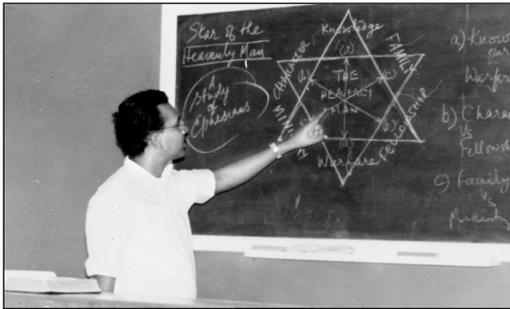


More than Studies!

A Message to Christian Teachers



by

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(This Message is one of the Talks given by the Author in the 1-day Christian Teachers Conferences conducted in various cities like Chennai, Coimbatore and Tuticorin in the 1990s.)

The 1997 July issue of *Teens Today* had a 20 page section—*Attitude is Everything!*—in which the teens of today have raised scores of provocative questions “because they just don’t want to accept things they are told to accept; they want to have a good reason for their attitude.” I would urge every school teacher and college lecturer to go through this questionnaire to understand the generation of students they meet in the classrooms and lecture halls. Here are just two of their questions for us to ponder: “Since most of the leaders the ADULTS have elected are such losers, how come they don’t give us (the teens) a chance to elect them?” “If schools are meant to develop us physically and mentally, why do we have so many classes for studies but so few for everything else?” These questions asked over twenty years ago are even more relevant today (2020).

The answer to the first question is implied in the second. Most of our national and political leaders were once students in schools and colleges. Their corrupt and silly behaviour is largely because of the values they failed to learn or to be taught in their schooling years. As we have entered the 74th year of Indian Independence, unless the teachers assume a moral responsibility to consistently teach their students life’s absolute values “*more than studies*,” there’s no hope for future India.

Except for the six months of teaching assignment I fulfilled in 1970-71 in the Regional Engineering College (NIT), Tiruchy, Tamilnadu, I had never been an academic teacher. My mother was a school teacher under whom I did my first standard. Both my schooling and Pre-University Class (PUC) were done in Christian institutions, namely Margoschis High School, Nazareth and St. John’s College, Palayamkottai. My graduation and postgraduation were in secular institutions, namely A.C. College of Engineering & Technology, Karaikudi and Indian Institute of Technology, Madras. These years as a student and 50 years of Christian ministry to students have given me reasonably enough understanding about the student community and what they need to be taught “*more than studies*.” I would share here with the Christian teachers of educational institutions five important values they must inculcate in the lives of their students. You can mark them on your five fingers for easy remembrance —

1. Submission (*Thumb Finger*)

Disobedience is the spirit of the age. Rebellion is the order of the day. The Bible has predicted disobedience to parents and elders as a sure sign of the end of endtimes. “Know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be... disobedient to parents...” (2 Tim 3:1,2). God views disobedience or lack of submission quite seriously. In fact, His last warning in the Old Testament is concerning this. In the last verse of the Book of Malachi, God promised that He would send a ministry which would “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers” lest He would come and strike the earth with a curse! (Mal 4:6). Christian teachers can become an effective instrument in the hands of God to stop premature judgment falling on the earth due to disobedience.

When we were students we stood up in reverence with a word of greeting the moment the teacher entered the classroom. We would sit down only after he had asked us to do so. It is unfortunate that such an honourable custom has vanished from our midst these days, especially in some English medium schools. Let the medium be English but let not the customs turn Western. Students in classrooms in the West may even stretch their legs with shoes on the desks and stay in this posture when the teacher enters the class or comes near them. We in India cannot afford to deteriorate to this level. The Bible clearly instructs the youngsters, “You shall rise before the gray-headed and honour the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the Lord” (Lev 19:32). In India, physical postures as expressions of respect cannot be dispensed with as meaningless traditions. Insist on them in the classrooms. Teach them to greet elders the Indian way and not with a “Hi” like cowboys.

The decision to telecast the Assembly and Parliament sessions alive is one of the unpardonable blunders made by our polity. What do our Politicians expect from the youngsters after they watch the irreverent and indecent behaviour of the MPs and MLAs on the TV screen?

Teach your students that they would be able to exercise authority, at whatever level they would be placed tomorrow, only to the extent they themselves submit to authority today. Jesus as a boy obeyed His parents and as a man obeyed His heavenly Father in all things. Therefore no devil could ever disobey Him.

God usually chooses the obedient and the submissive for leadership responsibilities. Charisma and capabilities are only next. Skills and talents do not top the divine list of leadership qualifications. Entrust the obedient and submissive students with responsibilities and train them. I thank God for my teachers who gave me several responsibilities in school and college. This campus training came in handy when God called me to lead a Christian Mission.

2. Sincerity (*Pointer Finger*)

Truth is slain on the streets. Honesty is the rarest commodity. Corruption is rampant at all levels of national life. India is one of the most corrupt nations in the world. The national leaders say they are “helpless.” Manipulative politics, cheating business, twisting journalism, and name it—these have pushed to the back seat “whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report and are virtuous and praiseworthy” (Phil 4:8).

In a survey conducted in 1994 by *India Today*, 1365 college students from 8 major cities of India were asked, “Would you bribe?” To this 43% of male students and 34% of female students answered, “Yes!” Imagine these figures for 2020! Where are we heading as a nation? Will it take too long for 75% of students to answer this question in the affirmative? Is excelling

in computer engineering and medical science the answer to the society which talks about development but is ignorant of its decay? Where shall we start arresting this trend, if not in the schools and colleges? Christian teachers, the need of the hour is *“more than studies!”*

A student who is not taught or trained to say a stern no to any malpractice in exams is unlikely to grow into an honest citizen. Teachers must train the “conscience” of the students to resist temptations to copy or do any such shameful deeds. In all my student life I copied only once and that was in a class test, because I had not prepared for it nor was I ready to lose my first rank. But my conscience kept pricking me for six months until I apologised to the headmaster voluntarily. He encouraged me to maintain a sharp and clear conscience always. Fear of being caught must not be the primary force of restraint. The “everybody-does-it” argument should least appeal to youth. Teachers must prepare themselves for moral instruction classes as much as they prepare for a Mathematics or Biology class. It is the teachers’ responsibility to strengthen the backbone of students to stand against the devil’s majority. Peer pressure is no small matter.

Here’s an excellent truth in the writings of King David: “Mark the blameless man and observe the upright; for the future of that man is peace” (Psa 37:37). In the same Psalm David exhorts and encourages those who take a stand with the truthful minority: “Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong... Trust in God and do good... Do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes... Commit your way to God ... He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn” (vv1,2,7,5,6). Sow the seeds of such eternal truths in the young hearts and save them from the perishing world.

This generation of youngsters has not seen real heroes but only reel heroes! Heroes are those who refuse to compromise, for whom wrong is never right, who go by conviction and not convenience. Teach your students heroism from Bible history. For example, how the Egyptian midwives refused to kill the male babies in spite of the orders given by King Pharaoh (Ex 1:15-21). Tell about martyrs and pioneer missionaries of Church history. Hitler’s story doesn’t find a place in the history books in Germany. The German youth are ashamed to read anything about that “mad man” in their textbooks. Illustrate through these real stories what God has said: “Those who honour Me I will honour, but those who despise Me will be disdained” (1 Sam 2:30b).

3. Salvation (*Middle Finger*)

The middle finger is the “longest” and the “central” finger which perfectly typifies the eternalness of the soul and the super importance of Salvation. Jesus asked, “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his own soul?” (Mk 8:36).

19 out of 20 who receive Christ do so before they reach 25. After 25, only one in 10,000 turns to Christ; after 35, only one in 50,000; after 45, only one in 200,000; after 55, only one in 300,000; after 65, only one in 500,000; after 75, only one in 700,000. In other words, as per this statistics, the chances of students coming into Salvation experience with Christ after they leave school or college are rare. What a responsibility and privilege it is then in the hands of Christian teachers to lead the younger generation to the Saviour of the World!

Intelligence, industriousness, sports, talents, etc., can each be compared to a zero. Adding any number of zeroes makes another zero. But zeroes after the integer “1” multiply their value. Referring to eternal Salvation Jesus said, “ONE thing is needful!” King Solomon, the most intelligent person who ever lived, wrote, “The fear of God is the BEGINNING of knowledge” (Prov 1:7). Teachers must not only train students for their immediate future but also prepare them for their ultimate future. Here are a few ways how Christian teachers can enable students enjoy eternal blessings—

■ Encourage Christian students to gather regularly, atleast once a week, inside or outside the college or hostel, for Bible study and prayer. Pick up Timothys and Tituses and through them help the cells to grow in the knowledge of God. Participate yourself in their gatherings atleast occasionally and encourage the students. Don't feel hesitant or ashamed to identify yourself with God's little flocks. In Christian circles there's such a lot of competition to do pastoral ministry. But students' ministry suffers from lack of shepherding care in college campuses. Dear Christian teacher friend, don't defeat God's purpose in keeping you in that school or college.

■ Cooperate with the Christian youth ministries. Union of Evangelical Students of India (UESI), Scripture Union (SU), Youth For Christ (YFC) and Students For Jesus (SFJ) of the Blessing Youth Mission are some of the active campus ministries. Each organisation has its own style and emphasis. No single group can cater to all the needs of all the categories of students. Use their specialised services therefore accordingly to bless the students. Sponsor interested students to their Camps and Retreats. John Wesley (1703-1791) and Charles Wesley (1707-1788) received God's vision as students, and God used them to revive England and found the Methodist Church. Most of the nationwide and worldwide missionary movements started as campus ministries. The Blessing Youth Mission (1971) is an example.

■ Support the students evangelistic programmes financially. Many students come from the middle or lower income groups. They cannot spare from their pocket money for transport for outreach activities. They also need gospel tracts, booklets and Testaments. In our college prayer cell in Karaikudi we were praying for funds to purchase Testaments and Bibles for some non-Christian enquirers. A doctor's family from Thanjavur sent us a dozen Bibles. How we rejoiced that day in the evening gathering in the woods for God's miracle supply! Teachers are reasonably well-paid in India. Spending for students ministry is an investment for the next generation of leaders of the Church and the country. Be liberal.

■ Pray for each of your students. It is not God's will that any of them should get lost (1 Tim 2:1,4; Mt 18:14). My sixth class teacher, Mr. Michael Chelladurai, had been praying for my salvation from 1956 and I was saved in 1962. Little would he have realised that he had been praying for a would-be preacher! If you keep a list of all your students and pray for one person each day, each of them would be prayed for once every two or three months. This is the minimum you can do for their souls.

■ Make use of every opportunity to share the Gospel personally with students. You may be accused for "converting" people. But tell them that you are actually "reconverting" them. By creation all men and women belong to God. No one is born as a Christian or a non-Christian. By choice we have gone away from God in sinful ways. Christ is the only way for us to "come back" to the Creator God (Isa 53:6; Jn 14:6). Before he became the second President of India, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan was a professor of philosophy in Chennai. Following his lecture on *guru-disciple* relationship, one of his students asked him personally whether he could keep him as his *guru*. To which Dr. Radhakrishnan answered, "Jesus is the ideal *guru*!" Stunned by this reply from a Hindu philosopher, that young man started reading the New Testament and experienced Salvation through Christ. He is none other than the famous preacher from Kerala, Mr. Paul Sudhakar! Teachers Day in India is celebrated on Dr. Radhakrishnan's birthday. I was led to Christ through my Chemistry lecturer when I was a fresher in college. Remember, if you are sincere, the students take your words seriously.

As teachers yours is a greater opportunity than professional missionaries. The students are a mission field which has come to you! Catch 'em young!' When an old man is saved, his soul alone is saved. But when a young person is saved, his life also is saved!

4. Sociableness (*Ring Finger*)

Students must learn the basic principles of interpersonal relationships before they leave the campus. It is told of the Boy Jesus that He grew in “favour with men” (Lk 2:52).

Campus fights and student unrest are on the increase. Politicians are using youngsters to work out their sinister schemes. Acid-throwing and stabbing have become commonplace. Rules however strict are not the answer. There must be a radical change in attitude through understanding. Use the last five minutes of a period to tell a short story and explain a moral. Quote freely from Solomon’s Proverbs and the Sermon on the Mount. Mahatma Gandhi once said, “You are not a complete Hindu if you have not studied the Sermon on the Mount by Christ.” He carried a New Testament in his kit. “Love your neighbour as yourself” — This is the golden rule to solve all relationship problems (Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14,15).

Teach your students basic manners. To say, “Thank you,” “Will you please?” etc. How to greet. The power of a smile. Making loving enquiries. Textbooks don’t teach these lessons of life.

I was shocked when I once saw some youngsters in jeans and T-shirts washing their fingers under the dining table in a restaurant! If you don’t develop in students a civic sense, they will leave the colleges as educated fools. They will spit everywhere, draw nasty pictures inside toilets, smoke in buses and trains, paste wall-posters on compound walls and even on road signboards, throw banana peels on the roads and pavements, and so on.

Sooner a young person learns to respect the opposite sex, the lesser the chances are for him to commit adultery later in life. But with the flooding of pornographic materials and x-rated movies, there’s an unprecedented breakdown in morals. In a survey of the late 1990s, 48% of boys and 18% of girls said that premarital sex was not wrong. Think what the figures would be now (2020) after 25 years. The government is also talking about “safe” sex only. It has legalised homosexuality and lesbianism.

Explain to the students from the Bible how our bodies are to be kept as a temple for God and not abused by drugs, alcohol, smoking and illicit sex.

5. Service-mindedness (*Small Finger*)

No one becomes a Mother Teresa overnight. Service-mindedness and principles of servanthood must be embedded in the hearts right from youthhood. Some are naturally kind whereas most of the people need to be taught that acts of love towards the suffering are actually service to God. Jesus the King of kings identifies Himself with the poorest of the poor so much that He says what is done to the hungry, thirsty, homeless, clotheless, sick and imprisoned is done to Himself! (Mt 25:34-40). Mr. C. N. Annathurai, one of the late Chief Ministers of Tamilnadu, used to say, “You can see God in the smile of the poor!” Did not Solomon write, “He who has pity on the poor lends to God?” (Prov 19:17). September 5 happens to be Mother Teresa Day also.

Motivate your students to involve in social work, in whatever way possible. Studies is not everything. What’s the use of education if our graduates don’t know how to help their fellowmen in need? Once upon a time medical work was considered to be the noblest of all professions. But now it has come down to be the most profitable of all businesses. That’s what the capitation fee culture has proved. If you are a Christian professor in a medical college, keep indoctrinating your students to go as a doctor where there’s no doctor, where villagers don’t have even a primary health centre or a pharmacy in the radius of 30 kilometers.

We as college students (1963-1970) kept visiting a leper colony every week with eatables purchased from our pocketmoney. We sat with the lepers, sang with them and prayed with them. What a joy for them and for us! I am not surprised that several members of that college prayer cell are involved in social welfare programmes today. Encourage your students to be service-minded and aspire for Civil Services. They must not become victims of choosing courses for making quick money.

Anti-dowry concepts must be sown in the minds of students before they leave college and settle in jobs. Report from the daily newspapers incidents of bride-burning, *sati* (the practice of burning the widow on her husband's pyre), temple prostitution and the like and inspire the students to crusade against such barbarian acts. Missionary William Carey (1761-1834), who founded Serampore University, joined hands with men like Rajaram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) and influenced the Indian government to ban the evil practice of *sati*. We have freed ourselves from the British rule, but when will Indians be freed from the clutches of superstition?

Challenge the bright students to help those who are weak in studies. Talk to the well-to-do students to assist the poor students for purchasing books and instruments. What we have more than what we need is what God has given us to share with the have-nots.

Conclusion

Dear teacher friends, the students spend the best part of their formative years with you. God will hold you responsible for the way they would behave as adults, and reward you. If you faithfully teach and train these young lives in the values pointed out in this Article, you are laying "a good foundation for the time to come!"

(This Article is freely downloadable in English and Tamil from the Author's website.)



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