupils are indifferent toward it. He must not confine his Bible reading to the lesson he is to teach and to its immediate context. He must know the Book as a whole. It must be the Book not only of his mind but of his heart.

The success of the Sunday School teacher is measured in various ways. To some success depends on:

First: Gathering a large class and holding them in regular attendance.

Second: The maintenance of good discipline.

Third: Personal popularity.

These are all elements that attain to the success of the Sunday School. But a large attendance means nothing unless there is a spiritual growth. Likewise no matter how good the discipline may be if the pupils have learned nothing of Bible truths and if their hearts are not filled with love of God, then the discipline has been fruitless. And as to personal popularity, if the teacher's character is strong, it will have a lasting influence on the lives of the pupils, but unless the pupils are won not to a love of the human teacher but to the Divine Teacher, there is no success.

So after considering these elements, we conclude that discipline, attendance and reverence are all necessary but only a means to an end, and that success depends upon the teacher having as his aim "to win each and every pupil to a love of their Saviour." To do this every effort must be put forth to present the lesson in a wise, skilful and persuasive manner. I believe if this is done with fervent prayer, the teacher will incidentally draw them to himself; he will gain their lasting gratitude; he will hold their reverent attention; he will maintain a full attendance. So let us rely on the Divine Teacher, for has he not said, "Seek ye the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you."

New let us consider some methods that will be helpful in bringing about this success.

First: Let us consider the opening of the lesson period. This should be prepared with exceeding care as so much depends upon it. If the first few minutes are dull it means not only loss of time but loss of interest, which is

difficult to recover. Much depends upon the teacher's manner. If he is gloomy and indifferent, we will notice a relaxing in attention. If he is confused, there is likely to be a lack of confidence in his ability. But on the other hand if he is alert, confident, in other words "master of the situation," they will respond with an eager attention.

Next to his manner comes his opening words. Here we have an opportunity to introduce variety and originality. He may, if necessary, use somebody else's methods, but he cannot use some other person's ideals, purposes and enthusiasm. Therefore whatever methods he uses, he should put himself into them so thoroughly that he grasps and holds the attention. We may ask some gripping questions to challenge the attention; make some unexpected statement; tell some anecdote illustrating the point of the lesson; if a blackboard is available, a rough diagram; a bit of personal experience bearing on the main point of the lesson; at other times a few words of earnest prayer by the teacher that the lesson truth may find a hearing and be implanted in the hearts of all. Now these are all good methods and may be enlarged upon, but to vary them will bring the most effective results, for familiarity will dull any method.

Second: The Teacher's Questions.

Teachers as a rule study the lesson facts, try to understand the difficult clauses, think up some illustrations for practical applications, but as for questions which are necessary for the development of all this, they make no preparation but leave them for the inspiration of the moment. Now this is not a safe plan because it is not easy to ask a good question. Unless one is well experienced, the wisest plan is to write out all questions and as he gains in experience he may write out only those on which he relies for the successful opening and closing of the lesson. Good questions are skilful, alert, varied. They are never leading questions including the expected answer; they are not questions that can be answered by yes or no; they are not long and complicated but short and brisk. They call for facts and experiences and seldom for mere opinions, except at the climax or in discussion. Much depends on good questions. In fact we may say the art of teaching consists in framing good questions that elicit good answers.

Third: Subject matter—What to Teach—How much we shall try to get in the limited time.

If a teacher makes one point in a lesson a worth while point regarding some matter of vital spiritual import and impresses that point so clearly and forcibly upon his pupils that they cannot forget it, he has done enough for one day. As each lesson is capable of providing many points, let us choose the point with great care. Let it be one that meets the need of all his class. Work up to that point with all the power of mind and soul, clinch it with every teaching art available. One point a Sunday brought home to the lives of the pupils will mean fifty-two a year. You may well be content.

Fourth: How much do the pupils know.

Unless the pupils are tested, we cannot really tell how much they actually know about the Bible. I believe the most satisfactory way of doing this would be at each lesson to have a written test on the previous lesson. The teacher could have these questions, clear, definite ones that call for facts not opinions, and

that could be fully answered in a very few words prepared on slips of paper. Pass these around, give three or five minutes for answers, gather the papers to be examined at home. By doing this he will stimulate an interest to remember facts, find out what he has failed to teach and remedy the failures. Otherwise he is teaching in the dark.

Fifth: The close of the lesson.

The effective teacher is working up to this period. In the last few minutes he will bring the lesson to bear upon the lives of his pupils. He will urge the class to carry the teaching into the following week, and will concentrate his thoughts and theirs on their individual relation with God and thus inspire them with a deeper purpose, with higher ideals, and with a fresh determination to be and do their very best. And these results will not come by chance. The teacher must plan for it and bend all his teaching toward it. If you have an effective illustration, a searching question, a stirring experience on the lesson, tell it them. The closing few minutes are to sum up the lesson, render it unforgettable, drive it in and clinch it on the inside. Whoever can teach at all can do this if he will prepare for it carefully before hand. As I said before, do not leave things to chance. As he goes before the class, he must know exactly how he will close that lesson. Bear the climax in mind just as the architect bears in mind from the beginning the tower which is to crown the building.

Sixth: Let us consider if we have been a progressive teacher. Let us size up our work as if we were an outsider and open our eyes to its faults. In doing so, let us ask ourselves these questions:

- (1) Am I a friend as well as teacher to the pupils?
- (2) Do my questions arouse and quicken?
- (3) Are my illustrations remembered?
- (4) Do my practical applications lead to changed lives?
- (5) Am I creating a devotion to the school?
- (6) Is my class discipline what it should be?
- (7) Am I helpful to the other teachers and officers?
- (8) Are the tests of pupils showing knowledge gained?
- (9) Is my teaching leading to any conversions?
- (10) In all these am I making a steady progress from Sunday to Sunday?

Such results will not come without hard work. Sunday School teachers should take pride in their calling. It is a profession and one of the noblest. As I said before, it is difficult, involves hard work but whatever is worth doing, is worth doing well. It is the teacher's duty as such to give of his very best the facts and truths that will equip his pupils for life. Magnify your office. Give your work the best that you have, and be assured that this spirit will enlarge your best and make it better still.

"And He gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and some teachers. For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

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To be "rooted and grounded in love," seems to mean that we are to have the deep roots of a tree and the firm foundation of a building.

God's breast is the softest pillow; his arms are the safest protection; and his will is the sweetest home.