Articles by Wylam Price

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Sacrificial Sharing (Oct 1956)

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“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” Heb. 13:16.

I. The Teaching

The Lord Jesus Christ commands His own to love one another; obedience to His command shows to the world that we are His disciples (John 13:34-35).

John exhorts us to demonstrate the truth of our professed love, in practical deeds of sacrifice and kindness to our brethren (1 John 3:16-18).

James points out the futility of offering purely verbal comfort to the needy (James 2:15-16).

Peter reminds us to express our love for one another in ungrudging hospitality, remembering our responsibility as God’s stewards (1 Peter 4:8-10). Paul teaches that we who enjoy ministry from God’s word, should share all good things with those who minister; and furthermore, that we should do good unto all men, in particular, our brethren (1 Cor. 9:14; 16:1-3. 2 Cor. 8:9. Gal. 6:6-10). He instructed Timothy to teach that we should be ready and willing to do our good works with liberality and generosity (1 Tim. 6:18).

II. The Examples

The Lord Jesus Christ is the supreme example of sacrificial sharing. He has shared our human likeness and form (Phil. 2:7-8. Heb. 2:14); also our infirmities and temptations (Heb. 4:15). Ultimately, He was even made

sin (2 Cor. 5:21); and not merely shared the burden of our sins, but actually bore them in His body, on the tree (1 Peter 2:24), as He laid down His life for us (1 John 3:16).

The New Testament writers also exemplify the sacrificial sharing which they taught. John proved his love for the Lord by obeying His dying request; he took Mary, the mother of Jesus, into his own home and shared it with her (John 19:26-27).

James, Peter, and John, leaders in the church at Jerusalem, all shared in a ministry of exhortation to Christians concerning the needs of the poor; needs which were often met in a most practical and sacrificial manner in the early church (Gal. 2:9-10. Acts 6:1-3).

Peter shared his boat with the Lord at the lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1-11). It is probable, too, that he shared his home with the Lord, and with Paul, as well as with his mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-3; Gal. 1:18).

Although he was a mission-ary-preacher, Paul laboured with his own hands (1 Thess. 2:9. 2 Thess. 3:8. 1 Cor. 9:15); and he shared the fruit of his labours with his companions (Acts 20:34).

Some Old Testament saints exemplify this same spirit of sharing. Abraham readily and willingly used his home and resources to entertain three men with gracious hospitality (Gen. 18. Cf. Heb. 13:2). Moses chose to share ill-treatment with the people of God (Heb. 11:24-29). The widow of Zarepath believed Elijah, and gladly shared her last meal with the man of God (1 Kings 17). The Shunammite woman and her husband made a room and furnished it specially for Elisha (2 Kings 4:8-11).

Other New Testament saints shared their goods and facilities with the Lord and His people. Martha received the Lord as a welcome guest in her home (Luke 10:38-42). Barnabas sold land and donated the proceeds to the common fund at Jerusalem, thus sharing the burden of caring for those in need (Acts 4:34-37). Luke became a most loyal travelling companion of the apostle Paul, thus enabling Paul to share the Christian fellowship and companionship which he loved and craved (Col. 4:14. Phil. 24. 2 Tim. 4:11). Aquila and Priscilla shared their home with Paul while he was in Corinth (Acts 18:1-3), and with the church while they lived in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:19). Philip, too, entertained Paul and his company at Caesarea (Acts 21:8). The Philippian Christians frequently shared with Paul the financial burden of his gospel ministry (Phil. 4:10-18); they also shared sacrificially in caring for the needy saints in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8:1-5). Epaphras, Aristarchus, and perhaps others, shared Paul's imprisonment, possibly on the basis of a voluntary system of rotation (Phil. 23. Col. 4:10).

III. The Results

Sacrificial sharing brings a personal blessing to the individual Christian who is ready to follow the teaching and the examples given in scripture. Of greater importance is the blessing which others experience through realizing that we love them and care for them enough to sacrifice on their behalf. Of greatest importance is the fact that our sharing with one another constitutes a sacrifice which is pleasing to God (Heb. 13:16. Phil. 4:18).

The Lord Jesus Christ endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him (Heb. 12:2); God has highly exalted Him, and crowned Him with glory and honour (Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 2:9). In addition, we, His sheep, share His divine life as a result of our Shepherd's sacrifice of His life (John 10:10-11; 17:2-3, 21-23). We, His redeemed, share His divine wealth as a result of our Saviour's voluntary poverty (2 Cor. 8:9). Most important of all, however, is the fact that He has pleased the Father (Mark 1:11. Matt. 17:5), and brought great glory to God (Phil. 2:11), through the offering and sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 9:14, 28).

The examples of others illustrate the same, blessed, threefold results. What a joy John must have experienced in sharing his home with Mary, the closest human relative of the Lord Jesus Christ! What a comfort Mary must have experienced in the shelter of that home, where Christian love and understanding would facilitate the healing of her sword-pierced soul! What pleasure must have filled the heart of God as He saw the disciple whom Jesus loved, fulfilling the dying request of His beloved Son!

When Peter shared his boat with the Lord, and followed His instructions, he was immediately rewarded with an astonishing catch of fish. Better still, however, Peter was told that he would henceforth catch men; thus he became a means of blessing to multitudes amongst both Jews and Gentiles. Inasmuch as Peter's life and service were subsequently characterized by an outstanding fruitfulness, we can be certain that all of his sacrificial sharing was most pleasing to the Father (Cf. John 15:8).

When Paul laboured in the gospel ministry at his own expense, he was immediately rewarded with a sense of satisfaction in having proclaimed the gospel without cost to others (1 Cor. 9:18). Better still, however, the Lord amply met Paul's needs in various ways through the ministry of His people, with the result that the apostle was sustained and enabled to carry on a minstry of preaching, teaching, and writing, the influence of which has no remotely similar parallel in the history of the Church. Best of all, Paul's willingness to share sacrificially, constituted his whole life of service an offering to God, in which He could not fail to be well pleased (Phil. 2:17. 2 Tim. 4:6-8).

The scriptures record, in some measure, the blessed results of the sacrificial sharing of many other saints of God. James gave to Paul the right hand of fellowship, exhorting him to remember the poor, while ministering to the Gentiles. In return, Paul exhorted the Gentile Christians to assist in the support of the needy Jewish Christians in Jerusalem when their time of trial arrived. James' extension of fellowship to Paul was thus returned to James in full measure (1 Cor. 16:1-3. 2 Cor. 8; Rom. 15:25-27).

In sharing his home with strangers Abraham experienced an unusual season of communion with God. Furthermore, he became a blessing to others through his intercessory prayer; God did not destroy the righteous with the wicked in Sodom (Gen. 18). God was no doubt well pleased with Abraham's life and testimony, for He is not ashamed to be called his God (Heb. 11:16).

Moses shared ill-treatment with the people of God, and subsequently became their greatest leader and deliverer. The widow of Zarephath shared her last meal, but in return received an abundance of food and the restoration of her son. As a result of her ministry to a man of God, the Shunammite woman was given a son, whose life was restored also.

Martha welcomed the Lord into her home. As a result, she was taught to serve the Lord without anxiety; her sister Mary enjoyed listening to the words of the Lord; her brother Lazarus was raised from the dead; many of the Jews believed in the Lord; and the Lord received a precious anointing from Mary (Luke 10:38-42. John 11; 12:1-11).

Barnabas shared the proceeds obtained from the sale of his land, and later became a key figure in introducing Paul to the Christian church and ministry. Having shared Paul's journeys and persecutions, Luke has been able to leave us one of the most valuable documents known to the Christian Church, the book of the Acts. Although Aquila and Priscilla are somewhat minor characters in the history of the Church, theirs will be a great reward for having received an apostle into their home (Matt. 10:40-41).

The examples cited indicate that the priestly service of sacrificial sharing is open to us all. Every one of us, including the youngest Christian, may enjoy the inestimable opportunity and privilege of sharing with our brethren in a great variety of ways. We can share our material blessings, such as homes, food, clothing, cars, and money. We can share in the service of the Lord by caring for His servants, assisting them in their

labours, and sharing their many burdens. We can share in the trials of His people by standing with them in persecution, comforting them in sorrow, and supplying their wants in time of need.

If we realize how much the Lord Jesus Christ has loved us, we will love Him in return (1 John 4:19). We will then give ourselves completely to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5. Rom. 12:1), and we will make our love known to our brethren in Christ (1 John 4:7-13).

Our sacrificial sharing will then bring great joy to our own hearts; great blessing to others; and great glory and pleasure to God our Father.

The Lord Is Risen Indeed (Apr 1957)

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God has provided the world at large with abundant, lasting, visible evidence of His Son's literal resurrection from the dead; despite the fact that, after His death, the Lord Jesus Christ was seen alive again only by certain divinely chosen witnesses whose number totalled possibly little more than five hundred (Acts 10:40-41. 1 Cor. 15:4-8).

The Christian Church

The founding, growth, and continued existence of the Christian Church is in itself an evidence of our Lord's resurrection. Even the critical scholars who refuse to believe that Jesus actually rose from the dead, admit that the Church came into being because the apostles believed and preached that God had raised and exalted His crucified Son.

It is a fact known to the entire world that the Christian Church was founded about 1950 years ago, in an atmosphere hostile to all of its basic tenets, and to all of its chief proponents. It came into being despite the weaknesses, failures, and martyrdoms of its earliest members, and despite even the death of its founder.

The Church has grown from very small beginnings until countless thousands have come to comprise its membership. It has spread from one of earth's most parochial regions to the distant, remote parts of the globe. Worshippers of Christ may now he found amongst the most savage of heathens. The effects of the growth

of the Christian Church are known to practically every race upon earth.

The Church continues to exist and to grow despite numerous persecutions, failures, and divisions; despite dissension within its very own ranks; despite the horrible fact that even some of its professed members have denied the most treasured truths concerning the blessed person and work of its founder, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Church can count amongst its members many who have died for their faith, refusing to deny their loving allegiance to their incomparable Redeemer. Out of love to Christ, Christian missions have brought to the world the healing, enlightenment, hope, and joy that come only through faith in Christ.

Down through the centuries, thousands have expressed their devotion to Christ as the risen Saviour. Even now, no one can deny that there is evident in the world today, a large body of believers in Christ, whose love, devotion, and allegiance to Him are widely known and unmistakably felt again and again.

What is the explanation for such a phenomenon? How were the early disciples delivered from their fears, and charged with a courage and a power that drove them forth to proclaim the challenge of the risen Saviour? How did the Church become established despite all the power, hate, and guile of Roman and Jewish officialdom?

How did the Church grow in the midst of such influences and opposition? How did it manage to spread to the far corners of the earth? Whence has come that power of attraction to Christ; a power that knows nothing about time or distance?

Man has invented various hypotheses to explain the phenomenal founding, growth, and continued existence of the Christian Church, but none of these suppositions provide us with the certainty and the satisfaction which come from believing the confident exclamation of the early disciples, “The Lord is risen indeed!” (Lk. 24:34).

The critics admit that the founding of the Church was the result of the preaching of the resurrection. But how do they explain the origin and the power of such preaching? No theory of visions, or of hallucinations, or of deceptions, has ever stood the test of careful, consistent examination.

The church’s answer still remains the best; the continued existence of a Church which is not afraid to proclaim the risen, glorified Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, is in itself one of the most potent of witnesses to the truth of the resurrection of our triumphant Lord.

The Lord’s Day

The world has always known, from the earliest times to the present, that the Christian Church has met weekly upon the first day of the week, the Lord’s day; this fact is further evidence of our Lord’s resurrection.

The early Church was composed chiefly of Jews. For centuries, the faithful of their nation had observed the Sabbath most scrupulously. To them it was a solemn duty to keep holy the seventh day of the week; death was the penalty for failure (Ex. 20:8-11; 31:12-17).

Suddenly, the Christian Church was founded; and just as suddenly that Church began to meet on the first day of

the week. This has been the consistent tradition of the Church until the present day.

Why did the early Church thus meet on the first day of the week? Why has this day become so special to the Christian Church throughout its long history? There is no more satisfactory explanation than that contained in the simple belief of the early and the present Church: the Lord arose on the first day of the week, and on the same day, He appeared to His own disciples on a number of occasions. No human hypothesis is nearly so logical, so credible, or so inspiring as the exultant, confident, wonderful affirmation of the disciples, “The Lord is risen indeed!”

The empty tomb was discovered, and the Lord first appeared to His own on the first Sunday after His crucifixion; on that day, He was seen by some of the Christian women (Matt. 28:1, 10), by Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18), by Peter (Lk. 24:34. 1 Cor. 15:5), by Cleopas and another (Lk. 24:13-35), and by the ten apostles (Lk. 24:36-40. John 20:19-23). A week later, again on the first day of the week, He was seen by the eleven apostles (John 20:26-28).

The first day is given prominence elsewhere in Scripture too. The Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost, probably a first day of the week (Acts 2:1-4). Later, the first day of the week brought together the disciples to break bread (Acts 20:7). Paul directed the Corinthian Christians to put aside their contributions for the needy on the first day of every week (1 Cor. 16:2). John called it the Lord’s day (Rev. 1:10); his words connect that day directly with the celebration of the Lord’s supper (1 Cor.

11:20) which occurred on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).

Since those days, the entire world has witnessed the Church commemorating the resurrection of its glorious Head, in the gathering of the saints on Sunday, the first day of the week, the Lord's day. Hence, this day continues as a regular memorial and an eloquent witness to the resurrection of the crucified Man Who is now glorified at God's right hand (Acts 2:32-36; Heb. 10:12; 12:2).

The Lord's Supper

From its inception to the present day, the Church has been known world-wide for its celebration of the death of Christ in the feast of remembrance, the breaking of bread. The perpetuation of this remembrance in the weekly feast is further evidence that the Man of Calvary rose from the dead.

The early Church cherished the fond memory of its risen Head. Would these people have done so had He not risen? Nothing in the records of Scripture or history indicates that the breaking of bread was a funeral feast or a mourning feast. Rather we can be completely certain that participation in the symbolic feast declared to the world, as it does to-day, that Jesus Christ died and rose in victory.

It is specially significant, of course, that it was the first day of the week which brought the disciples together to break bread (Acts 20:7). Why did they celebrate this memorial supper at all, and why, in particular, did they celebrate it on the first day of the week?

People who were traditionally Sabbath-keepers must have had a most fundamentally important reason for meeting on the first day of the week rather than on the seventh. The Lord arose and appeared to His own on the first day of the week, before He ascended to glory; this is the most adequate explanation, not only of their meeting on this day, but also of their celebrating His death on this day.

If He did not rise, His mission was a failure, and the cause of Christianity must have died with its founder. No one would have subsequently troubled to commemorate such an ignominious defeat.

In addition, the keeping of the feast emphasizes weekly the power of Christ to win the heart's affection still. The love to Christ which burns within the breast of every genuine believer, knows no higher or holier experience than the remembrance of the risen Lord in the breaking of bread. Loyalty and love are expressed and poured forth in the greatest measure and with the deepest sincerity as we meditate upon His broken body and shed blood; as we gather around the emblems of His death; as we meet with His own on the day which celebrates His triumph over death.

He is remembered because He arose. Failure to rise would have condemned His memory to extinction, or at most it would have but perpetuated the memory of the world's worst imposter.

We can truthfully join the earliest disciples in explaining the continued loving remembrance of His death: "The Lord is risen indeed!"

We remember Him still, because He loved us and gave Himself for us. And we in turn love Him and express that

love as we surround the emblems of His death, eloquent testimony to the blessed fact of our Lord's glorious resurrection.

The Holy Scriptures

Evidence of our Lord's resurrection is found also in the existence of the New Testament.

It is a fact, known to all the world, that the Holy Scriptures including the New Testament constitute the most remarkable piece of literature that has ever been known to man.

No single book has had an equal impact upon mankind's thought and life. Even to-day, it is still the world's best seller. It has been translated into numerous languages throughout the earth. For demand and circulation, it still has no parallel.

How came this remarkable book to be written? Who wrote it and why did they write it? The New Testament was written by those who first testified to the resurrection of their Lord; most of them died because they so testified. The writings themselves are filled with allusions to the resurrection, for the simple reason the writers believed it to be a fact of the utmost importance and significance. Had there been no resurrection, there would have been no New Testament as we know it. Its very existence and character witness to the fact of the resurrection.

Would the New Testament writers have bothered to record the life and death of Christ, had His whole life's work ended in failure and hopeless defeat at the cross? Their hearts were filled with despondency until they learned the blessed news that their Lord had risen.

Would they have troubled to record the founding of a Church whose beliefs included the most cherished hope of all, the hope of the resurrection? Indeed, there would have been no Church with a founding to be recorded, had the New Testament writers not believed and preached the resurrection of Christ.

Besides, the fundamentals of Christian doctrine — justification, sanctification, the high priestly work of Christ, His second advent, etc.—are all based upon the assumption of the truth of the resurrection (Rom. 4:25. 1 Cor. 11:23-26; 15:20-23. Heb. 2:9-18; 4:14-16; 9:28; 10:10- 14).

With no resurrection, there would be no body of Christian doctrine as we know it; none of the epistles would have been written, saturated as they are with the spirit of the resurrected Christ.

The very fact that this Book ever came to be written; the fact of its enduring character, value, power, and blessing; all leads us to exclaim again, “The Lord is risen indeed!”

We do so with the greater certainty when we remember, that as historical documents, the Holy Scriptures have no peer as to reliability. Their authentic historicity has been demonstrated again and again, as well as their power to win men’s hearts to Christ and to make their minds and lives anew.

Let us go forth afresh to a sorrowing hopeless world with our joyous, hope-filled, Easter message of cheerful triumph. Let us be bold to proclaim the fact of our Lord’s resurrection, and the undeniable evidence which attests to the fact. Let us declare it with the confident

and certain assurance of its eternal truth: “The Lord is risen indeed!”

If Christ Be Not Risen (Apr 1958)

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Many years ago, the world was turned upside-down by a few preachers who consistently taught that the crucified Christ had risen from the dead (Acts 17:1-6). Even the man who had thrice denied his Lord declared repeatedly that Jesus the Christ was alive again (John 18:15-27. Acts 2:32; 3:15). Certainly no element in the apostolic message was emphasized more than the resurrection of our Lord.

This doctrine is vitally fundamental to the Christian faith, a fact which was recognized in the early Church, as clearly indicated by the sermons in the Acts. Therefore, it is pertinent to ask why this truth is not more prominent in contemporary preaching. Everyone ought to be made aware of the full significance of Jesus' resurrection, for if Christ be not risen …

He Made False Claims

Before He was crucified, Jesus predicted that He would be raised from the dead on the third day. His disciples heard Him make this claim explicitly and frequently (Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19).

Had Jesus not risen, His followers would have been filled with grief and disappointment (John 20:11-15. Lk. 24:21). Worse still, He could have been justly declared guilty of falsehood and exaggeration; or at best, suspected of delusion and fantasy.

Had this been the case, memories of such a fiasco could scarcely have led to the founding of the Church, the

establishment of Christian doctrine, and the world-wide spread of the gospel. All this became possible only after the death and resurrection of Jesus, when the disciples came to realize the significance of the prophecy which earlier they had misunderstood so often (Lk. 18:31-34; 24:7-8). Then, with a fresh comprehension of the Scriptures, they joyously worshipped and proclaimed their risen, ascended Lord (Lk. 24:45-46, 51-52. John 2:22).

Had Jesus failed to rise, such results would have been either ridiculous or impossible; for not only would His friends have lost all confidence in His words, but also His foes would have been revelling in opportunities of proving the falsehood of His claim.

One day, the Jews heard Jesus say, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19); words which were later used to charge Him at His trial, and to mock Him on the cross (Matt. 26:61. Mk. 15:29-30). Although the Jews apparently (and perhaps deliberately) misinterpreted His words at the time, certainly they eventually realized the significance of the prophecy that He would rise again. Possibly this realization came to them as they heard Him say on another occasion, “so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40). Their full appreciation of His claim was revealed in their fear that the predicted resurrection would actually materialize, and in their effort to thwart any attempt to simulate it (Matt. 27:63-64). Their fear was culminated in the report that Jesus was indeed alive again; and their effort was frustrated by their total inability to prove the falsehood of the report.

The preachers in the early Church were fully persuaded that Jesus' claim was not false. They had every reason for being thus convicted: not only did they have concrete, first-hand evidence to crystallize and substantiate their own belief, but also, they had no contrary evidence to shatter their conviction or to hinder the preaching of the resurrection and the founding of the Church. Every attempt to produce any such contrary evidence has been based on other than historical ground.

The established facts of Jesus' historical resurrection confirm the truth of the prophecy which He made before His death. We can rest assured that His claim has been fully authenticated, and we can place complete confidence in this, and in every other statement which He made.

As Christians, we can find continual refreshment in the knowledge that He is indeed alive, but we should endeavour more frequently and diligently to impart this essential knowledge to others, for if Christ be not risen…

He Is Not The Son Of God

Great portions of the New Testament fall to shambles if Jesus Christ is not the Son of God. And if Christ had not risen from the dead, the Church never would have possessed the most important proof that He is indeed the Son of the true God. The doctrines of His resurrection and of His divine Sonship stand or fall together.

In the first place, if His prophesied resurrection had failed to take place, He would have been guilty of a false

claim. Such guilt is completely incompatible with any rational concept of divine Sonship.

Furthermore, divine Sonship implies divine life, which cannot be reconciled in any sense with the thought that the divine Son might experience final conquest by death.

On one occasion, Jesus spoke of His coming death and resurrection, while at the same time professing a complete consciousness of His divine Sonship (John 10:17-19). Were these words not completely true, they would surely have been symptoms of the utmost madness, as the Jews were quick to point out. And any delusions about His purposed resurrection would certainly lead anyone to suspect delusions about His professed relationship to God the Father. In other words, if He was wrong about His resurrection, who could feel confident that He was not wrong about His divine Sonship?

However, this record has been left to us by the apostle John, one of Jesus' most intimate associates. This strengthens our confidence in the doctrines of His resurrection and His divine Sonship.

John enjoyed the enviable experience of a close communion with the Lord Jesus Christ. But in addition, he lived long enough to witness the growth and development of the Christian Church, the remarkable organism that came into being through preaching which emphasized above all else the glorious resurrection of the One Whom every true Christian worships and serves. Later in life, John wrote one of the world's most magnificent pieces of literature, the beloved fourth Gospel. The specific purpose of this great work, he expressly declared himself, was to prove "that Jesus is

the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31); and this grand statement of purpose is set in the midst of detailed passages describing events connected with the Lord's resurrection. John was a confirmed and unshakable believer in both the resurrection and the divine Sonship of Jesus Christ, and his unique record leads every honest reader to the same belief.

Paul never lived to read this divinely inspired masterpiece, but he too was a most thoroughly convinced believer in the resurrection and divine Sonship of Jesus (Gal. 1:16). The two doctrines are inseparably linked in his epistle to the Roman Christians: Paul referred to Him as the One Who was "designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:4).

Glory to God, there is adequate evidence that Jesus rose from the dead, never again to die! His resurrection declares and substantiates His claim to divine Sonship (Matt. 26:63-64. John 10:30-38; 20:28). Therefore, in proclaiming the gospel and in presenting the Saviour to the world, it is essential that we give due prominence to the doctrine of the resurrection. If men and women fail to realize the significance of this doctrine, they will fail to appreciate the character of His person and the nature of His death, for if Christ be not risen…

His Death Was A Defeat

The Jewish leaders seemed confident that His apparent inability to save Himself was a clear indication that Jesus' claims were false and that He was surely not the Son of God (Matt. 27:38-44). Quite possibly they were smugly satisfied that in putting Him to death, they were

proving conclusively the vanity and guilt of “this deceiver” (Matt. 26:63-66).

Had their diabolical scheme succeeded ultimately, their triumph would no doubt have been secured for all time. Even the followers of Jesus realized that in His death, their hopes were dashed to the ground (Lk. 24:19-21). There can be no question whatsoever that in the mind of friend and foe alike, the death of Jesus spelled the defeat of Jesus — apart, that is, from His subsequent resurrection.

The Bible recognizes death as an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26). Had this enemy been victorious in combat with Him who professed to be the Son of God, surely no one could fail to conclude that in His death and defeat, the would-be Saviour had finally been unmasked as something much less than divine (cf. Phil. 2:6-11. Heb. 1:8; 2:14).

John, the beloved apostle, realized fully the extent to which the resurrection established as an essential victory, the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:17-18). Because He is risen, we know that He has been victorious. Because He is victorious, we know that He is Lord. Because He is Lord, we know that He must be confessed as such (Rom. 10:9).

This is the joyous note that should be sounded whenever the gospel of Christ is preached, for the doctrine of salvation is indissolubly bound up with the doctrine of the resurrection. Indeed, if Christ be not risen…

God Can Neither Justify Nor Sanctify

In his letter to the Romans, Paul connects our justification with the resurrection of Christ (Rom. 4:24-25) in such a way as to make it clear that apart

from the resurrection, there would be no justification at all.

With even greater clarity, he told the Corinthian believers that “if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17). After all, the gospel is good news, and justification depends upon the sinner’s acceptance of this good news: “that Christ died for our sins … and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Without the resurrection, there would be no Good News — and therefore, no justification.

But since He has been put to death on account of our offences and raised again on account of our justification, we can now enjoy full justification through faith, and glorious enduring peace with our God (Rom. 5:1).

The Apostles recognized that God’s approval of His Son was essentially linked with His resurrection from the dead (Acts 2:22-24). Furthermore, His resurrection and subsequent exaltation are described together in contexts which indicate that the Father was as well pleased with the death of His Son, as He was with His life (Eph. 1:20. Phil. 2:5-11).

The Christian’s sanctification is also dependent upon the doctrine of the resurrection, as revealed by Paul in several passages (e.g., Rom. 6-8. Col. 3). This is a matter of vital importance. Positionally, every Christian has been sanctified in Christ (1 Cor. 6:11). Through faith in Him, we are identified with Him in death, burial, and resurrection. In the sight and reckoning of God, we are set apart as holy ones through union with Jesus Christ our Lord.

Possibly there are many Christians, however, who have failed to appreciate the fundamental connection between our position and our practice. Before God, every believer in Christ is faultlessly righteous and spotlessly holy. Failure to manifest such character in practical living can be traced largely to our failure to realize how the resurrection of Christ is related to our achievement of experimental righteousness and holiness, for if Christ be not risen …

The Christian Has No Power

The power of the early disciples amazed the multitudes with whom they came in contact (Acts 1:12). Peter attributed all of these amazing phenomena to the living Christ who was working powerfully through His saints (Acts 1:33).

Paul describes the means of practical righteousness and holiness in writing to the Romans: “Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:11). He had experienced the power of this truth in his own practical life, as described in another Epistle, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Gal. 2:20).

Paul prayed that the Ephesians might know the resurrecting power of God working in their hearts and lives (Eph. 1:19-20). He himself craved a deeper knowledge of Christ and of the power of His resurrection (Phil. 3:10). The practical value of such a deeper knowledge was also stressed in his letter to the Colossians (Col. 2:9-13; 3:1-10).

Here, then, is the key to the successful Christian life, in which practical righteousness and holiness are demonstrated consistently as a matter of every day's routine: a clear perception of the crucial fact that only the power with which God raised His Son is adequate for such a life; and a full surrender to the One with Whom we have been so intimately identified in His death, burial, and resurrection.

No one can stress too much how important is the doctrine of the resurrection to the Christian's spiritual prosperity and joy, for if Christ be not risen …

The Christian Is Most Miserable

The Christian faith must either offer a resurrected Christ, or offer nothing at all. The Christian gospel is either a gospel of resurrection, or it is worse than a ghastly farce (1 Cor. 15:13-19).

But every Christian should be fully assured that his joy is founded upon the certainty of incontrovertible fact — the historical fact that Jesus rose again from the dead.

Concrete proof of this fact is still with us: the existence and the message of the historical documents comprised in our New Testament; the formation and development of the Christian Church; the continual celebration of the Lord's Supper; and the traditional commemoration of the Lord's Day as the day of resurrection.

Here are four pieces of evidence all of which are subject to the scrutiny of the most critical; all of which never have been adequately explained apart from the literal, bodily resurrection of our Lord.

And, of course, when the human heart is truly ready to do God's will (John 17:7), and when the contrite soul is

prepared to fully surrender to Him who is Lord of all (Rom. 14:9. Rev. 1:17), there follows an experience of revelation which convinces the mind and spirit beyond all doubt, that in Jesus Christ the risen Lord, each one of us can wholly confide forever.

* * *

After we have committed a thing to Christ, our faith and patience will be tried, and often the very worst thing may happen. Nevertheless, God will let nothing happen to prevent the coming of the salvation and deliverance for which we prayed. When we have committed it to God, and have the assurance He has undertaken, there is nothing to be afraid of but doubting God.

Let Us Sow More Seed (June 1958)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 4 No. 6, June 1958.

Thousands of children attend Sunday School regularly. This is a great opportunity; for while many of these boys and girls come from Christian families, many more live in homes where the gospel of Christ is unknown.

The Problem

Our responsibility, however, is just as great as our opportunity. We should “be deeply concerned that although numerous pupils come to know Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour, a significant number leave Sunday School without showing evidence that they have been born again.

The Bible is the chief text in our assembly Sunday Schools. The authority of the Scriptures is unquestioned. The gospel is taught in sincerity by teachers who desire to win young hearts to the Lord. Children are urged to accept the Saviour revealed in the Word of God. The blessings of salvation and the horrors of perdition are explained to every child who comes into our care.

We can thank God that this faithful teaching leads many children to Christ; nevertheless, we must deplore the fact that many others are passing through the Sunday School without getting saved. Furthermore, we seldom hear of them coming to Christ in later life. No conscientious teacher could possibly be satisfied with the harvest of souls which we are reaping.

The Cause

We are “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23). Therefore, it is pertinent to ask whether or not we should be satisfied with the extent to which we are sowing the good seed of God’s Word.

Obviously there is more than one factor bearing upon our success in winning the young to the Lord. The teacher must be motivated by devotion to Christ and love for souls (1 Cor. 13:1-4). The heart and life should be fully consecrated to the Master (Rom. 6:13-22; 12:1-2). The Word of God must be taught in the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:1-5). Unless these conditions are fulfilled, the most thorough course of Bible teaching will bear little fruit for God.

Furthermore, there are different types of soil. No matter how extensive our sowing might be, some good seed will fall by the way side, upon stony places, and among thorns (Matt. 13:1-23).

Nevertheless, reaping is proportional to sowing (2 Cor. 9:6. Gal. 6:7). We reap much when we sow much; we reap little when we sow little. These facts are just as true spiritually as they are physically. If our Sunday Schools are not enjoying an abundant harvest of souls, questions must be raised about the amount of sowing, as well as about the method of sowing.

How much do our “graduates” know about the Bible after five to ten years of Sunday School attendance? In itself, Bible knowledge is not enough to produce conversion; the work of the Holy Spirit is indispensable (John 3:3-8). However, the Spirit of God works through the Word of God (Eph. 6:17).

How much do our pupils learn about creation and the great men in Genesis? Perhaps a great deal in some schools; but how much do they learn about the history of Israel, beyond the journey from Egypt to Canaan? What do they know about the dealings of God with the kings of Israel and Judah? How much have they absorbed of the messages given by God to Israel and Judah through the prophets?

To what extent do they appreciate the life of Christ in its entirety? Have they grasped the primary significance (not allegorical application) of the parables and miracles of our Lord? How familiar have they become with the founding and development of the Church? Do they have any conception of the relations between the Acts and the Epistles? What do they understand about the great Christian doctrines of justification, sanctification, and consecration? Do they have any scriptural foundation upon which to base a rational understanding of the doctrine of the Lord's return?

Not all of these topics can be understood by young children — gradation of instruction is necessary. Nor can all this material be covered in a short period — years of teaching are required. Nor can the teaching of the way of salvation be neglected for the sake of giving children a knowledge of the whole Word of God — a balanced curriculum is essential.

Nevertheless, if children are spending years in Sunday School without acquiring a good knowledge of Scripture as a whole and without coming to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, it is quite possible that these two phenomena are related as cause and effect.

The Solution

If we believe that souls are born again through the incorruptible seed of God's Word, and if we are concerned about laying the groundwork for a genuine Christian life, then our most fundamental objective should be to teach the whole Word of God to all of the children entrusted to our care.

Many assembly Christians are proud of our freedom to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). Indeed, we are all glad that prevailing thought amongst us favours a respect for every part of Scripture. At the same time, would we be justified in claiming that the whole Word of God is being taught in our Sunday Schools?

If we believe in teaching all of the Scripture, then why not give the whole Word of God to our Sunday School pupils? It is true that some children come to Christ without much knowledge of the Bible; while others remain in their sins despite a considerable knowledge: but surely no one would point to these facts and say that therefore the amount of Scripture which we teach is relatively unimportant!!

We have no knowledge of the amount of Scripture required to bring a particular soul to Christ. Our responsibility is to preach the Word, and we believe that this alone will bring souls to Christ. Then let us do more of it by giving them the whole Word of God.

No doubt we come to know God better as we come to know more of His Word. Therefore if we want our pupils to acquire an increasing knowledge of God, let us extend their knowledge to include every part and aspect of His Word!!

Even in a lifetime, it is impossible to absorb more than a small fraction of the truth which God has given us in the Scriptures. Therefore, the sooner we start teaching our children all the truths of His Word, the fuller will be their knowledge of its Author, and the more effective will be their Christian experience when they do finally experience the second birth.

However, the sower must gather seed before he can sow it, and apart from serious study, the sower of God's Word will be unable to teach the Bible as a whole. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things" (Matt. 12:34-35). If our hearts are filled with God's Word, we shall be able to bring forth many good things in teaching our classes.

Newborn babes require the milk of the Word for growth (1 Pet. 2:1), but teachers must get beyond first principles. They must be skillful in handling the Word of righteousness, and must advance further than the elementary knowledge of the Scriptures which characterizes the new convert (Heb. 5:11-14).

The greatest Teacher of children had the most extensive knowledge of God's Word. The Lord Jesus Christ had an intimate acquaintance with every part of Scripture, as His disciples learned particularly after His resurrection (Lk. 24:25-27, 44-45). During His public ministry, His skill in handling the Old Testament was very evident (Matt. 22:23-46). Even as a "boy, His understanding astonished the teachers (Lk. 2:46-47).

Paul knew that Timothy was well versed in the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:15). He could safely encourage Timothy to teach the truths which he had received (2 Tim. 2:2).

Furthermore, Timothy was directed to teach faithful men who would be able to teach others. In other words, such men could be expected to teach effectively only after receiving the doctrine themselves.

Paul exemplifies the extent to which a man can be used of God when he is saturated with a knowledge of the Word of God. One Epistle is sufficient to prove him a master of the Old Testament — his masterpiece,. the letter to the Romans.

Paul's effectiveness was based upon his comprehension of the relationships between various parts of the Sacred Writings. While the illumination of the Holy Spirit is essential for such an understanding, this illumination comes only in diligent meditation of God's Word.

It is possible that herein lies the chief secret of success in winning the young to Christ. Perhaps as teachers we need more than anything else to heed the Lord's instructions to Joshua: "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Josh. 1:8).

The study of God's Word is essential not only for a knowledge of its contents and the relationships existing amongst its various parts, but also for that clarity of personal understanding which enables the teacher to present his lesson in a comprehensible manner.

The extent of the teacher's own appreciation of the Scriptures will determine the extent to which he can stimulate children's thinking. Unless they are provoked to be thoughtful about the lesson, and unless they

realize the impact of the Bible's teaching upon their own lives, it is unlikely that lasting impressions will be made upon their hearts.

The provocation of questions will be effective only if the teacher is sufficiently acquainted with the Scriptures that he can satisfactorily answer the queries of puzzled pupils. The thorough student of the Word will so seek to prepare himself for the lesson that the Holy Spirit will supply him with all the wisdom and knowledge needed to meet the rising tide of curiosity which a well taught lesson is bound to develop in the minds of his pupils.

Filled with Fullness (Nov 1958)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 4 No. 11, Nov 1958.

This biographical sketch of Stephen by our Associate Editor places before the minds of young and old an example of apostolic Christianity. May we not only admire, but by the grace of God emulate it. The Church and the world are both in need of such spiritual men. — Ed.

“I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ… that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” (Eph. 3:14-19).

With the stones of his captors still beating upon him, Stephen kneeled down and prayed for his foes (Acts 7:57-60). His final message and his dying prayer must have made a lasting impression upon Saul of Tarsus standing by (Acts 8:1; 22:20. Cf. Acts 7:48.51, 53 with Acts 17:24, Rom. 2:29; 4:9-12, Phil. 3:3, Col. 2:10-13, Gal. 3:19). Years later, as Paul the Apostle, the latter also bowed his knees and prayed in effect that the Ephesian Christians might become like Stephen (Eph. 3:14-19); for if anyone was ever filled with all the fulness of God, it was surely the faithful witness who died at the feet of Saul.

Full of Faith

Luke described Stephen as a man full of faith (Acts 6:5) and this no doubt was the secret of his unusual likeness to Christ. It is by faith that Christ indwells the human heart (Eph. 3:17); and this was so true of Stephen at his trial that even the council thought he looked like an

angel (Acts 6:15). The great heroes of faith were mentioned prominently throughout his defence; beginning with Abraham, the father of the faithful (Acts 7:2-53. Rom. 4:16. Gal. 3:7. Heb. 11:1-12:2).

Faith is the key to answered prayer (Matt. 21:21-22. Jas. 1:6; 5:16), and apparently Stephen's dying request was granted, at least in the case of Saul (Acts 7:60. 1 Tim. l: 13). The measure of Stephen's faith was never more clearly evident than in this final petition, this heart-felt supplication of a truly Christ-like saint (Luke 23:34).

The sinner is saved and justified by faith (Eph. 2:8. Rom. 1:17; 5:1). However, even the Christian cannot please God without faith (Heb. 11:6), for "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). We know "that our old man is crucified" with Christ, but faith is required to reckon it so (Rom. 6:6-11. Gal. 2:20). Without faith, we cannot realize the practical effects of Christian doctrine in our daily lives and we cannot glorify God as we should.

Full of The Holy Spirit

Being a man of faith, Stephen was also filled with the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39. Acts 6:3, 5, 10; 7:55). Faith gave the Spirit of God the necessary freedom to work in the man's heart and life, and thus to produce the fruit of the Spirit — that likeness to Christ which pleases and glorifies God the Father (John 15:8. Gal. 5:22-24). The branch bears fruit while joined to the vine (John 15:4); but the Christian can enjoy the practical benefits of his union to Christ only when he grasps by faith the reality of this vital relationship (Eph. 1:3, 12-13).

Paul envisaged the filling of the Spirit as the normal experience of every believer, and not as a special

blessing for the favoured few (Eph. 5:18. Gal. 5:16). When any Christian reckons by faith that the old man has been crucified with Christ, then he walks in the Spirit, and does not fulfil the lusts of the flesh; rather he then bears the fruit of the Spirit so evident in the character of Stephen. Likeness to Christ is here again displayed in the Spirit-filled man of God, for Jesus Himself was annointed and filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:22; 4:1,18. Acts 10:38).

In his defence, Stephen also referred to another great man of faith; namely, David — a man after God's own heart (Acts 7:45-46; 13:22. Heb. 11:32); a man who feared that his sin might provoke the removal of the Holy Spirit Who had come upon him (1 Sam. 16:13. Ps. 51:11). Although the believer today need not fear the removal of the Holy Spirit by Whom he has been sealed, yet he can fail through the sin of unbelief to experience the fulness of the Spirit and His divine blessings (John 14:16. Eph. 2:13. Heb. 3:7-11, 17-19).

The Holy Spirit is the Divine Teacher (John 14:26; 16:13); He makes it possible for the Christian to lead a righteous life (Rom. 8:4); He is essential to the proper functioning of the gifts in the Church (1 Cor. 12:4-13). How crucial, therefore, that we should endeavour to follow the example of Stephen who was full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit.

Full Of Wisdom

Stephen needed wisdom for handling the ticklish problem of ministering to the neglected widows (Acts 6:1-4). From his excellent knowledge of the Scriptures, he was no doubt well aware of wisdom's value to Solomon in dealing with the people of God (1 Kings

3:5-12. Acts 7:47. Jas. 1:6). In one way or another, practically all of the great men of faith were blessed with a wisdom whereby they could glorify God in their service for Him (e.g., Joseph, Gen. 41:46-57; Moses, Deut. 34:10-12).

Paul too realized later that wisdom was a vital necessity in the spiritual experience of the Ephesian saints (Eph. 1:17). He had learned the secret of divine wisdom, perhaps as no other man has ever done: he knew that in Christ “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3); that Christ is the wisdom of God unto His people (1 Cor. 1:24, 30).

Such wisdom was granted to Stephen in abundance, for he was a man of faith (Jas. 1:6). Through wisdom, he served his God well, not only in the material affairs of the Church (Acts 6:3,7), but also in the preaching of the gospel which was making such an impact at that time (Acts 6:10).

A man full of faith, he believed all of God’s revelation in His word and through His servants (Acts 7:2-53); he entrusted himself completely to God’s care (Acts 7:59). A man full of the Holy Spirit, he was fully yielded to this Divine Person dwelling within his heart and controlling every aspect of his life (Acts 6:10; 7:55). A man full of wisdom, he possessed a God-given gift whereby he rendered acceptable and Christ-honouring service to his God, to his fellow Christians, and to his fellow men. The wisdom with which he ministered was irresistible because it was the wisdom of God, and because he served in the power of the Spirit of God (Acts 6:10).

Full of Power

A man full of faith is invariably a man full of power (Heb. 11:33-38). To this principle Stephen was no exception (Acts 6:8); nor was God's servant Moses, whom Stephen discussed at some length in his defence before the council (Acts 7:22. Heb. 11:27).

Being righteous by faith, any child of God can experience abundant power through prayer (Jas. 5:16), even power to remove mountains (Matt. 21:21-22). Faith is also the key to healing (Matt. 9:22, 29. Jas. 5:15), and Stephen demonstrated this power in the wonders and signs which he performed (Acts 6:8).

By faith, we are justified (counted righteous) before God: in Christ He sees us guilty of no wrong. By faith, too, we are enabled to live righteous lives; for when we reckon the old man to be dead with Christ, then the Holy Spirit fills us and Christ too indwells the heart. How tragic that we should fail to take advantage of this infinite power with which we should all be filled (Phil. 3:9-10. 1 Cor. 1:24; 2:4-5).

The power and effectiveness of Stephen's ministry was quite evident to all. Immediately following the choice of Stephen as a deacon, the word of God increased and the number of disciples was multiplied. The context surely implies a connection as between cause and effect (Acts 6:5-7). He was capable too of working wonders and signs, another evidence of indwelling spiritual power (Acts 6:8. 1 Cor. 12:9-10). His ministry to the foes of the gospel also struck a telling blow (Acts 6:10). Towards the end of Stephen's address, they were cut to the heart by his powerful message (Acts 6:54). His prevailing

power in prayer was possibly the prelude to the subsequent conversion of Saul (Acts 7:60. 1 Tim. 1:13).

It is evident too that in all the exercise of his God-given power, Stephen acted with a wisdom which enabled him to use the gift of God with discretion and with Christ-exalting results.

Full of Grace

His spiritual power, however, was tempered with spiritual grace. The Corinthian Christians were greatly gifted but painfully proud (1 Cor. 1:7; 4:6, 18; 5:2); what a striking contrast to the grace and humility of Stephen who was full of grace as well as full of power (Acts 6:8. R.V.). In this respect, he was very much like Joseph, who at the height of his power, ministered grace to his undeserving brethren (Acts 6:9-14. Gen. 45. Heb. 11:22).

This no doubt was another reason why Stephen was chosen to minister to the needy widows (Acts 6:1-5). The gift of healing which he possessed was also the result of God’s grace ministered to him, filling him, and flowing out through him (Acts 6:8. Rom. 12:6. Eph. 4:7).

Full of faith; full of the Spirit; full of wisdom, power, and grace, Stephen died like his Lord, with forgiving grace upon his lips (Acts 7:60). One of the most Christ-like characters this world has ever known, Stephen is an outstanding example of what every Christian should strive to be in every age.

* * *

Stay firm; He has not failed thee in all the past,

And will He go and leave thee to sink at last?

Nay; He said He will hide thee beneath His wing;

And sweetly, there in safety, thou mayest sing.

* * *

And when there seems no chance, no change

From grief can set me free,

Hope finds its strength in helpfulness

And calmly waits for Thee.

O Ye of Little Faith (Feb 1959)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 5 No. 2, Feb 1959.

No sower is satisfied with sowing for its own sake. The real joy in sowing seed is the prospect of reaping a harvest. Indeed, the only reason for sowing at all is the harvest which every sower naturally anticipates.

A Natural Link

Sowing and reaping have been inseparably linked since the earliest days of man's history. "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest…shall not cease" (Gen. 8:22). And down through the ages, they stand out as the most vital, yet most satisfying occupations of the human race. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Ps. 126:5). "He that goes forth weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him" (Ps. 126:6, R.S.V.) Little wonder that sowing and reaping have been used so extensively in the Scriptures to illustrate cardinal spiritual truths.

Engaged continually in sowing the world's best seed, every Sunday School teacher stands to gain immeasurably in skill and effectiveness by studying carefully all of the Scriptural parallels drawn between physical and spiritual sowing. But the primary and most obvious lesson to be learned is the fact that, in the Bible, sowing and reaping are constantly associated with one another, not only in the physical realm, but also in the spiritual.

Sowing To Reap

This intimate association is clearly inherent in the nature of things; we sow in order to reap! And if we forget this plain simple fact, we are liable to be found guilty of excusing our barrenness, claiming that we are responsible only for sowing the seed and that God is the One Who gives the increase.

It is perfectly true that God alone can give the increase, in both the physical and spiritual realms (1 Cor. 3:7). But only a most peculiar sower would fail to look for the trouble if sowing produced no harvest! Surely none of us can take smug satisfaction in merely sowing the seed of God's Word, while reaping little or nothing for our labours!

When Paul said that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," he was not simply intending to teach explicitly that "he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption" (Gal. 6:7-8); rather, he was at the same time implicitly underlining the fact that sowing and reaping are naturally and inseparably bound up together!

The Lord's Teaching

The same can be said of the Lord's own teaching; for example, in the classic parable of the sower and the seed (Matt. 13:1-23). In the order of nature, as we now know it, not all the seed sown can be expected to bear fruit. At the same time, it is equally true that we can certainly expect some of the sowing to result in reaping!

The Lord's instruction is clear and completely unambiguous: sowing and reaping are correlative activities, both with literal seed and with the spiritual

seed of God's Word. And if we think for a moment that sowing is entirely an end in itself, our thinking is both contrary to all that is logical in nature and inconsistent with all that is spiritual in Scripture!

The necessary connection between sowing and reaping is stressed elsewhere in the Lord's teaching as well; for example, in the parable of the good seed and the tares which were sown in the same field and left to grow together until the crop was harvested (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43). Also, in discussing the will and the work of God with His disciples, the Lord reminded them that "one sow-eth, and another reapeth," but that both sower and reaper should rejoice together (John 4:36-37). Once again, He plainly implied in this discussion that sowing and reaping are inevitably related to each other.

Apostolic Experience

As to the spiritual sowing done in the apostolic preaching recorded in The Acts, Luke's story is one of continual reaping by various sowers. "Peter said unto them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ' … Then they that gladly received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:38, 41). "Repent ye therefore, and be converted' … many of them which heard the word believed" (Acts 3:19; 4:4). "And believers were the more added to the Lord" (Acts 5:14). "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ … And in those days … the number of the disciples was multiplied" (Acts 5:42; 6:1). "And the Word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

“They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake” (Acts 8:4-6).

Paul spoke to “Lydia…whose heart the Lord opened” (Acts 16:14).

“And Paul…reasoned with them… And some of them believed” (Acts 17:2-4). “Paul and Silas…went into the synagogue…many of them believed” (Acts 17:10-12). “Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill…certain men clave unto him, and believed” (Acts 17:22, 34). “And many of the Corinthians hearing believed” (Acts 18:8). Paul taught for two years in the hall of Tyrannus, “and many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds” (Acts 19:9, 18).

The Scriptures leave us no ground whatsoever for resting satisfied with sowing that leads to little or no reaping, either in work with adults or with children, for “God our Saviour…desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:3-4, R.S.V.). Furthermore, “the Lord is not … willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

Sowing In Faith

Of course, God’s will can only be accomplished through His Word, for every Christian is “born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23, R.S.V.). So the Sunday School teacher’s most important job is obviously the sowing the seed of the Word in young hearts.

At the same time, “as the rain cometh down … that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void” (Isa. 55:10-11). Therefore, if we think that we are sowing the seed, but find that we are reaping little or no harvest there is only one possible conclusion: the seed of God’s Word is not going forth as from the Lord Himself! In other words, there is something radically wrong with our sowing: most likely we are not sowing in faith!

Sowing with no subsequent harvest is a tragedy; but, for a Christian, sowing with no expectation of a harvest is ridiculous in the extreme: a thoroughgoing betrayal of a complete lack of faith! No wonder there is little reaping if there is little faith in sowing, for “without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Heb. 11:6).

Finally, let us not be guilty of thinking that a harvest cannot be reaped amongst young children in the Sunday School. The Lord said, “Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God” (Mk. 10:14).

“According to your faith be it unto you” (Matt. 9:29).

Easter All Year ’Round (Mar 1959)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 5 No. 3, Mar 1959.

Little Debbie, just turned four, went home from the children’s meeting, and began to tell her parents about the death of Jesus. Lying on the floor with her arms outstretched, she vividly demonstrated how the soldiers had nailed Him to the cross and lifted Him up to die.

Her young mind had been deeply impressed with the reality of Jesus’ death; but, sad to say, she had failed to realize that this was only part of the Easter story — indeed, only part of the Christian gospel!

The reason for this failure is obvious: she had been told only part of the Easter story! She had been taught only part of the Christian gospel!

Of course, during the Easter season this deficiency in our teaching of children is likely to be corrected in some measure at least. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ becomes very prominent in our thinking at this time of the year, and our teaching is almost bound to reflect a more proportionate emphasis upon all of the basic gospel facts.

But what about the other fifty-one weeks of the year? Are we teaching our children the full Christian gospel at all times and in all seasons? Or are we only telling them again and again, “Believe that Jesus died for your sins, and you’ll be saved?”

No doubt the foregoing statement has its place as a part of Christian doctrine; but there is a very great difference

between teaching one essential point of doctrine and teaching all essential points in their proper proportion.

Obviously, not every essential point of all Christian doctrine can be taught during each weekly lesson throughout the year. But at the same time, there is no good reason for mentioning the death of Jesus Christ more frequently than the resurrection of Jesus, for they both together make up the most basic essentials of all Christian doctrine.

In writing to the Corinthian Christians, Paul reminded them of the contents of the gospel which he had preached to them, “how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

The Lord’s Own Teaching

This was but an echo of the Lord’s own teaching; for time and time again as He told His disciples of His forthcoming death, He said that He would rise again (e.g., Matt. 16:21; 17:23).

We can scarcely over-emphasize the importance of giving due prominence to the resurrection of Jesus in all of our gospel teaching; for if we stress only or mainly the fact that He died, then our teaching in no wise distinguishes Him as a Man unique amongst men.

His uniqueness consists in His resurrection more than in any other experience or aspect of His life. Paul described himself as “a servant of Jesus Christ … set apart for the gospel of God … the gospel concerning His Son. Who was designated Son of God in power

according to the spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:1-4, R.S.V.)

It is because He rose from the dead that we are able to confidently trust in Him as the Son of God; and unless we present the gospel as an invitation to pledge one's allegiance, loyalty, and devotion to Him as the Son of God, we are only inviting people to give to certain historical facts a kind of mental assent which can constitute nothing but a very shallow experience with God and His Word.

The Apostolic Ministry

Throughout their gospel ministry, the early apostles preached the resurrection repeatedly; not just on its anniversary, but over and over again at every opportunity the whole year round.

When a replacement was sought for the traitor Judas, the emphasis in apostolic witness was clearly intended to be the resurrection (Acts 1:20-22). And Peter exemplified this emphasis in his sermon on the day of Pentecost: "Jesus of Nazareth… being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it … This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses" (Acts 2:22-36).

In his next recorded sermon, Peter preached similar words, telling his audience that they had "killed the Prince of Life, Whom God hath raised from the dead … God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless

you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:15-26).

The effect of such preaching was evident, for the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees were "grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead"(Acts 4:2). When questioned about his preaching and the healing of the lame man, Peter boldly declared "that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, Whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole" (Acts 4:10).

Persistence and Power

Despite imprisonment and threats, however, the apostles continued to witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and this they did with great power and great grace (Acts 4:33). When brought again before the high priest, Peter told them once more, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, Whom ye slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed Him openly" (Acts 10:38-40).

Preaching in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, Paul too laid stress on both the death and the resurrection of the Saviour, Jesus: "And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre. But God raised Him from the dead" (Acts 13:23-41). He even went to some length in explaining how the resurrection of Jesus fulfilled some of the Davidic prophecies (Acts 13:32-37).

In the synagogue at Thessalonica, Paul "reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from

the dead" (Acts 17:1-3). At Athens, too, "he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18,31).

As a prisoner before the Sanhedrin, Paul pressed home to his inquisitors that the hope and resurrection of the dead was the cardinal issue at stake (Acts 23:6). And then before Agrippa, he declared how "that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead" (Acts 26:23).

A Continuing Memorial

For the Sunday School teacher, the very day on which he meets with his class is a continuing memorial to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and a constant, year-round opportunity to remind his pupils of the first Easter morn when the Saviour arose from the dead.

If the significance of the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, is clearly taught and continually reviewed, and if the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is stressed equally with His death, the results will surely be: first, a better appreciation of the person and work of our Saviour; and then, a fuller awareness of the might and majesty of the One Who would claim each child as His very own; and finally, a greater readiness to bow the knee and to yield the heart and life to Him Who alone is worthy!

Robbery in the Sunday School (Apr 1959)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 5 No. 4, Apr 1959.

Every Christian would admit that God deserves the best we can offer Him, but is He actually getting the best of our efforts in children's work generally? There is abundant evidence to indicate that He is not, for actions speak much more loudly than words!

Old Testament Teaching

Throughout the Old Testament, it is obvious that God requires nothing short of the very best. The Passover lamb had to be "without blemish" (Exod. 12:5); likewise the bullock and the rams for the priests' consecration (Exod. 29:1), as well as the animals used for burnt offerings (Lev. 1:3, 10). Again and again the Scriptures stress that anything offered to God must be the best.

Even the sons of Aaron were qualified to perform all their priestly functions only if they were free from blemish; otherwise they would have profaned the sanctuaries of the Lord (Lev. 21:16-24). Only the best were fit to serve fully.

Furthermore, the Lord commanded that the Levites should receive "the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the first-fruits …" which were offered to the Lord (Num. 18:12). Only the best was fit to be offered to Him, and the best was reserved for those who served in presenting these offerings.

That Israel failed miserably in giving God the best weighed heavily upon the heart of Malachi. "Ye offer

polluted bread upon mine altar" (Mal. 1:7). "Ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hands? saith the Lord" (Mal. 1:13). "Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation" (Mal. 3:9). Giving God our second-best is nothing short of outright robbery, for He has given all of His best. Nevertheless, it seems possible for many of us to rob Him over and over again, without so much as a ripple of concern!

The greatest offering of all time was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; He was uniquely free from spot and blemish (Heb. 9:14. 1 Pet. 1:19). Fortunately for us, that perfect offering is the ground of our perfect acceptance with God (Eph. 5:25-27). But this in no wise or degree exempts us from striving to present Him with the best of our worship and service; the spirit and principles of the New Testament are just as demanding of our best as was the Old Testament of Israel's best.

New Testament Teaching

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). And yet how many of us expend our best efforts in seeking food, clothing, and even luxuries, rather than in seeking His kingdom!

Paul pressed upon Timothy the vital importance of giving his best: "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them" (1 Tim. 4:15). And Paul's own example was so completely consistent with his teaching that, near the close of his life, he could say confidently without fear of rebuke: "I have fought a good fight, I

have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7).

His life and service, more than anyone's, fully exemplified the sacrifice he urged upon the Roman Christians: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God" (Rom. 12:1). And if God will accept only the best as a sacrifice, we have some idea of the calibre of service for which our bodies should be utilized. It is true that in Christ we are judicially accepted before God, but to what extent do our spiritual condition and our Christian service correspond to our lofty position? Or are we quite smug and self-satisfied about giving Him our second-best, or even less?

Because we are human and inherently sinful, there is bound to be failure. But we sin grievously if we use this fact of nature as an excuse for not striving to give Him our best — in every situation and in every aspect of our service.

Despite the knowledge that perfect attainment still lay before him, Paul nevertheless could say that he counted "all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3:7-14). He was continually "reaching forth unto those things which are before" and constantly striving to give his best under all circumstances.

To the Corinthians he wrote in a similar vein: "Wherefore we labour, that … we may be accepted of Him" (2 Cor. 5:9). Are we labouring amongst the children so that we may be accepted of Him? In other

words, are we sincerely and whole-heartedly endeavouring to give Him our best in all of our service in the Sunday School and in other children's works?

Self-examination is a healthful spiritual exercise if conducted in accordance with scriptural principle (Ps. 26:2. 1 Cor. 11:28. 2 Cor. 13:5). In fact, a humble confession of failure before the Lord is possible only when sin and shortcomings are recognized. Furthermore, blessing and fruitful service are possible only through fellowship with the Lord, and the maintenance of this fellowship is entirely dependent upon confession (1 John 1:5-10).

In seeking to serve the Lord amongst the children entrusted to our care, are we giving our best to Him Who died and rose that these precious young souls might be redeemed to Himself?

Teacher's Check-List

1. Do I seek to keep fit spiritually and to come to the class each Sunday in a condition which makes it possible for the Lord to bless my teaching, or do I just squeeze my preparation in between other "more essential" activities?

2. Do I pray daily for each of my pupils by name, or do I just ask the Lord vaguely to "bless my class"?

3. Do I strive constantly to become better acquainted with each pupil and his parents, or have I never bothered to meet the parents?

4. Do I prove to the family my genuine interest in each pupil by writing or visiting him whenever he is sick, or do I merely hope that he will be back next week anyway?

5. Do I begin preparing my Sunday School lesson a week before I have to teach it, or do I just leave it until the last day, the last hour, or even the last minute?

6. Do I go over the lesson prayerfully day by day throughout the week or do I just hope for the best?

7. Do I try to teach a comprehensive range of Bible books and topics, or do I generally just cover the well-known stories?

8. Do I review my teaching carefully week by week, or do I just take it for granted that telling pupils once is enough?

9. Do I attend the class regularly, or do I “take a day off” whenever there is something “more important” to do?

10. Do I practise punctuality, or does half the class arrive before I do?

In other words, are we really giving our best, or are we robbing God and deceiving ourselves?

Divine Absentee (May 1959)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 5 No. 5, May 1959.

“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them”— (Matt. 18:20).

A regular check of the attendance is normal and routine in most Sunday Schools, but perhaps we have not been checking on the presence of the Lord as carefully as we should.

While we know that God is present everywhere at all times, the doctrine of divine omnipresence has two aspects in common with other Christian doctrines; for example, the doctrines of justification and sanctification.

With respect to these latter two, we know that through faith, we are reckoned by God to be righteous and holy and specially set apart for Himself. This is the judicial or positional aspects of these doctrines.

On the other hand, of course, we know from experience that frequently our lives are anything but righteous or holy; and at times like these, there is very little evidence that we really belong to the Lord in any sense whatsoever.

Similarly, although we know that the Lord is present throughout all the universe — simultaneously and continuously — it is possible for us to miss completely the real enjoyment of actually experiencing His presence in our midst.

Probably most non-Christians live out their lives without ever being conscious of the presence of God. But far worse than this, there is ample evidence to indicate that

the average Christian today is living day by day, and hour by hour, without any vital realization that the Lord is near.

And how does this apply to the Sunday School? Simply like this. While we know that He is present in every class (because He is omnipresent), there is a good possibility that on many occasions He is actually absent without our realizing it. And if this be the case, we are probably suffering from the delusion that just because we profess to take no denominational name, the Lord is automatically present in our midst in a very unique manner. In such a state of mind, there is little point in even considering the possibility that He might be present only “theoretically” and not practically at all.

Evidence of His Presence

It should be quite easy for us to check on the Lord’s presence in the Sunday School class; or for that matter, in our assembly or in an individual’s life. The Scriptures make the matter clear as crystal, for they give us numerous indications which confirm decisively whether or not He is present.

The realization of the Lord’s presence brought forth praise from the shepherds of Bethlehem (Luke 2:20) and similarly, worship from the wise men (Matt. 2:11). Simeon blessed God and Anna gave thanks unto the Lord when they saw the Saviour-babe (Luke 2:28,38).

Throughout His ministry of preaching and healing, the Saviour’s presence brought light, understanding, recovery, hope, and inspiration. Innumerable instances reveal the unmistakable signs and effects of His presence, but the essential feature of them all is

revealed in the words of Martha and Mary, “Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died” (John 11:21,32). They fully appreciated the fact that wherever He went, His presence brought blessing inevitably.

The early Church proved this in their experience also, even although the Lord Himself had ascended to the Father. “The hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord” (Acts 11:21).

In a very special way, the Apostle Paul proved the reality of the Lord’s presence on a number of occasions; for example, when “the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul” (Acts 23:11).

Thus, the Word of God leaves us in no doubt whatever: the Lord’s presence is accompanied invariably by praise, worship, thanksgiving, blessing, and power. Where these are absent, we can only conclude that the Lord is also absent, except in the doctrinal sense of His omnipresence.

Even in our own day, of course, there are times when we see the evidence of the Lord’s presence amongst His people: the Word of God goes forth in power; men and women are led to repentance, faith, praise, and worship; the Lord’s people strive together in the work of preaching the gospel, loving one another as well as the perishing souls they seek to reach; Christian prayer is a constant joy and exercise of the individual saint and the assembled church; the world as well as the church itself knows of a surety that God is actually in the midst of His own.

But are these signs evident in all of our Sunday Schools today? If not, we cannot help but conclude that the Lord is really not present as He should be!

Conditions for His Presence

A glib quotation of Matthew 18:20 guarantees the presence of the Lord no more than does a heathen chant if we are not actually fulfilling the conditions essential for realizing the enjoyment of His actual presence.

There is one condition: we must meet in His name! And even if Matthew 18:20 is printed on the sign-board outside the building, we can be quite sure of this: if there is no evidence of His presence then we have no evidence that we are really meeting in His Name! Of a certainty, if we were truly meeting in His name, He would indeed be present in our midst, and we would have conclusive evidence to this effect in the form of the signs which always accompany His presence.

Meeting in His Name means this at least, that we are meeting as those who belong to Him in fact, not merely in profession; that we are meeting as those who are yielded and committed to Him as fully as He requires on the grounds of His person and work as revealed in the Scriptures.

And if this one essential condition is not fulfilled, no other consideration even begins to matter. For belonging to Christ or owning His name means inevitably that we must be prepared to go all-out — to go all the way — in yielding ourselves to His claims upon us. It is because the most of us are not prepared to do this that we fail to experience and enjoy His presence — in our individual

lives, in our assemblies, and in our Sunday School classes.

Barriers to His Presence

Only sin keeps us from realizing the Lord’s presence. Only sin keeps Him out of our Sunday Schools. And the sooner we realize that our gospel testimony is barren throughout most of the land; the sooner we admit that the Lord is not really present with power and blessing in our midst and the sooner we confess that we have grievously sinned in failing to yield our all to Him; the sooner will we know the joys, the blessings, the incomparable bliss of experiencing His nearness throughout every Sunday School session.

Why Sunday Schools? (Sept 1959)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 5 No. 9, Sept 1959.

This article is the first in a new series covering many different aspects of Sunday school work. The October issue will feature a discussion of the teacher and his qualifications.

Sunday School was over, the classes dismissed. The children had gone, and the teachers were chatting in small groups as they moved slowly towards the door.

“That young rascal, Billy, is a case if I ever saw one,” groaned a weary teacher, thankful that the session was over. “What a character! At times like this, I wonder if it’s worth it all!”

Most teachers feel this way occasionally; if not always for the same reason, for numerous others just as discouraging. And at times like these, it is good to re-examine the purpose for doing Sunday school work. In fact, it is good to keep this purpose before us always.

The Ultimate Purpose

Why Sunday schools? They can only be justified in terms of God’s ultimate purpose — and that purpose is His own glory (1 Cor. 6:20; 10:31).

It was God’s purpose in creation that we should be like Him; so we can only glorify God as we allow Him, by His Spirit, to fulfil that purpose in us (Gen. 1:27. 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 11:7. John 15:8. Gal. 5:22-23).

Hence, in Sunday school work, it should be our main purpose (1) to manifest a godly character before our

pupils, and (2) to strive for the reproduction of that character in them.

Christ, the Image of God, is seen in every Christian teacher who continually reckons himself dead to sin; who hourly yields himself and his members unto God; who constantly abides in Christ; who always allows the Spirit of God to fill him and thus to bear in him the fruit of the Spirit, which is likeness to Christ and to God (Col. 1:15. Rom. 6:11-13; 8:4; 12:1. John 15:4-5. Eph. 3:15-16; 5:18).

Since this is possible only to a child of God, the purpose of Sunday school work must comprise the divine intention that the gospel of Christ be taught to every creature (Matt. 28:19-20. Mark 16:15. Luke 24:47). In other words, we should strive to win boys and girls to the Saviour; moreover, we should not be content merely to sow the seed; it is His will that they should all be saved, not simply evangelized! (Matt. 18:14. Luke 19:10. 1 Cor. 9:22. 1 Tim. 1:15; 2:4. 2 Pet. 3:9. See also “O Ye of Little Faith,” Food for the Flock, February 1959, page 30).

If we are striving to fulfil God’s ultimate purpose, we should not be content to tell children the same few stories year by year. Rather, while seeking to present the gospel whereby they can be saved, we should also cover a broad range of Bible books and topics, thus building the foundation for a developing Christian life that will truly glorify God when the child eventually accepts Christ (2 Tim. 3:15-17. 1 Pet. 2:2. See also “Let Us Sow More Seed,” Food for the Flock, June 1958, page 113).

The ultimate purpose of God goes further than this, of course; it includes His intentions for the Church (Matt.

16:18. Eph. 3:9-11). Sunday school objectives fall short of the divine standard when if we fail to aim at building up the Church through evangelistic efforts whereby children should be saved and added to the Church, and through a teaching ministry whereby these young converts should develop and mature into godly Christians (Eph. 4:11-16. Col. 1:2829).

The Practical Purpose

For many practical reasons, Sunday schools lend themselves to the fulfilment of God's ultimate purpose in creation, redemption, and the Church.

First of all, the Sunday school deals with children and young people, often the special objects of the Saviour's care (Matt. 18:1-8; 19:13-15). The Lord thus demonstrated the lasting value of teaching children at an impressionable age, thereby influencing a whole life for God.

This work has a special value today when the home and the public school do so little for the spiritual welfare of youth and when so many other agencies give support to the belief that health, education, and entertainment are more vital.

Interesting enough, however, non-Christian parents often recognize the value of Sunday school training, even when they do not bother to engage in religious activity themselves. In its appeal to parents as a means of influencing their children for good, the Sunday school is indeed a marvellous opportunity.

Such a community service can have immeasurable results if carried out faithfully with divine wisdom and power. After all, we must serve our community if we

hope to convince them that our teaching is true (1 Pet. 2:12). Particularly in a new residential area, the Sunday school can prove its worth as a means of reaching religiously indifferent parents as well as their children. This is specially true when Sunday school is held simultaneously with a gospel meeting for adults.

Special events serve not only to maintain children's interest but also to attract parents that would not come to gospel meetings. The annual "treat" and picnic have been traditionally used for this, but there are numerous other occasions for reaching adults through their children; e.g., programs at Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and the re-opening of school in the fall.

The influence of the gospel may go beyond the children to their parents through visitation of the home, especially when the pupil is absent. Also, visitations for "bringing our records up to date" seldom fail to find an open door through which our interest in the children can be shown. At the same time, a tract and invitation to adult meetings can be left without offending.

Viewed in this way, the Sunday school is a channel for distributing Christian literature — to adults as well as to children. This is a fine method, for the delivery of the message can be backed up by the testimony of a spirit-filled life in which God can reveal the love of Christ towards child and parent alike.

The Conscious Purpose

Unfortunately, it is possible to give mental assent to the foregoing ideas without realizing consciously either the

ultimate purpose of God or the practical value of Sunday school work as a means of fulfilling His purpose.

There is a glaring lack of concern about our failure to fulfil God's purpose. The Sunday school is a well-established institution, but our failure to achieve its purpose perturbs us very little these days!

It is quite futile for us to talk about the ultimate purpose of God and practical purpose of the Sunday school method if we do not realize these purposes consciously and make them a part of our daily thinking.

Are we as teachers consciously taking advantage of all the divine resources for living Christ-like lives before our pupils? Or are we "going through the motions" in such an unspiritual fashion that children sense our cold carnality more often than a warm spirituality?

Are we consciously working towards that day when the likeness of Christ will be seen in each pupil? Or are we content with the mere fact that they come and sit and appear to listen?

Are we consciously praying that the gospel seed will get into every heart? Or do we simply tell them another well-known Bible story that we happen to have "thought" of at the last minute?

Are we consciously sowing the seed with an expectation of conversions? Or do we remain smugly self-satisfied, consoling ourselves with the puerile notion that "this is the day of small things," while thousands of pupils leave school unsaved?

Are we consciously teaching the whole Bible? Or do we hide behind the pretense that organization is unspiritual, thus trying to conceal our own laziness and

indifference about teaching all of the Bible systematically?

Are we consciously trying not only to win souls, but also to edify young converts so that the Church will grow in strength as well as numbers? Or do we rashly assume that, once converted, young people will automatically follow in their parents' footsteps just because "it was good enough" for mother and father?

There are some happy exceptions, thank God! But speaking broadly, assembly Sunday schools are not nearly fulfilling the ultimate purpose of God; nor are they nearly realizing the practical purpose and value of the Sunday school method. And the most obvious reason for the whole sad state of affairs is the simple yet tragic fact that our professed beliefs are not a conscious and indispensable part of our thoughts and lives.

In other words, we simply do not practise what we preach! And only when we do, can we ever expect the Sunday school to fulfill its divinely ordained purpose of glorifying God.

Apt to Teach (Oct 1959)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 5 No. 10, Oct 1959.

This is the second in a new series of Sunday school articles. The November issue will feature unity and fellowship amongst the Sunday school staff.

“And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach…” (2 Tim. 2:24)

Nobody is perfect, and neither is any Sunday school teacher. But without some clear conception as to what constitutes the ideal teacher, the spiritual effectiveness of the Sunday school will be seriously limited.

For one thing, elders and superintendents will have no adequate standard for evaluating their staffs, and thus no means of knowing when a teacher needs special prayer, counselling, or encouragement. Furthermore, Sunday school leaders will have no satisfactory criterion for judging the potential merits of prospective teachers, and thus no guide to making wise decisions in the selection of new staff.

Besides, without a proper appreciation of an ideal that is worth striving for, teachers themselves will be incapable of measuring their own performance or of seeking, with the Lord’s help, to improve it.

On the other hand, if we are clearly aware of the characteristics, aptitudes, and abilities of the ideal teacher, we shall all pray and strive for a continuous improvement in the spiritual qualifications of our present staffs, and for increased spiritual discernment and guidance in the choosing of new teachers.

Spiritual Character

Paul gave special instructions to Timothy and Titus concerning the type of person who is suitable in God's sight for teaching in the Church (1 Tim. 1:3; 3:2. 2 Tim. 2:2. Titus 1:5). And although these instructions pertain to elders in particular, we cannot overlook the fact that elders and Sunday school teachers hold in common the same chief function; namely, the teaching of the Word of God.

In writing to both of his colleagues, Paul emphasized particularly the spiritual character of the teachers. In fact, his concern about the teachers' spirituality appeared to equal —if not exceed — his concern about their teaching ability and their knowledge of the Word of God (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:1-7).

It is plainly axiomatic that spiritual work can be carried on to the glory of God only if spiritual people are doing the work. It is of all things most essential, therefore, that a Sunday school teacher should be spiritual in the fullest sense of the word.

(In this connection, nothing could be more helpful and edifying than the careful reading, study, and application of the truths discussed in Chafer's volume, "He that is Spiritual", which is reviewed on the inside back cover of this issue).

The purpose of Sunday school work is to glorify God, and teachers can do this only if the Spirit of God is filling them and producing the likeness of Christ in their hearts and lives. And this is possible only to those who are filled with love and devotion to our Lord and Master, and who are willing to allow His Spirit to make the

indwelling Christ a vital reality day by day (Eph. 4:16-17).

Paul's unparalleled effectiveness in writing and teaching the Scriptures was no doubt more the result of His burning, passionate love to Christ than of any other single factor in his character and experience. Without a similar love for our Lord, no teacher can aspire in any degree to a life of increasingly fruitful service. God is glorified by a fruitful life, but love is the primary and basic fruit of the Spirit (John 16:8. Gal. 5:22).

Love to Christ inevitably produces love to others; the latter is the proof of the former. Both are essential spiritual qualities, without which no service can be pleasing to the Lord (John 13:34-35; 15:12-17. 2 Cor. 5:14. Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1). And here we all stand condemned! How miserably we have failed to love our Lord, our brethren, and our unsaved fellow-creatures!

The reason for our failure is not difficult to discover, of course. The one who looks upon Christ in the Word of God; who yields to Him in humble surrender and submission; who beholds Him in all His beauty, wisdom, grace, and power; who realizes and appropriates by faith the truth that he is identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection — that one cannot fail to love Him and to serve Him in loving others!

Prayerful meditation upon the Word of God is probably the greatest single deficiency in the life of believers today. And without such exercise on the part of Sunday school staffs, the work will inevitably prove to be fruitless and depressing. The maintenance of spiritual communion with the Lord — day by day, and hour by hour — through Bible reading, prayer, praise, and

confession, constitutes the most vital and indispensable part of every teacher's qualifications.

Teaching Aptitude

Paul made it clear that the Church needs teachers. At the same time, he declared that one of the basic qualifications for this instructional work is an aptitude for teaching (1 Tim. 3:2. 2 Tim. 2:24).

In the dictionary sense, an aptitude, of course, is a capacity, ability, or talent for doing a certain work or for engaging in a certain activity.

With reference to Christian concepts, aptitude can therefore be considered as a part of one's natural gifts and also as a part of the believer's spiritual endowment from God.

The ideal teacher is one with a natural teaching gift that has been yielded to the Holy Spirit and thus consecrated for use as a spiritual endowment in doing spiritual work.

Paul also made it clear that not every believer is intended to be a teacher (1 Cor. 12:29). While every believer no doubt has a divinely ordained function in the Body of Christ, the function differs from person to person, depending upon the fitting and provision of the Spirit of God (Rom. 12:3-8. 1 Cor. 12:4-6, 11, 27-30. Eph. 4:7, 11).

A passionate love for souls, springing out of a heart wholly devoted to Christ, can more than make up for a lack of natural teaching aptitude. Also, without a love for Christ and for children, no amount of purely human teaching aptitude will suffice for doing a job that glorifies God.

Notwithstanding, it is surely most obvious that the ideal teacher should be one whose heart yearns after souls as did the heart of the Lord Whom we serve, and whose natural and spiritual gifts from the Lord comprise an aptitude for teaching the Word of God. Where there is aptitude as well as love, there will be superabundant joy and blessing in service, despite all the difficulties and the discouragements.

It would be wrong of course to forget that the “knack” or the skills of teaching can be developed and improved somewhat, provided that there is some basic aptitude or gift for this work. The devoted teacher, who loves his Lord and his class, will certainly be more than anxious to do all that he can to become a better teacher in every sense of the word.

Many Sunday schools apparently fail to appreciate any connection between the training of Sunday school teachers and Scriptures such as Eph. 4:11-12 and 2 Tim. 2:2. But fortunately, despite the tragic and deplorable lack of teacher training in most of our assemblies, there are numerous excellent volumes on the subject of Sunday school teaching (e.g., How to Understand and Influence Children, by C. M. Narramore. Zondervan).

First rate courses have also been published on film strip for group instruction (e.g., Successful Teaching, and Know Your Child. Scripture Press or Moody Press). Also, a number of Christian magazines run regular features on Sunday school work. And on top of all these sources of guidance and assistance, older and more experienced teachers are usually thrilled to have the opportunity of assisting younger, newer teachers’ in accordance with the Scriptures just mentioned above.

Biblical Knowledge

Last, but far from least, an increasingly thorough knowledge of the Word of God is surely a qualification without substitute. Apart from sound Bible knowledge, the teacher is limited and handicapped beyond description.

First of all, each lesson must be prayerfully and carefully prepared — well in advance! An essential part of this preparation is the diligent study of the portion of Scripture to be taught.

In addition to this regular lesson preparation, however, every teacher should be ambitious to study and to increase his knowledge of the Word regardless of any connection between this study and the specific lesson he might be teaching.

There is ample evidence to show that our Sunday school children are not really getting to know the Scriptures thoroughly. There is no more likely cause for this deficiency than the lack of Bible knowledge amongst our teachers.

Fortunately again, there are many means available to us all today whereby our study of the Word can be enlarged as much and as quickly as desired. Study-helps, and commentaries abound on every hand. Bible correspondence courses (including some on teacher training) have proven over and over again to be a rich source of blessing to many. No one need suffer too long from the widespread lack of Bible ministry today, no matter what his particular situation might be. (Interested readers are invited to write for further information.)

All of this is not to say, of course, that a mere head knowledge of the contents of Scripture will make a good teacher. But again, if we are seeking the ideal, we will pray for more teachers whose hearts are yielded and devoted to the Lord; whom God has blessed with an aptitude for teaching; and whose character and gift are crowned with a Spirit-imparted knowledge of the Word — for it is by the Word of God alone that the Spirit of God regenerates the souls of girls and boys (John 3:5-6. 1 Pet. 1:22-23).

* * *

Suggestion of the Month

Many teachers and workers among children have found the device of the “quiet seat” to be a valuable aid to discipline in the Sunday school class, children’s meetings, and daily vacation Bible school projects.

Before the session begins, the teacher makes mental choice of a particular seat in the audience and announces to the group that he has done so, keeping the actual choice a secret. Of course, at the same time, he promises a small reward, such as extra marks, candy, etc. — to be awarded at the end of the session to the child who is sitting in that unknown seat, provided his behaviour is good throughout the session. Each child thinks that he might be sitting in the “quiet seat” (which is changed from one session to the next).

Everyone usually does his best to merit the reward, and then the prize is given out at the end of the session if the child occupying the seat deserves it.

The standards should be set at a high level from the beginning, and if the child does not behave, the teacher

simply announces that no prize is being awarded that session.

With One Accord (Nov 1959)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 5 No. 11, Nov 1959.

“Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called … endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:1, 3).

“For all the work we put into this Sunday school, we certainly do not see much blessing!”

Do you ever hear this remark in your Sunday school? If so, then perhaps you have got a problem in staff unity! The early Church, with its abundance and variety of spiritual blessings, was characterized by a spirit of fellowship and oneness in prayer and service. However, where there is a lack of such spiritual unity in the Lord, there will certainly be a lack of blessing.

Early Examples

Immediately following the Lord’s ascension, the apostles and others were found in an upper room, where they continued with one accord in prayer and supplication (Acts 1:14).

Again, “When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly … they were all filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:1-4).

Furthermore, they continued “daily with one accord in the temple… praising God, and having favour with all the people And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:46-47).

In the midst of persecution, “They lifted up their voice to God with one accord,” praising Him for His wisdom and power” (Acts 4:24).

As they moved about in their service for the Lord, again, “They were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch” (Acts 5:12).

Important spiritual decisions were made when the Church was “assembled with one accord” (Acts 15:25).

How beautifully the early Christians fulfilled the Lord’s commandment, “Love one another; as I have loved you … By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

Paul, too, realized the importance of unity in the church when he prayed for the Roman Christians: “The God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind (accord) and one mouth glorify God” (Rom. 15:5-6).

Since the purpose of the Sunday school is to glorify God, and since we can glorify only when we are praying, working, and praising with one accord, it follows that a Sunday school which is characterized by disunity and a lack of fellowship amongst the staff cannot possibly glorify God; and, therefore, cannot fulfil the Sunday school’s prime purpose.

Present Indications

When a Sunday school enjoys a true spirit of unity in Christ, the evidence of fellowship and oneness is seen in various ways.

For one thing, relations between the superintendent and each teacher will be characterized by Christian love, mutual respect, and understanding. If a proper tone is established at this level, the spirit will permeate the rest of the school and will manifest itself in good relations amongst the teachers.

The children will also be affected, indeed they are probably much keener than most adults in detecting a lack of good “school spirit”. And if children are “taken” with the atmosphere of the school, no doubt parents too will sense the tone of general goodwill and Christian comradeship existing throughout all of the school’s departments and relationships.

Within the school itself, Christian unity will be seen in the staff’s attitude and conduct towards one another, both in public and in private. A willingness to pray and work together for a common goal will be commonplace, rather than a rarity. Co-operation in working out programs of mutual concern will be a hallmark of every phase of the school’s ministry.

Without question, unity amongst the staff is of all things most essential to the spiritual progress and prosperity of the work. And if fellowship and oneness are missing, the lack is perfectly evident to all concerned and the lack of blessing is equally obvious.

Towards Greater Unity

No doubt every Sunday school would benefit greatly from an improvement in the level of Christian fellowship existing amongst the staff. Whether conditions are good, bad, or indifferent at the moment, there are several

steps which can be taken to improve the situation, no matter what the local peculiarities might be.

Spiritually qualified teachers are the prime requisite in every Sunday school, and without them, there can be little hope for any great measure of spiritual fellowship amongst the staff.

Hence, in the choice of new teachers, a great deal of prayer and consideration is necessary in order to ensure the selection of people who will have a godly exercise about getting along with the superintendent, the other teachers, the children and parents, and also with the elders of the church, who, after all, are charged with the ultimate responsibility for all the teaching carried on by the church.

Prayer for each other is a potent force for unity amongst the staff. If the superintendent prays for each teacher by name daily, and if each teacher prays for every other member of the staff, problems in unity will invariably become less frequent and less serious.

Sharing of problems in prayer can also contribute effectively to a warmer fellowship throughout the school. Every teacher might make a weekly report to the superintendent, telling him about one special need or problem in connection with his class. The superintendent can then make a list covering all the classes and distribute this to every teacher. In this way, all the staff can pray unitedly for the outstanding problem facing each individual teacher.

Encouragement of prayer on the part of Christian children is a potential source of spiritual power seldom tapped in our Sunday schools, generally speaking. The faith of children is often purer and stronger than that of

adults, and the young should be taught and encouraged to pray for their unsaved parents and classmates. They can also become a vital part of the work by praying for teachers and other Christians in the Sunday school as well.

Private discussion of problems and differences is essential; that is, the superintendent and the teachers should never air their differences in front of the children; nor, for that matter, in front of anybody else. Furthermore, it would be wise for all the staff to agree solemnly amongst themselves never to discuss differences without praying first individually and then unitedly. There is nothing like prayer for keeping a potentially useful discussion from degenerating into an unprofitable argument.

Recognition of gift is essential if jealousy and needless offence are to be avoided. Different teachers are gifted in different ways. If every one thinks he is equally gifted with every other member of the Body of Christ, friction and unpleasantness are inevitable. With a proper recognition of each other's gift, and a humble appreciation of one's own gift and limitations, each particular gift will be given full scope in the ministry of the Sunday school and there will be no silly pettiness about some people not being given "their turn".

Sharing of ideas, books, visual aids, and various resource materials helps to generate a spirit of fellowship in the work. If a teacher gets a good idea which would be of value to others, the sharing of the idea will be of benefit to a greater number than would otherwise be possible, but also, it will be a means of drawing the people concerned closer to one another.

Assistance with the singing is a possibility for every teacher in the school. If a teacher knows the subjects of his lesson a few weeks in advance, he can tell the song leader about these subjects. Then the latter can try to teach and sing choruses and hymns about the same subjects on the appropriate Sundays. This will reinforce the teacher's work in the class, and further promote the unity desired.

Campaigning together for new pupils can serve to bring all the staff closer together. This is also the case with programs of visitation aimed at bringing back absentees and at reaching parents of Sunday school children.

A Sunday school curriculum is both an outcome of unity and a contribution to unity. Only when a staff is wholeheartedly united in their labours for the Lord will they be willing to assume a joint undertaking of such magnitude as a course of study comprising all the grades in the school. On the other hand, once an accepted course is in force, the spirit of fellowship is enhanced inasmuch as every teacher feels that his work is a necessary part of an overall program, spiritually designed to cover the whole Bible and to which his fellow-teachers are also contributing.

The Church of God is a spiritual unity, — a fact which every Sunday school should demonstrate. Only those who are willing to strive for the practical fulfilment of the divine ideal are worthy of the calling of a Sunday school teacher.

* * *

Suggestion Of The Month

Growth in the attendance at the Sunday School may be promoted through the use of contests between girls and boys. Records should be prominently displayed in the school, week by week. Progress can be indicated in various ways: by a paper-doll girl and boy each climbing their respective ladders, every rung of which represents so many pupils, or by two sail boats racing toward the finishing line. The contest period always should be short; say, a month or two. Simple inexpensive prizes can be awarded the group (either girls or boys) which attains the best total over the allotted time, that is, the total of all the individual Sunday attendances.

* * *

Every life that would be strong, must have its “Holy of Holies” into which only God may enter.

* * *

Those who bring sunshine to the lives of others, cannot keep it from themselves. J. M. Barrie.

* * *

“If the Lord will,” let us labour;

“If the Lord will,” let us rest;

We must learn, in calm obedience,

That His will is always best.

That They May Learn (Dec 1959)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 5 No. 12, Dec 1959.

This is the fourth in a continuing series on Sunday school work. The January issue will feature the same subject as this month's article; namely, Christian educational psychology.

How many fathers and mothers have asked their children a question like this, "What did you learn in Sunday school today, Johnny?" —only to receive an answer like this, "Nothing!"

While the number of such parents is probably legion and while the answer is likely exaggerated in most cases, there is still a horrible possibility that sometimes Johnny might be pretty close to the awful truth!

Can the average Sunday school teacher do anything to avoid such a calamity? Without a doubt he can!! In fact, there are numerous teaching principles, both biblically and psychologically sound, which any intelligent, spiritual teacher can apply in order to make his teaching more effective and more productive of genuine spiritual results in the lives of his scholars.

The Influence of Example

Never underestimate the power of a teacher, especially a Spirit-filled teacher! For not only does his verbal teaching carry a spiritual impact evident to everyone, but also the godly example of his Christ-like life exerts an obvious, yet immeasurable influence on the pupils in his class.

In Sunday school work, the primary principle of effective teaching and productive learning is embodied in Paul's instruction to Timothy, "Be thou an example" (1 Tim. 4:12).

The character and behaviour of children are inevitably influenced and moulded by the people whom they contact: parents, classmates, and teachers. However, only spiritual people can provide the kind of spiritual influence whereby growing, developing youngsters will be led to glorify God through the reproduction of His likeness in their hearts and lives (See "Why Sunday Schools?", Food for the Flock, September 1959, page 173). It is essential, therefore, that every teacher heed the Lord's injunction to His disciples, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

From another point of view, even the worldling knows how futile it is not to practise what you preach. Children too will not heed the precepts of a teacher whose life is a glaring contradiction of the truths being taught, regardless of the obvious validity of the truths themselves.

Never Too Young

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

Many educational authorities and psychologists believe that while a child is two and three years old, more can be done to mould and develop his personality than is possible throughout his years at college. Truths implanted and attitudes developed during the child's most formative years will inevitably be crucial for his

future growth and maturation in the Lord, as well as for his initial decision to accept the Saviour.

The Lord Himself stressed the vital importance of working with youngsters when He spoke to His disciples, “Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God … Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein” (Luke 18:16-17).

In other words, we dare not assume for a moment that the teaching of the youngest child is a whit less important than teaching the adult Bible class. And while parents no doubt bear the primary responsibility for carrying out the child’s earliest training, nevertheless, the Sunday school teacher’s responsibilities and opportunities are great indeed, particularly in the case of little children whose parents are not Christians.

Here, then, is a second important principle essential to effective teaching throughout the child’s years in Sunday school: a strong foundation must be laid in the youngest classes, and so the school’s best teachers must invariably be placed in these grades.

Growth and Development

Most of us realize that no two children are exactly alike; yet, we often forget that no two age-groups are alike either. As youngsters grow and develop from birth to adulthood, they are constantly changing, stage by stage, so that each succeeding age-level is characteristically different in several respects. This is a principle clearly recognized by professional educators and certainly very explicitly stated in the Scriptures (1 Cor. 13:11).

A basic characteristic that steadily changes as the child grows older is the one commonly referred to as “attention span.” This simply means the period of time for which a child is able to “pay attention” or concentrate on the subject in hand.

Nursery children have an attention span of only three or four minutes; and yet how often they are expected to sit through a class or children’s meeting listening to a concentrated twenty-minute sermon!

To ensure productive learning, every teacher must be thoroughly familiar with the characteristics of the particular age-group he is teaching, and then adapt his whole approach accordingly.

The best way to learn these characteristics quickly is to obtain good literature on the subject; e.g., the descriptive folders published by Scripture Press, 1825 College Ave., Wheaton, Ill., under a series of titles such as Nursery Children, Their Characteristics and How to Understand Them. Similar titles are available on beginners, primaries, juniors, intermediates, seniors, and even adults. While these folders give the subject only brief treatment in each case, and while they contain a fair amount of promotional information about the organization’s Sunday school materials, they are nevertheless very sound and quite helpful. Free copies are available on request from Scripture Press.

How to Understand and Influence Children — Dr. Clyde M. Narramore—is an excellent volume on children of ages five, six, seven, and eight. For further details, see the Book Review on the inside back cover of Food for the Flock, September, 1959.

Although not primarily a Christian publication, These are Your Children, by Jenkins, Shacter, and Bauer, contains a wealth of useful information about the various stages of the child's development. Publishers are Scott, Foresman and Company, Chicago, Ill.

Correspondence courses on teacher training should certainly not be overlooked as another possible means of acquiring help in this area. The lack of teacher training is one of the saddest, most deplorable deficiencies in our whole assembly Sunday school program, but correspondence courses have served admirably in attempting to fill in this gap.

In addition, a great deal of assistance can be obtained through the use of Sunday school manuals and study helps prepared by professional teachers who are also consecrated Christians. The best Sunday school publications are carefully graded as to teaching concepts and vocabulary, so that the teacher using them properly will be guided in his approach to the particular age-group with which he is working.

Teaching concepts and vocabulary must correspond to the child's experience. If the teacher uses ideas and words that are outside his experience, then the teaching will be ineffective and little or no learning will result. In other words, to get the best results, the teacher must think the child's kind of thought and speak the child's kind of language.

A Learning Atmosphere

Children learn most efficiently when they feel comfortably "at home." Through careful planning, the

teacher can create a homey atmosphere which will spark the child's interest and motivate his learning.

For the Christian teacher, atmosphere must be considered in terms of spiritual, as well as social and physical conditions.

A proper spiritual atmosphere is possible only through daily communion with the Lord, as the teacher diligently prepares himself (as well as his lesson) throughout every day of the week. Prayer and the study of the Word of God are of all things most essential, but unfortunately they may often be of all things most neglected.

A wholesome social atmosphere is also highly desirable and can be encouraged by taking a personal interest in each child and by showing a friendly attitude towards him. In addition, there is no substitute for regular prayer that an increasing spirit of friendliness and co-operation might prevail amongst all the children in the class.

On the physical side, the proper choice and arrangement of furniture, lighting, temperature, and ventilation can all be used to produce the atmosphere most conducive to effective teaching and productive learning.

Seats and tables should be scaled to the size of the child; otherwise, discomfort, and distractions result. Lighting must be adequate (bright, but not blinding) so that children can read and see the lesson illustrations clearly. Temperature and ventilation must be properly regulated, or children will be sleepy, fidgety, or otherwise uncomfortable.

The very best physical equipment is, of course, only complementary to the teacher's spiritual equipment. The latter is the most vital aspect of the whole learning

situation, and without care and exercise in this regard, nothing else will be much avail in producing the best spiritual results.

At the same time, we should always remember that Sunday school teaching is the Lord's work, and the Lord deserves the very best, not only in personal devotion and sacrifice, but also in methods and equipment.

Of course, it costs us something to give Him our best, it always has. But in this connection, David's comment is the classic for all time: "Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing" (2 Sam. 24:24).

1960 Can Be Different (Jan 1960)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 6 No. 1, Jan 1960.

This the fifth in a series of Sunday school articles begun in the issue of September 1959. “Five-sense teaching” will be featured next month.

Should Sunday school teachers make New Year’s resolutions? Well, if 1960 is going to be different, there is no alternative to making several!

If we genuinely want to glorify God increasingly in the coming year, we must resolve that we will seek Him with all our hearts as never before, and that we will devote ourselves afresh to Him in the service to which He has called us! (Josh. 24:15. 2 Chron. 34:31. Mic. 6:8. Mal. 3:10).

In the practical aspects of serving the Lord amongst children, there are many ways in which we can express such a spiritual resolve. To resolve, after all, is simply to determine, decide, or to choose; and until we make up our minds that we really want to do a better job for the Lord, the chances are that our Sunday school teaching will never improve; indeed it is liable to degenerate.

Lesson Unity

As the greatest Teacher of all time, the Lord Jesus Christ is the supreme example to every Sunday school worker today. Outstanding amongst the exemplary characteristics of His teaching technique is the coherence in each lesson that He taught. Amidst the detail, a single central thought provided the essential element of unity throughout every discourse.

To the murmurings of the Pharisees and scribes that "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them," the Lord responded with the classic parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (Luke 15:1-32). While some considerable detail is given in each of the three stories, throughout the chapter a unifying thought recurs periodically: "Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth" (v. 7); "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (v. 10); "They began to be merry … It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad" (v. 24,32).

"One thing at a time" is a maxim as applicable to teaching as to any other human activity, for unity in the lesson facilitates comprehension and strengthens memory. If the student fails to understand and to remember, the so-called teaching is in vain!

To avoid such a tragedy as ineffective teaching of the Scriptures, the teacher must of course be prepared to study his lesson thoroughly and to think it through carefully. The lack of coherence is largely the result of inadequate preparation on the part of the teacher.

Here, then, is the first step that every teacher can take to ensure that 1960 will be different: resolve that no effort will be spared in seeking to prepare each lesson with a single unifying thought. For examples of such coherent teaching, resolve to make a careful study of the parables and other discourses of the Lord Himself, and follow His example week by week.

Program Correlation

Just as every Sunday school lesson should have one main objective, so each weekly session as a whole should be characterized by the maximum amount of coherence amongst its various elements.

The correlation of music, Scripture reading, lesson, visual aids, handwork and/or written exercises, memory verse, and Sunday school paper or tract, is a major contribution to more effective learning amongst children.

If the main object of a given lesson were to teach that "God is love," a chorus on that theme could be taught before the lesson; e.g., "For God so Loved the World." Then a public reading of I John 4:7-12 might follow, either in the presence of the whole school, or in the individual classes, as deemed appropriate.

The story of the Saviour's birth might be the lesson chosen to demonstrate (as none other could) that God has manifested His love in the gift of His Son. A visual aid to illustrate the story might be either a flannelgraph or a filmstrip presentation; and the hand-work, a picture-colouring project, at least for the more junior grades.

The memory verse could be John 3:16, and the tract or Sunday school paper might be chosen to carry the same message of God's love into the home, for the sake of the parents as well as the children.

This kind of correlation in the program provides the repetition so essential to learning, but avoids the monotony of rote. Furthermore, not only does the message reach the individual child through various

channels, thus impressing his mind more strongly, but also the varied approach provides an appeal to a wider range of types amongst the group. What appeals to one child may not awaken a good response in another; but with a correlation of elements as described above, there can be no doubt that each child will be reached by at least one approach that appeals to his particular make-up.

Again, however, correlation requires thoughtful preparation on the part of each teacher; and, in addition, co-operation amongst the entire staff. Hence the need for a further resolve that could make 1960 the best year yet!

Mental Activity

Often overlooked in a great many classes is one of the most important principles of efficient teaching: namely, that learning is largely proportional to the intensity of the learner's mental activity in relation to the lesson.

Mental activity is exceedingly low when the child is forced to do nothing but listen, and yet this is the most common approach to our Sunday school work. There is probably no greater single need amongst assembly Sunday school teachers today than the need for a godly resolve to make the pupil's mental activity increasingly intense.

This is done simply by providing for pupil participation in the lesson, and there are several ways in which this can be done. For example, when a story is told by flannelgraph, the children can participate in the review by sharing in the re-telling of the story and in the re-placing of the figures on the board.

If properly controlled, class discussion can be a useful method of stimulating pupils' mental activity. Oral questions and written tests on the subject matter taught not only make the children think but also indicate to the teacher how much has been learned.

Work-books and hand-work projects also give opportunity for pupil expression that intensifies mental activity. It is important, of course, that these methods be carefully applied and closely correlated with the main objective of the lesson.

This takes time, effort, thought, care, patience, and godly resolution!

Review and Re-Teaching

Pupils seldom appreciate having a lesson reviewed; but, nevertheless, review is essential if learning is to have any degree of permanence in the child's mind. Teachers often dislike and overlook this important phase of teaching, thus contributing to the widespread ignorance of Bible truths amongst Sunday school "graduates."

A thoughtful resolve to take a fresh look at methods of reviewing and re-teaching our Sunday school lessons would help enormously to improve our teaching in 1960.

Most pupils dislike review because it is presented in a dull, uninteresting fashion. Review must be not only frequent and repeated, but also varied and attractive.

Previous lessons must be reviewed again and again if the learning is going to "stick"; but monotonous repetition and "harping" must be avoided like the plague, for they are liable to cancel out even the impressions made by the first teaching.

One of the best methods of review is inherent in the planned curriculum which embraces a series of lessons spread over several months, and preferably over several years. When a lesson is taught as one of a series, there is a natural link between the present and past, and furthermore between the present and future. Re-view thus constitutes a part of the new lesson week by week, and the previous teaching can be consolidated with little or no danger of monotony.

When hymns and choruses are taught as correlated elements in the over-all program of the Sunday school or department, they provide a continuing form of review as they are sung for many months after the original lesson.

Work-books and hand-work projects are often prized and kept by youngsters; thus the lesson is constantly brought to mind again by association.

But in addition to these methods of review which are somewhat implicit, review must also take more explicit forms such as direct questioning. Even here, however, quizzes and tests can be used to introduce the element of interest through pupil participation; thus reinforcing the impressions made in the past.

A continuing effort must also be made through questioning and testing to discover erroneous or inadequate concepts of scriptural truths. When these are found — as they are bound to be if the search is efficient — they must be corrected through a very careful re-teaching of the lesson. This must be done, of course, by using a method to which considerable prayer and thought has been directed so that it will be both interesting and effective.

Lesson unity, program correlation, mental activity, review and re-teaching are all essentials which no spiritually exercised teacher can afford to overlook or neglect. Without them, teaching is inadequate and therefore fails to glorify God. With them, 1960 not only can be, but will be, very different indeed!

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The water without the ship may toss it; but it is the water within the ship that sinks it. Because we have “fightings without” there is no need to have “fears within.”

Five Channels of Blessing (Feb 1960)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 6 No. 2, Feb 1960.

This is the sixth in a continuing series on Sunday School work. Discipline in the school and the class will be featured in next month's issue.

In one ear and out the other! Does that ever happen to your Sunday school lesson? Then why not use all of the child's God-given senses, instead of just one?

Every normal child has five potential channels of learning — sight, hearing, feeling, taste, and smell. That's the way God made him —the way He intended us all to function. Why, then, are we so prone to use only one of these channels often to the complete exclusion of the other four?

The Lord's Example

In His exemplary teaching, the Lord Jesus frequently appealed to various senses, rather than to hearing alone. His lesson from the coin included a visual demonstration so that His audience might see as well as hear what He was talking about (Matt. 22:16-21).

In view of this incident alone, no teacher need ever feel obliged to weary his hearers with superfluous apologies for the use of teaching aids.

In describing His disciples as "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world", the Lord used picturesque language which appealed to their sense of taste and sight in addition to hearing (Matt. 5:13-16).

Following His death and resurrection, Jesus sought to convince the disciples that He was indeed alive. “Handle me, and see”. He said, thus calling into play their senses of sight and touch, as well as hearing (Luke 24:39).

The effectiveness of the Master’s technique is illustrated in the words of His beloved disciple, John, who in later years still referred to “that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life” (1 John 1:1).

John, in fact, used the same technique in his own writings; for example, in his description of the occasion when Mary anointed the feet of Jesus. How vivid and real the scene becomes as we read John’s words, “the house was filled with the odour of the ointment” (John 12:3)!

Seeing is Learning

More is learned through the sense of sight than through any of the other four. In view of this, it is of the utmost importance that every teacher should utilize visual aids to the greatest advantage possible.

Verbose sermonettes are utterly inadequate for doing the job that needs to be done if children are going to learn scriptural truths both clearly and permanently. Fortunately, there is an abundance of visual aids available today; teachers ought to be using them regularly. Those who don’t are simply ignoring a cardinal feature of the Lord’s own technique; He was constantly referring to visible objects around Him as He taught the people and His disciples.

He didn’t need flannelgraphs and filmstrips, of course; he taught in the open space of nature. However, when we can’t do the latter, it’s a simple matter to bring the great outdoors right into the classroom; for example, through the use of objects, drawings, and/or paintings in a wide variety of formats.

Visual aids are useful, not only to illustrate the main part of the weekly lesson, but also to clarify the meaning of the memory verse.

And quite apart from the use of pictures and objects, no teacher should ever under-estimate the value of a child’s experience in reading the Scriptures for himself. When he sees what the Word of God says, he will remember it much better and longer than if he only hears the teacher say it. “The entrance of Thy words giveth light” (Ps. 119:130).

Ears to Hear

No encouragement is needed to employ the sense of hearing; it is used regularly and universally — in fact, excessively!

Nevertheless, its importance must not be under-rated, as indicated by the Lord’s own words, “Hear another parable” (Matt. 21:33). The Father also stressed the importance of the same sense: “This is My beloved Son: “hear Him” (Mark 9:7).

But there are more ways than one in which the child can be reached through his hearing. Simply “telling” him something throughout every session, week by week, can be terribly wearying and therefore quite ineffective.

Stories need to be told, of course. And principles and doctrines must be taught and explained. But the sense of hearing can be utilized in other ways too.

The use of melody and rhythm in singing hymns and choruses is a powerful means of teaching through hearing. Great care should therefore be exercised in choosing good words and music, as well as in teaching them clearly and thoroughly. Children often sing a scriptural chorus long after they have forgotten much of the lesson they heard.

Part of each lesson should include oral reading of the Scriptures, both by pupils and teacher. Recitation of the memory verse constitutes a further means of impressing the Word of God aurally upon young minds and hearts.

Often the Scriptures refer to certain sounds which can be imitated vocally, such as the roaring lion of 1 Peter 5:8. Others can be reproduced through sound recordings or through the use of the object itself; e.g., the tinkling cymbal of 1 Corinthians 13:1.

Some teachers take to the use of such methods more easily than others, and one must be careful to avoid extremes that distract from the main point of the spiritual lesson being taught. Also, the facilities of many Sunday schools limit the individual teacher considerably and make it impossible for him to exploit such methods without disturbing neighbouring classes (a problem which, incidentally, points up in part the great desirability of having a private room or enclosure for each class in the school). Nevertheless, all of these problems will be solved in measure through the remembrance that even while teaching solemn doctrines such as the new birth, the Lord Himself made reference

to simple, well known sounds like that of the wind (John 3:8).

Handle and See

That the Lord had risen was learned by the disciples through the sense of touch as well as through sight and hearing (Luke 24:29. I John 1:1).

His power for healing was often communicated through the sense of touch (Matt. 8:15; 9:21).

These incidents demonstrate the important role which the sense of touch can play in the learning process. While this role is necessarily a limited one, feeling can nevertheless serve as a valuable supplement to the chief senses for learning; namely, sight and hearing.

Learning by doing is the principle involved in the use of handwork which is closely correlated with the theme and purpose of a lesson.

Handwork emphasizes the lesson by making it more concrete and visible. When hand-made projects are taken home, they keep the lesson alive in the child's mind and they also carry the message to parents as well.

When flannelgraph lessons are used, children can be given some of the "feel" of the subject by allowing them to take turns in re-telling the story and re-placing the figures on the background.

Pupils can also be given the opportunity to hold an African or Indian doll whenever missionary stories are being told. This enhances their impressions of the distant peoples being discussed.

Even the story of Calvary can be made much more graphic by bringing spikes, thorns, and a model lash for the pupils to see and feel.

Taste and Smell

These last two of the five senses are not as useful as the first two, or even as the third. At the same time, there are sufficient biblical references to their use that no one should ignore their possibilities forgiving children a full-rounded experience of learning through all five senses (Ps. 34:8; 45:. Dan. 3:27. John 7:37. 2 Cor. 2:15. Phil. 4:18).

The differences between sweet and sour, salted and unsalted, leavened and unleavened, could all be demonstrated very vividly by the direct use of children's sense of taste, right in the classroom.

Similarly, the actual odour of such things as spices, perfumes, and burnt rags can be used to make a lasting impression of the lesson; the teaching will be reinforced and the retention of learning greatly enhanced.

The Lord Himself was greatly interested in the children of His day. He is also interested in those of our own day. He wants us to spare no effort in teaching them about Himself and His Word.

The only real obstacle to the use of five-sense teaching is our own indifference and laziness — our smug satisfaction with the mediocre and the second rate. But if the latter are not satisfactory to the Lord, then why should they be so to us?

Let us all resolve, therefore, to devote ourselves afresh to the work of reaching the young, not only through increased study of the Word and prayer but also through

the Spirit-guided use of all the child’s God-given channels of learning and blessing.

* * *

Many of us are doing our best, and we are grieved that the minds of people should be more directed to our personal imperfections than to our divine message. God has purposely put His treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power should be ascribed to Himself alone; we beseech our hearers not to be so occupied with the faults of the casket as to forget the jewel.

— C. H. Spurgeon.

The Way He Should Go (Mar 1960)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 6 No. 3, Mar 1960.

Next month this series on Sunday school work will feature the preparation and presentation of a Sunday school lesson, using the Easter theme as subject matter. Write to the publisher for back issues carrying this series monthly since September 1959 inclusive.

To what extent should a Sunday school teacher feel responsible to strive for good behaviour on the part of each child in his class?

In seeking an answer to this question, the spiritual Christian will give primary consideration to biblical principles and not to human fancy. In other words, he will listen to God rather than to man (Acts 4:19).

The Glory of God

First of all, the believer's purpose in life is to glorify God. Nothing short of this purpose will be entertained by a devoted teacher (Mark 10:13-16. Rom. 15:6. 1 Cor. 6:20; 10:31. See also "Why Sunday Schools?", Food for the Flock, September 1959, page 173).

Is God likely to be glorified as much in a class that is poorly behaved as in one that is well behaved? We know that God is not a God of confusion, but rather of peace. Also, it is evident that He prefers things to be done decently and in order. Therefore, we can be sure that He is not particularly glorified in a disorderly class (1 Cor. 14:33, 40).

Furthermore, it is obvious that misbehaviour and efficient learning are completely incompatible. God is

glorified only when the seed of His Word falls into good ground and brings forth much fruit (Matt. 13:23. John 15:8). But when children are disobedient, unruly, disrespectful, and inattentive, the Word of God can scarcely gain an entrance into their minds, let alone into their hearts and lives.

Above all, God is glorified by the reproduction of His likeness in His creatures (Gen. 1:27. 1 Cor. 11:7. Gal. 5:22-23). For this to be achieved, children must be taught what God is like, as revealed in His Son. If this is taught conscientiously, each pupil will come to realize what is right and wrong in human behaviour.

Such a realization is vital. For one thing, it produces that consciousness of sin which drives the guilty soul to the Saviour for cleansing and forgiveness. In addition, it brings that awareness of human weakness which leads the child of God to depend entirely upon the Holy Spirit, the only One who can produce the divine likeness in any one of us.

All these benefits are lost if children are allowed to “run wild” in the Sunday school. Not only does the confusion dishonor our testimony to the Name of Christ; not only does the disorder make efficient learning impossible; but also, the permitting or condoning of objectionable behaviour encourages the child to think that there is little difference between right and wrong — and what could be worse!

It is therefore of the utmost importance that every teacher should feel responsible for teaching standards of good behaviour in the Sunday school, and for striving in every way possible to see that such behaviour prevails at all times. Failure to assume such a responsibility is

nothing short of failure to recognize our primary responsibility to glorify God!

Power Through Prayer

The first step towards achieving good behaviour in the Sunday school is the development of a well-disciplined spiritual life on the part of each teacher. The cardinal feature of such a life is a carefully cultivated communion with the Lord, which is quite impossible without regular private prayer.

In other words, the teacher's ability to control the behaviour of his pupils will depend largely upon the spiritual power which is brought to bear on the classroom situation. And this, of course, depends in turn upon his devotion to the Lord in prayer (Jas. 5:16).

There are two main reasons for this power through prayer. First of all, by constant communion with the Lord, the teacher's life becomes a shining example of Christ-likeness, the influence of which will inevitably tend to regulate the behaviour of the class.

Furthermore, there are teachers, who can witness to the evidence of God's workings upon the unruly members of a class, solely as a result of prayer that God Himself would restrain the ill-behaved individuals. This constitutes a challenging opportunity to every teacher who has to cope with a "problem-child." If we have the faith to expect such things from God, He will not disappoint us (Matt. 9:29).

Preparation with a Purpose

Minimum preparation for a lesson, which enables the teacher just "to get by" for an afternoon, can scarcely be

expected to achieve great results for God — either in the learning or the behaviour of pupils.

Every lesson must be prepared carefully and comprehensively. An interesting introduction will attract attention right at the beginning. By carefully connecting the introduction to the main body of the lesson, the teacher will hold this interest and attention throughout the period.

A personalized application given in terms of the children's experience and understanding, helps to focus their thoughts on the lesson right up to its properly prepared conclusion.

If, on the other hand, the teacher arrives in the class without adequate preparation, then no one need be surprised if the children are inattentive, uninterested, and consequently poorly behaved.

From this point of view, it is clear that behaviour is the responsibility of the teacher, not the pupil! In other words, teacher — if your class is ill-behaved, blame yourself, and no one else!

Adequate preparation will also give due consideration to the attention span of every child. By experiment, the teacher should find out the shortest attention span amongst his pupils. Then, lessons must be designed to require the children's concentrated attention only up to the time-limit of which they are capable.

When the minimum attention span has been reached — three minutes for the nursery child — the approach to the lesson must be shifted immediately. If a story is in progress, the straight telling of the story must not exceed three minutes (for nursery youngsters). A shift

can easily be made by asking a question, introducing a new element of the visual aid being used, or by acting out some part of the story.

Such care in preparation should also provide for child participation —in answering questions, in re-telling the story at the review stage of the lesson, in writing answers to quizzes, in coloring, or in doing other kinds of handwork.

Practical Pointers

Some people are more gifted than others in their ability to control children, but practically every one desiring to see behaviour improved can see this accomplished by avoiding certain pitfalls and by developing various helpful techniques.

To be successful, the teacher must first of all give children the impression that they are loved despite their behaviour. Adults tend to love them when they are good and loathe them when they are bad. On the contrary, we must love them always and let them know it.

At the same time, we should never forget that we can’t fool a child on this point, although it’s a simple matter to fool most adults!

At the other extreme, we sometimes tend to think that love is leniency. Never! Love must be coupled with firmness. Vacillation is fatal; children have no respect for a “softie”.

The child’s insights are exceedingly keen in matters of fairness, justice, and consistency. In this area, teachers need to cry to the Lord constantly for real spiritual guidance.

A common fault is the use of the threat; this should be shunned like the plague! Not only is it a negative approach to discipline; usually children think it is either a joke, or a challenge to test the teacher on his readiness to carry out the threat. Often the threat is so ridiculous that no teacher would ever dare to carry it out; thus, the whole matter becomes a complete farce.

Voice and looks are important elements in the control of classroom behaviour. Cultivation of a low-pitched voice will produce better results; high-pitched voices tend to aggravate discipline problems.

Facial expressions convey to others the love that is blended with firmness; in this area we are completely dependent upon the Lord. As the Spirit of God fills us and reproduces the character of Christ within us, then the radiance and power of His person will be seen in each one of us.

Then we shall not only be more successful in the regulation of children's behaviour; we shall also see them drawn in love and devotion to the One whom they know we are following and serving.

A Tip for the Teacher

A "curiosity corner" can be a very useful device for arousing the child's interest in things biblical. Each week an object, picture, or book related to a past, present, or future lesson is placed in a noticeable location where the pupils can see it plainly on entering the class. If it is an object that is not too fragile, the children can be allowed to pick it up too, thus exploiting their sense of touch as well as the sense of sight.

Almost inevitably some child will ask “What’s this?” or “What’s this for?” and thus the teacher is given an opportunity to discuss informally, before school starts for the day, certain aspects of the topic to which the object or picture is related.

Curios might be ancient stones, pottery, jewelry, weapons, or tools —some of which can be borrowed from museums in certain localities. Pictures and/or books about Bible lands can also be used to great advantage. Postage stamps and leaves of typical plants have a similar value in making the discussion about distant lands more concrete.

Besides giving children additional information about the Bible, this device also gives the youngsters something to do and think about while waiting for school to start. It also provides the teacher with just one more opportunity for developing an ever-improving relationship between each child and himself.

Tell Them He Lives (Apr 1960)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 6 No. 4, Apr 1960.

This article, the eighth in a series on Sunday school work, will be followed next month by a discussion of curriculum.

The father who excused himself from the lunch table one Sunday afternoon was naturally not too pleased when he heard his young daughter explaining to their guests, “Daddy has to go and prepare his Sunday school lesson.”

Such a situation is no doubt embarrassing to a teacher who neglects the preparation of his lesson until the very last minute. But worse than that, such tardy preparation is usually the prelude to a spiritually ineffective lesson.

This article, the eighth in a series on Sunday school work, will be followed next month by a discussion of curriculum.

The preparation of every lesson should be started at least a week in advance and continued daily until the lesson is given. In the case of a message as vital as the Easter story, it is not too soon to begin preparations even earlier.

When uncontrollable circumstances make such preliminary work impossible, the Lord is able to provide in a special way. But this is no reason for expecting the Lord to provide when we are negligent of our duty to Him and to our pupils.

Preparing Daily

Certain aspects of the teacher's preparation need to be repeated daily throughout the week; e.g., the teacher's spiritual exercise.

If he is going to be endued with spiritual power that will make his service honoring to the Lord, the teacher must cultivate daily communion with Him.

Prayer is essential for an understanding of the Word of God, and certainly also for the kind of power that will really glorify God. Such power should be at its peak in our experience during this season of the year when we are remembering the death and resurrection of Him who could say, "All power is given unto Me" (Matt. 28:18. See also Phil. 3:10. Rom. 6:11. Gal. 2:20. Col. 3:1-3).

In addition, the teacher's daily prayers should include a special burden for each pupil. The unity in the school will also be enhanced through prayer for the superintendent, other teachers, and their classes (See also "With One Accord," Food for the Flock, November 1959, page 213).

Every day, the Scriptures bearing on the lesson should be read prayerfully; in the case of the Lord's. resurrection, all four Gospels could be used, and 1 Corinthians 15.

While reading, many ideas will come to mind: illustrations, questions in the teacher's mind, questions to ask the pupils. All of these should be noted and attended to as time permits.

A Suggested Schedule

In addition to the preparation repeated daily, other preparatory work should also be done on different days of the week.

SUNDAY. Preparation for a lesson should be started early — the afternoon or evening of the Sunday before. Sunday is a busy day, but a good teacher will at least make time for choosing the next topic and reading the Scriptures.

For the Easter lesson, if the emphasis is to be on the resurrection, the minimum reading will be Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20, and 1 Corinthians 15.

MONDAY. Other translations should be read in addition to the Authorized Version. Answers to the teacher's questions should be sought with the help of commentaries, Bible dictionaries and encyclopaedias.

"Curios" might be obtained from a museum or missionary. The object desired for the stimulation of pupil interest may not be readily available, so adequate time should be allowed for procuring it.

For Easter, teachers might obtain pressed flowers brought from the Holy Land. For items like this, it is a good idea to be on the alert throughout the year.

TUESDAY. If a teacher's manual is available, it should be used as much as it is helpful. Needs vary, so each teacher must take what is useful and leave the rest aside.

This is a good day to attend selecting a memory verse to fix the message in pupils' minds; e.g., Luke 24:6-7.

WEDNESDAY. A detailed outline of the lesson should be written down by mid-week, and thought should be given to the visual aids (See also “Five Channels of Blessing”, Food for the Flock, February 1960, page 33).

Flannelgraphs or filmstrips are excellent for portraying the Easter message. Besides the telling of the story, the playing of Easter music on records makes an appeal to the hearing. There are numerous Easter hymns and choruses which children should sing at this time of the year; e.g., “Low in the Grave He Lay,” and “I Am the Resurrection and the Life.”

The senses of sight, smell, and touch can also be exploited if preparations are made sufficiently in advance. The planting of bulbs earlier in the year can be timed to have the flowers appear in time for Easter. While illustrating death, burial, and resurrection, this project also makes an appeal to various senses simultaneously. When the time arrives for smelling the flowers, the children could also handle an old bulb, just to remind them of the “burial.”

THURSDAY. Visual aids chosen on Wednesday should now be prepared, and a “dry run” carried out for practice.

FRIDAY. Children learn by doing, so handwork has a vital role to play in the lesson. At Easter, many possibilities suggest themselves; e.g., a gift for parents, say a bookmark of cardboard cut in the shape of an Easter flower, with “He is risen” inscribed.

Or, an Easter greeting card for parents might be prepared, with an Easter verse-sticker attached and an Easter tract enclosed to carry home a message to adults.

These tracts, as well as others for the children themselves, must be ordered well in advance.

SATURDAY. This is a good day for phoning absentees, just to remind them about “Sunday school tomorrow.” A great deal of time should also be devoted to prayer. Choice of a good Easter poem to read after the lesson might be made now.

SUNDAY. Everything should be committed to the Lord in fresh surrender, preferably at a fairly early hour in the morning. He can only use to His glory what is really from Himself.

After school, the lesson should be evaluated and notes made for improving next week’s effort. Absentees should be contacted by letter, telephone, or visitation.

Presenting The Lesson

If the teacher has an appropriate “curio” on hand when the children arrive, chit-chat is focussed in the lesson subject itself. This creates a desirable atmosphere right from the beginning of the session.

Everyone learns by going from the known to the unknown, so the teacher must always make sure that his words and concepts are suited to each pupil, and that illustrations comprise terms and experiences with which children are familiar. The use of a flowering bulb is particularly suitable as an illustration in this connection. (Incidentally, the bulb and flower could be used instead of a curio if the latter were too difficult to obtain).

A typical Easter lesson might include the following elements. First, a brief reading of a suitable Scripture passage is essential, for nothing we can give our pupils is more powerful than His Word. Older children can read

around the group or in unison. Even young children should be given a verse or two; it helps them to realize that the story is God’s, not ours.

Telling the story with flannelgraph or filmstrip comes next — a second hearing of the message.

In reviewing (the third hearing), the flannelgraph can be used again, with the children re-telling the story. Holding the figures appeals to their sense of touch.

The teacher can also make good use of flash-cards in review. Each card carries one key word from the story; e.g., tomb, nails, thorns, stone, Mary, etc. When the pupil sees the word, he then tries to tell the part of the story associated with that word.

After the review, the handwork is done, followed by a closing poem that gives a final impression of the lesson just before the youngsters go off home with a message for their parents tucked into their Easter gift.

Beginning at Moses (May 1960)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 6 No. 5, May 1960.

In the June and July issues, this department win feature various aspects of summer camp work with children.

Should a Sunday school have a curriculum? No one doubts that a day school should, but common practice indicates that many assembly Sunday schools prefer to get along without one. Is this good or bad?

First of all, what is a curriculum? In Latin, the word referred to a course over which races were run, and this is suggestive of a plan, a sense of direction, determination, and a goal to be achieved — essential features often conspicuously lacking in the teaching done in Sunday schools which operate without a curriculum.

In our language, a curriculum is a course of study; i.e., a plan whereby the study of a subject may be carried out with a sense of direction. In other words, a curriculum is simply a plan of study, indicating the order in which the various parts of the subject are to be studied.

The Lord’s Plan

After His resurrection, Jesus used a planned arrangement of material to convince His doubting disciples that He Himself was the ultimate fulfilment of the Old Testament Scriptures.

“Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself … all things must be fulfilled, which

were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Me" (Luke 24:27,44).

It is particularly important to note that He covered the whole of the Scriptures in this exposition, for the Sunday school which uses a curriculum will find that its greatest value lies in its almost certain guarantee that all of the Bible will be taught to all of the children in the school.

The Spirit's Work

A comprehensive acquaintance with the full range of divine truth was promised His disciples when Jesus told them about the coming Holy Spirit (John 16:13). Endued with the Spirit's power, they were to teach others to observe all things that the Lord had commanded them (Matt. 28:20).

And although he was not there to receive the great commission in person, Paul could claim without contradiction that he had carried out the Lord's instructions, having "not shunned to declare … all the counsel of God" to all men wherever he went (Acts 19:10; 20:27)

Obviously then, the nature and extent of the Spirit's work, as well as the examples set by the Lord and His apostles, make it quite clear that the major objectives of Sunday school effort must include a comprehensive coverage of the whole Bible (See also "Why Sunday Schools?" Food for the Flock, September 1959, page 173; "Let Us Sow More Seed," June 1958, page 113).

Once this objective is accepted, the problem then becomes this: how are we going to make sure that all of the Bible will be taught to all of the children?

Perfect coverage for every child is obviously impossible. But this limitation cannot legitimately be used as an excuse for not doing a great deal better than we are at present. Evidence abounds that children passing through many of our Sunday schools today are being exposed to only a limited range of Bible books and teaching. If we choose to dodge the question of method in seeking a solution to this problem, then either we have failed to recognize the seriousness of the situation or we are simply too lazy and indifferent to bother doing anything about it.

Spiritual Solutions

Spiritual problems require spiritual solutions, and these can be attained only in the light of God's Word and in fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Human solutions, however imaginative or clever, are quite inadequate to deliver us from our current situation. Previous articles in this current series have underlined the same point repeatedly.

Only spiritually qualified teachers, devoted to the study and the teaching of God's Word, are competent to tackle the problem facing assembly Sunday schools today. The Bible is being taught neither as completely, nor as clearly, nor as carefully as it should be, and unless the Spirit of God gives us fresh insights into His own divine desire that all men should come to know all of God's truth, we shall continue to flounder in the spiritual morass of partial, confused, and inadequate Bible knowledge.

Steps to Recovery

Only a recognition and confession of our failure can get us started on the right road. Then the elders of the assembly and the teachers of the school must seek the face of the Lord in the greatest earnestness, that He might be pleased to reveal the detailed, practical steps which are necessary in the case of each particular assembly.

The spiritual wisdom which is bound to come to those who ask aright (Jas. 1:5) will inevitably result in the adoption of a more spiritual and a more effective approach to the problem of teaching the Bible to children in such a way that coverage will be more comprehensive, and more productive of spiritual results.

With the proper spiritual tone prevailing amongst the elders and Sunday school teachers, it is likely that even without adopting a deliberately planned curriculum for the school as a whole, a greater proportion of the Bible will be taught; and without any doubt whatsoever, the parts that are taught will be impressed upon young minds with far greater effectiveness than ever before.

At the same time, careful consideration should be given to the possibility of seeking, with the Lord’s help and guidance, a plan of action whereby the teaching at various levels in particular classes might be co-ordinated. Although purely man-made plans are of no avail, we cannot arbitrarily decide that the Spirit of God is unable to provide His people with divinely conceived and spiritually adequate plans for carrying out His intention that all of the Bible be taught to as many people as possible.

While human planning may be carnal, unspiritual, and displeasing to God, Christian planning is not necessarily so in every instance. Spiritually guided assemblies plan their weekly schedules of meetings. Spiritual Bible teachers plan their movements, their series of meetings, the contents of individual messages. And while all of these plans may be laid without the Spirit's guidance, it is just as possible for them to be made in full accordance with His guidance.

Why then limit the Spirit's ability to guide a group of elders and Sunday school teachers in the adoption of a Bible curriculum which will provide for the teaching of all the Scriptures to all the children?

That the Spirit will provide different answers and different plans for different situations is undoubtedly true. For some schools, the answer may be that no planned curriculum whatever should be adopted. For others, one of various possible curricula may be put to use.

If a school decides against a curriculum, there are two possible dangers which must be considered. For one thing, there is a danger that rejection of the idea of using a curriculum has been based on an implicit fear that there might be more work for the teaching staff. The possibility of great effort being required cannot be denied, but this surely cannot be regarded as a sound, scriptural basis for rejecting the idea.

The other danger is that, despite the best of intentions the whole Bible may not in fact be adequately covered; individual teachers may still go on covering only the limited range of topics and books with which they are best acquainted; from grade to grade, there may be a

great deal of unprofitable overlapping; and consequently, the over-all result of the school's work will be little better than what is already too prevalent.

In other words, the school which decides against the use of a planned curriculum, will be hard pressed to find a satisfactory substitute that will guarantee anything approaching a complete coverage of the Bible throughout a pupil's years in the school. The fact of the matter is that teaching without a curriculum has already been tried on a very wide scale in a broad variety of situations — with very little in the way of convincing spiritual results to show for the effort.

For the school which decides to adopt a curriculum which will provide a planned course of study for the whole school, there are a number of possibilities.

For one thing, the school must decide on whether to use its own plan, or the plan of others. In either case, the decisions must be made in the light of all pertinent spiritual considerations, and the Lord's answer must be sought with care.

There are numerous planned curricula available from various publishers; the merits of each must be assessed by each individual staff.

These curricula may be categorized in two main groups; namely, uniform and graded. The uniform type provides the same subject matter for all classes throughout the school for a given Sunday. The graded type provides different subject matter, suited to the various ages in the school. Both types are designed to cover the entire Bible in a given number of years, but some are of the opinion that the graded type usually does a more thorough job in this respect. This is because the uniform type involves

the difficulty of making certain portions of the Bible intelligible to every grade in the school; whereas the graded type suits the subject matter to the student's level.

But whatever might be our approach to the solution of this pressing problem, no one can do better than follow the Lord's example, who, beginning at Moses, expounded unto His disciples in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself (Luke 24:27).

Better Late Than Never (Dec 1960)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 6 No. 12, Dec 1960.

Here’s Christmas only a matter of days away, and nobody’s even started planning a Christmas program. As usual, everything’s left to the last minute!”

Perhaps you haven’t heard these remarks made in your Sunday school. Possibly weeks ago, the staff began preparing to take advantage of the one season in the year when a large part of the world stops to think about the birth of Jesus Christ.

You may also be inviting your pupils’ parents to come and hear their children recite and sing the great Christmas poems and carols of the Church. If so, you can be quite sure of a favorable response, for most parents love to see their youngsters take part in a program. Furthermore, at Christmas time, a great many folks warmly welcome an old fashioned carol sing.

A Christmas program in the Sunday school can be a great blessing to all concerned, both in the preparation and in the presentation. After all, the theme of Christmas is one of the most glorious subjects that human hearts have ever been privileged to consider: God has entered humanity through the virgin birth of His Son!

But the planning and preparing of a good program require plenty of thought and effort, and TIME, and this year, there’s precious little time in which to do anything about a Christmas program. In fact, many would say it’s hopelessly late. Well —better late than never!

True, for certain types of Christmas programs, there is insufficient time left in which to make adequate preparations. Just a few days remain between now and the 17th, 18th, or 22nd of the month — possibly some of the best dates for holding such an event at this time of the year.

However, for the Sunday school staff which would still like to capitalize on the opportunities provided by the season, there is still the distinct possibility of preparing an adequate and effective program if a start is made immediately.

Invitations

One of the first steps in the preparations will be the mailing of invitations to the Sunday school pupils' parents. In view of the shortage of time, a mimeographed announcement could be sent to them all, with a touch of personalization in the individual names and addresses on the envelopes.

For the sake of those who might not come to hear the message, a Christmas tract could be enclosed. If supplies have not been ordered from a distance in advance, a local bookstore might be able to meet the need from existing stocks. Failing all this, a few Bible verses about the birth of Jesus could be placed at the bottom of the invitation.

The mailed invitations will be supplemented, of course, through oral invitations given to the pupils to relay to their parents at home. In some special cases, personal telephone calls or visitation would be even more effective.

Speaker

The most important part of the program will be the Bible message. This could be delivered in a variety of ways, but perhaps a different approach might be used for a change. Not just to be different, of course, but in order to constitute the message an integral part of the program itself.

It ought to be understood that the speaker should be one whom the Lord has gifted and exercised to present the Word of God to children. In fact, he should be invited to speak to the children and not to the parents. Otherwise, parents who come are liable to feel that they have been “trapped” into coming to “church” to “get preached at” — and, if you hope to see them back again, nothing could be worse than making them feel trapped.

Visual aids add greatly to any Bible message, so if the speaker is able to use flannelgraphs, large pictures, or slides, all the better.

Instead of delivering one long, unbroken address, however, the speaker could take three or four short episodes connected with the birth of the Lord, each one being given no more than seven minutes, and each separated from the others with carol singing by groups or the congregation. He could teach the annunciation to Mary, the angel’s message to Joseph, the shepherds’ experiences, and the visit of the wise men, as four of the main topics in the general subject of Christ’s birth.

It scarcely needs to be stressed that the speaker must also be gifted in brevity, particularly for this type of approach.

To emphasize the Bible message in connection with each episode, a pertinent Scripture verse could be printed on a large poster and displayed prominently at the appropriate moment. If flannelgraphs or pictures are used, each scene and its verse could be left in sight as the program proceeds, so that by the end of the program, the complete set of episodes and Scriptures will still be impressing the audience.

Singing

The carols placed between parts of the message could be sung by various people; e.g., some by individual classes from the Sunday school, and others by the whole congregation. Most of the carols are well known, so the time for training classes to participate in this way is minimal, if not negligible.

Although most of the tunes are well known, not all the words of every verse are always known by everyone present. Therefore, it is best to provide the words in some form or another.

If there is time, the words can be printed on large posters or prepared in the form of slides. Failing the time for this, inexpensive books of Christmas carols can be purchased at many music stores. Another method is the typing of the words on stencils to be mimeographed for the occasion.

The importance of choosing the best available song leader for the occasion is surely obvious. Parents are unlikely to be favorably impressed by incompetence or confusion of any kind.

At this late date, there might not be sufficient time for the children to learn a contemporary Christmas song,

but if there should be any opportunity, “Ring the Bells” by Harry Bolback is outstanding. It is available in sheet music.

If the school as a whole has too little time in which to learn a new song, perhaps one of the older classes could get together for special practice outside of regular Sunday school hours. In this way, a new song could be learned more quickly, without taking up time for the school in general on Sunday.

The old carols are perennial favourites, of course, but a touch of something new adds a great deal to any type of program, particularly if the new item has quality and is well presented.

In order to have the school singing at its best for the occasion, use the remaining time for practice to find out first the carols they sing most poorly. Then concentrate on these, and give relatively little time to the others which they know well.

Don’t forget, too, that any occasion such as a Christmas program is greatly enhanced by the warm, friendly touch provided by refreshments. They also provide a wonderful opportunity of getting better acquainted with the visitors and perhaps even a chance to speak to them about the Lord.

It’s perfectly true that multitudes around the world fail to realize the true significance of the birth of our Saviour. Crass commercialization and carnal celebrations have also served to obscure the true beauty and meaning of the Christmas story.

All the more reason then, that we who are truly the Lord’s should take every opportunity, including the

Christmas season itself, to herald afresh the birth of our Lord, and to declare once again the claims of Him “who, being in the form of God … took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:6-7).

Too Much Children's Work (Jan 1961)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 7 No. 1, Jan 1961.

We hope that Wylam Price will give us the sequel to this rather unusual and negative approach to work among the children. Watch for the next issue.

How much children's work was done by the early Church? Little, if any, is recorded in The Acts, and one naturally wonders if there are lessons in this for the Church today. Children's work is vital, essential, indispensable — but perhaps we should start the New Year with a new look at the relative proportions of our time and effort being directed to children and adult work.

Peter's address in Acts I was directed to "men and brethren" (Acts 1:16). On the day of Pentecost, those who "began to speak with other tongues" were heard by "devout men, out of every nation" (Acts 2:4-5). Later the same day, he spoke to "men of Israel" (Acts 2:14-22).

Children were not ignored completely, of course. As Peter also pointed out, "the promise is unto you, and to your children" (Acts 2:39). At the same time, "children" here does not necessarily mean little girls and boys. Besides, the emphasis on work with adults is rather obvious and the early Church was clearly established as a result of such work —not children's work.

In Acts 3, the person healed was an adult (Acts 3:2). Those who wondered at this miracle of healing were addressed by Peter as "men of Israel" (Acts 3:12). After his arrest, Peter then spoke to the "rulers of the people, and elders of Israel" (Acts 4:8). While the general term

of address, “men”, might sometimes include women and children, “rulers” and “elders” plainly could not.

Furthermore, only “men and women” are mentioned in connection with the multitudes of believers “added to the Lord” (Acts 5:14). Not that this term would exclude young people or children, but again it is evident that the emphasis is on a ministry directed primarily to adults.

When Peter accused the Jews of slaying Jesus, his remarks were directed to adults (Acts 5:29-33), who in turn were counselled by Gamaliel to be moderate, as adults, in their actions.

When Stephen undertook his ministry, his opponents were adults, who, however, “were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake” (Acts 6:10). Such language would normally be used only to describe adult behaviour. In addition, he later addressed the council as “men, brethren, and fathers” (Acts 7:2).

Phillip’s ministry was apparently concerned with adults for the most part (Acts 8:5, 13, 15), as was Paul’s subsequently (Acts 9:20-22, 29).

In Acts 9, Peter healed Aeneas, an adult man, and raised Tabitha, a women (Acts 9:34, 40). Later, he ministered mainly to adults in the home of Cornelius (Acts 10).

Under Paul’s ministry, Sergius Paulus the proconsul was converted (Acts 13:12). In the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia, Paul addressed his remarks to “men of Israel” (Acts 13:16). Description of the people’s reaction indicates a predominantly adult audience (Acts 13:42-43).

Paul’s healing at Lystra was that of an impotent man (Acts 14:10). His first convert in Europe was an adult

woman (Acts 16:14). At this point, of course, it is worth noting that “she was baptized, and her household,” the latter term implying that possibly servants or even children were included amongst those believing (Acts 16:15).

The same could be observed in the case of the Philippian jailor, a converted adult whose household also apparently included believing children (Acts 16:33-34).

To this point in The Acts, however, for all the many indications of ministries to adults, there have been only three mentions of children: one of them not necessarily meaning younger children, and the other two merely by implication.

At Thessalonica, the response to Paul’s ministry appears to demonstrate a continuance of the same trend. His converts included several of “the chief women” (Acts 17:4). The same thing occurred at Berea, where they searched the Scriptures daily to prove the truth of Paul’s preaching. As a result of this, many believed, including Greek women of honourable estate and several men (Acts 17:11-12).

Paul’s reasonings at Athens must have necessarily been conducted with adults; i.e., “men of Athens” (Acts 17:22). The only believers named were adults, “Dionysius the Areopagite, and a womn named Damaris” (Acts 17:34).

One of the first believers at Corinth was “Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue”, who “believed on the Lord with all his house” (Acts 18:8). Here again, one could infer a contact with children or young people, but nevertheless, the emphasis is clearly on work with adults.

A continued perusal of The Acts would indicate that most of Paul's ministry was directed to adults, including the elders at Ephesus (20:17), the elders at Jerusalem (21:18), the crowds at Jerusalem (22:1), the Sanhedrin (23:1), Felix the governor (24:10), Festus the governor (25:8), King Agrippa (26:2), and the Jews in Rome (28:23).

Now what, exactly, should we infer from this review of ministries to adults throughout The Acts? Ought we to conclude that children's work is improper, out of place, ineffective? Never! But now, the results of these adult ministries should be observed also.

"The same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). "Many of them which heard the word believed and the number of men was about five thousand" (Acts 4:4). "Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5:14). "The Word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

In addition to great crowds of converts, a considerable number of new churches were established, all within a space of just a few short years. Besides the large "mother" church at Jerusalem, others were founded in Samaria, Antioch, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus — to mention only a few of the many places where stable testimonies took shape as a result of preaching to adults. Small wonder that the early preachers were accused of turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6).

This much is clear to everyone no doubt: the work of the early ministers of the Christian Gospel was directed very largely to adults rather than to children. No one would deny that children were also included and reached through their ministry, but the emphasis of the records in The Acts is plainly on adult work. And at the same time, their ministry was highly effective, under God, in winning great numbers of converts, and in establishing numerous flourishing and aggressive churches.

Now the question arises, do the proportions of our adult work and children's work correspond to those found in The Acts? And also, do we find significant numbers of adults amongst our converts today as they obviously did in The Acts? Furthermore, are our churches growing in size and quality and number through the addition of adult converts?

Answers to these questions will vary from person to person and from place to place, but readers are invited to consider the subject in the light of the recorded experiences of the early Church as compared (or contrasted) with the known experiences of our assemblies today. A further discussion of the subject will appear in this department next month, but in the meantime, readers' comments and questions are welcomed for The Forum. (For a previous discussion of the author's views on children's work, please refer to "Why Sunday Schools?", Food for the Flock, September 1959, page 173).

The Child and the Church (Feb 1961)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 7 No. 2, Feb 1961.

TO THE EDITOR:

My January title, “Too Much Children’s Work?” was intended as a question, not as a statement. Possibly the current article will correct any misinterpretations resulting either from the mistaken omission of the question mark or from the editorial description of the article as a “negative approach.”

The Church was established through preaching to adults. Only by inference can we find any mention of children’s work in The Acts of the Apostles. (See “Too Much Children’s Work?”, Food for the Flock, January, 1961, page 13.)

Does this mean that children’s work is superfluous? Most emphatically no! (See “Why Sunday Schools?” Food for the Flock, September, 1959, page 137.)

What, then, is the place of children’s work in the program of the Church? How do we reconcile our emphasis on children’s work with the obvious emphasis on adult work in The Acts?

Before answering, we should examine our objective. What were the apostolic preachers trying to accomplish? What are we trying to do in our ministry?

Briefly, the apostles were trying to glorify God; to live Christ-like before their hearers and converts; to preach the Gospel so that men and women would be saved, gathered into church fellowship, and developed into mature, spiritual believers, capable of functioning

themselves as faithful witnesses and godly members of the local church.

We believe that their ministry is a pattern for us today. And we thank God for the extent to which we see the ideal fulfilled in our generation.

But we dare not take anything for granted. We must keep the basic objective before us constantly: we too must aim to glorify God by living Christ-like lives; by witnessing to Christ and preaching the Gospel; by winning men, women, and children to the Lord; and by establishing local churches comprised of Spirit-filled, Christ-like believers with hearts and lives dedicated wholly to the glory of God.

With this objective in mind, we can begin to answer the fore-going questions. Children's work is an opportunity (1) to bring girls and boys under the influence of Christians who demonstrate the presence and power of the Spirit of God; (2) to teach young people the Word of God, whereby they might come to know the Son of God; (3) to win youngsters to the Lord at an age when their whole lives can be spent for the glory of God and the service of Christ. In this respect, children's work holds a vital and unique place in the Church.

Nevertheless, there remains the problem of reconciling our emphasis on children's work with the apostles' emphasis on adult work. And no doubt the real problem lies, not so much in what we are doing, as in what we are not doing!

What we do is excellent—as far as it goes! It is a splendid thing to teach children the Gospel. Many are saved, to mature later as adult saints whose lives are highly honouring to God. Some are used to win parents

and friends. A few are called to full-time service. For all of this blessing, we can be profoundly thankful.

But the glaring facts of the matter are this: most of the girls and boys who are saved through children's work and who eventually take their places as mature believers in assembly capacity, are children of believers already in the assembly. Evidently only a few assemblies see girls and boys from non-Christian homes being saved, brought into assembly fellowship, and retained within the assembly where they develop into spiritual saints capable of functioning as responsible members of the local church.

While there may be many exceptions, still the majority of children from unsaved homes leave our assembly Sunday schools in their early teens, either through lack of interest, or through forcible removal by parents—particularly at the age of "confirmation" in the family church. Even those who get saved are often "lost" to the assembly through family or church attachments.

The problem then is this: our effort in children's work makes a definite contribution in reaching our objectives in the lives of some believers' children. But our effort is largely unsuccessful with respect to adult unbelievers and their children. Remembering that our objective includes the establishment of local churches comprised of spiritually mature believers, we cannot be satisfied with such a sorry state of affairs. It is not enough just to have believers replaced by their children!

The early Church grew mainly because the Gospel was preached to adults. Many were saved, and were soon functioning as responsible leaders in the local churches.

Our churches will grow only when we do the same—preach the word to adults!

Does this mean that children's work is unrelated to the work of the Church as a whole? Far from it! First, if our efforts in children's work were more vital, scriptural, spiritual, and determined, we would see a far higher percentage of these children coming to Christ—and among the families of unbelievers as well as of believers!

If we fail to see such results, it's because our efforts are so carnal, lacking in dedication and determination. We devote insufficient time to our spiritual health as Christian workers — too little time for prayer, study of the Word, and dependence on the Lord.

Also, in the vast majority of children's efforts today, one of the greatest opportunities for reaching adults in this generation is being almost completely ignored or neglected.

For practically every child who comes to a Sunday school or a children's meeting, there is a home, with parents, and a family — an entire group to be reached with the Gospel. The child who comes in is an incomparable contact — the best open door to adult work that could be found anywhere.

But let's remember, we're engaged in building churches, and churches are composed basically of adults. We must see children not only saved, but also brought into assembly fellowship — and not only from believers' families, but also from the homes of unbelievers.

In addition, we must reach the parents, the adults. And for this work, the children who come into our care are

themselves the most fruitful contacts imaginable. Unfortunately, we're failing to grasp the opportunity.

Educational Problems (Dec 1962)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 8 No. 12, Dec 1962.

What's your problem? Too little education? Wrong kind of education? Too much education? All of these problems are common in Christian circles today. But, like other problems, every one of them can be faced and solved by any young Christian who is determined to follow his Lord completely.

Many young people have been overpowered by the attraction of earning money at an early age, only to find out later that it can be exceedingly difficult to obtain the additional education they need and want.

Others discover, after completing their education or after working for a time, that they have followed the wrong course and chosen the wrong career. They find that they have become interested in another field for which they are better suited. Acquiring the desired education then, particularly with a wife and family, can be a very difficult problem.

Nowadays, one wonders if there is not a possibility of seeking too much education. Everyone of us is responsible to make full use of the talents given by the Lord. But this does not mean that we should all be Ph. D.'s or even study indefinitely, say in the evenings. It would appear in some cases that the time devoted to education might be out of proportion to the time required for the essentials of a truly spiritual life.

The basic questions in all these problems are simple: "What does the Lord want me to do? What kind of education should I pursue? How far should I go?" If

these questions were asked more frequently and the implied principles followed more consciously, we would less often hear our young people saying: “I wish I hadn’t quit school so soon!” “I wish that six years ago, I’d known what I know now. Things would have been different!” “I can’t come to prayer meetings. Sometimes I even have to study on Sunday. After all, it’s a heavy course this year, you know!”

If the basic questions are going to be answered, scriptural principles must be followed. Can we expect the Lord to guide us if we’ve already made up our minds? Analysis of our thinking reveals that we often go to the Lord, outwardly asking Him what we should do, but knowing all the time what we want Him to answer.

This can hardly be described as yielding to the Lord. It fails to express the spirit of Christ, “not my will, but Thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). It falls short of Paul’s ideal, “present your bodies a living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1).

“I think I’d like to be an engineer.” “I’d love to be a nurse!” Young people often have thoughts like these. But it’s a good idea to ask ourselves where these thoughts have come from. Are they from the Lord? Sometimes they are. Other times, they are only notions dreamed up in our own imaginations without asking the Lord what He wants.

Discovering what the Lord wants is not a magical process. Some people might think that only missionaries experience the Lord’s guidance about their life’s work, and that this requires a mystical voice or a chain of unusual events which all add up to the right answer.

At times the Lord does use such means in teaching us His will. But the basic operating principles are simple and available to us all.

Fundamental to all Christian guidance is a close fellowship with the Lord. This requires daily prayer, Bible meditation and study, constant yielding to Him. It means frequent, diligent confession of sin, continually reckoning ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God (1 John 1:9. Rom. 6:11).

This is how we abide in Him and bear fruit for His glory (John 15:5). And there can be no more pleasing fruit for God than a life devoted to the "good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

No doubt the good works He has ordained include getting the amount and kind of education He wants us to have, and pursuing the type of career that He has chosen for us.

The same basic principles can be applied to all of youth's educational problems. "What school should I attend?" "Should I go to college in my home town, or should I go away?" "Would it be better to attend a Christian school or a secular institution?" "Should I take all of my education by day course, or should I go to work and finish my education by evening course?" "How am I going to finance my education?"

We get wrong answers to these questions when we look for them in the wrong way and in the wrong places. Vocational guidance and aptitude testing can be most helpful in many circumstances. But they seldom, if ever, give clear-cut answers. For the Christian, there is no substitute for a close fellowship with God, a constant

yielding to His Spirit and His will, a patient waiting for Him to develop our convictions in the right direction.

It is virtually certain that the bulk of youth's unsolved educational problems today are the result of failing to apply these basic Christian principles consistently.

Dependence on the Lord does not mean that we should ignore the knowledge and help available to us from various sources. There is an abundant supply of literature about education and careers, giving information on a wide variety of fields. School guidance counsellors, university placement officers, and the personnel and public relations departments of many companies are equipped to provide assistance. Scholarships, bursaries, and fellowships are more generous and plentiful than ever before.

But even with this help, there is still the crucial matter of deciding — a matter between the Christian and his Lord.

The absence of such communion can spell disaster for anyone. And for the Church at large, one wonders if the low level of our private and collective communion with Him is not at the root of some of the broader educational problems confronting us today.

Some think that the shortage of male missionary personnel today is a direct result of young men seeking lucrative careers at home in the professions and in business. No doubt the Lord has a place for each of us: some at home in secular work, and others at home or abroad in full-time missionary work. Nevertheless, one suspects at times that the bulk of our best people, spiritually speaking, are on the mission fields of the

world and that many who are gainfully employed at home are here for the dollar more than for the Lord.

It is also worth noting that throughout our assemblies today, the education of many of our young people appears to be oriented more towards business and the professions than towards the arts, and least of all towards the study of Hebrew and Greek.

Broadly speaking, with possibly a very few exceptions, assemblies of brethren today are largely dependent upon other Christians for Scripture translation. One wonders why scarcely any of our young people feel called of the Lord to study the languages of the Bible, while countless hundreds aim at financially rewarding careers in fields such as business, industry, medicine, and law.

A further problem presents itself in some of our larger centres where evening schools and colleges make it possible to extend one's education while holding a job during the day. To many young people, deprived of more normal educational opportunities, this is a great blessing. In many cases, nevertheless, there is considerable difficulty in giving the proper proportion of time to work, studies, and the spiritual necessities of life.

Evening studies coupled with a full-time job inevitably tend to cut into the Christian's time for prayer, Bible study, fellowship with other Christians, and service for the Lord. The best way to avoid this problem, of course, is to pursue one's education as far as possible, as early in life as possible. Evening studies should, in general, be regarded as a last resort, and then only under the definite guidance of the Lord.

Youth's educational problems are undoubtedly many and often great. But as James reminds us, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith" (James 1:5).

Counting Converts (Dec 1963)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 9 No. 12, Dec 1963.

What's been happening in our assemblies during 1963? Have we been winning souls to Christ? If so, how many? Or are we afraid to count?

Luke wasn't afraid to count the converts in Jerusalem. In Acts 2:41, he records the addition of 3,000 and later he says the total has risen to 5,000 men (Acts 4:4). Do we think we're holier than Luke just because we don't count our converts?

Shouldn't we face facts? If our assemblies aren't winning souls for Christ, then let's admit it — and start asking "Why?" With little or none of the New Testament written and with very limited resources other than the Holy Spirit, the early Church won thousands for Christ. With the Word of God complete and with the same mighty Spirit of God, the Church today could do likewise if we really wanted to!

Some assemblies are winning souls. Praise God for this! The numbers might be small, but every soul is precious. Even one soul saved means that the Holy Spirit has been at work through His people. We must be grateful for every indication that He is working in any degree whatever.

But some assemblies are not winning souls. Probably there are scores of places where not a single convert can be counted for the past year, or two, or three.…Even those who have won a few would be the first to admit that the numbers are mournfully small. Surely no one can be satisfied with the results of our current

evangelistic effort. Can any of us fail to share the Saviour's burden for souls? (Luke 19:41). He wept about the perishing. Do we? Sometimes we hear that these are the days of small things, the days of the two's and three's. True, perhaps —but have we not made it so by our own failure to evangelize aggressively and effectively? Peter and Paul would never have been satisfied with two's and three's. Why should we be?

Some tell us that our responsibility is to witness, not to make converts (let alone count them). No doubt it is only the Holy Spirit who can make a true convert. But why is the Spirit of God not making more converts than He is presently making through our witness? Perhaps we're not witnessing as we should — in the power of the Spirit!

Others say that we shall be commended for faithfulness, not success; after all, the servants in Matthew 25 were commended for being faithful, not successful. To imply that this completes the interpretation is dishonest and hypocritical, for the servants who were faithful were also successful! They doubled their master's holdings! And if we are failing to see any spiritual increase, what right have we to think we're being faithful? The servant who was unsuccessful was the one condemned for unfaithfulness. The likelihood is that our lack of success in winning souls is largely the result of our lack of faithfulness. Are we really evangelizing in God's way, by the power of God's Spirit?

What did the church at Jerusalem do to evangelize the surrounding community? In chapters 1 to 7 of The Acts, Luke tells us in considerable detail how the first church reached out with the Gospel to the people in the

immediate neighbourhood. The results are staggering and thrilling. It would be a healthful exercise for every assembly to compare (and contrast!) both its methods and its results with those of the assembly in Jerusalem.

First of all, the Christians at Jerusalem felt a special responsibility for a definite field of service. The Lord Himself had given them the command that “they should not depart from Jerusalem” (Acts 1:4). They were to await the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Then their witness was to commence at Jerusalem (Acts 1:8). True, they were not to stop at Jerusalem. But they were certainly commanded to start at Jerusalem.

Have we started at our respective “Jerusalems”? “Why, of course! Don’t you realize? We have 100 in our Sunday school and the Gospel is preached every week from our platform!” Praise the Lord for every such effort, and for every soul who is hearing the Gospel and responding to the message! But there’s another way of looking at the question.

Take any assembly. In each of the four directions, measure off five blocks from the meeting place. Estimate the number of families and individual souls who are living in that 100-block area. Depending on the density of population and the size of block, there could be anywhere from 2,500 to 6,000 families in such an area —possibly from 10,000 to 25,000 souls!

Then start asking a few questions: How many of these people have been converted through the assembly’s testimony? How many of them are known personally by the Christians in the assembly? How many of them has the assembly befriended in a personal, neighbourly way? How many of them know the assembly exists, and what

it stands for? How many of them have ever heard a representative of the assembly clearly tell the Gospel story in a personal or collective situation — in the home, the Sunday school, or in a Gospel meeting? Can we honestly say that we're concentrating on our "Jerusalem" when we find it difficult to think of anyone from the immediate community who has been saved and added to the local church?

If we plan to do anything at all about evangelizing the community in which the local church is situated, then let's start by really concentrating, and let's aim to do it thoroughly —not by the haphazard, once-over-lightly methods that are so common today.

But not only did the church at Jerusalem concentrate; in doing so, they were obedient to the Lord's instructions. "Then returned they unto Jerusalem" (Acts 1:12). "They entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught" (Acts 5:21). Purely human influences could not deter them; they were conscious of the fact that "we ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

It's a great thing to support foreign missions. After all, the Lord doesn't want us to stop at "Jerusalem"! And besides, our missionaries abroad are in general very inadequately supported. Our giving would need to be doubled in order to provide adequate support for the work that needs to be done and that could be done with existing staff if we were giving as we should.

Nevertheless, while our vision must include "The uttermost part of the earth," the evangelistic effort of a local church begins in its own community. Perhaps it's because we have failed to obey in this the area of our primary responsibility that we have also failed to send

more missionaries to distant fields and failed as well to properly support those we have sent! “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam. 15:22).

Basic to their spiritual progress and success, of course, was the fact that the church at Jerusalem was also united in prayer and love. How little we grasp the importance of this today! “All continued with one accord in prayer” (Acts 1:14). “They were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). “They lifted up their voice to God with one accord” (Acts 4:24). “Lord… grant unto Thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy Word” (Acts 4:29). “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul” (Acts 4:32).

Can we not emulate this to-day? If not, why not? How about attendance at prayer meetings? Do we find that only about 25 per cent of the assembly attends? What do you suppose might happen if the entire assembly, led by godly elders, were to turn out regularly for prayer meetings, with hearts cleansed from known sin and bodies fully yielded as living sacrifices; crying to God for blessing; pleading with Him for a moving of His Spirit amongst His people; seeking the power of God in the preaching of the Gospel? Would we not then be able to count more converts?

What might happen if we were to come to prayer meetings properly prepared — spiritually ready for fellowship with God and His people, intelligently informed and genuinely burdened for the souls of men and the needs of the saints? The Word of God has guaranteed results: if we give Him His due, He will bless beyond all imagination (Malachi 3:10).

Picture an assembly with a prayer meeting in which all the saints are present. Every heart is filled with love to Christ, to fellow saints, and to perishing sinners. Every brother present takes a couple of minutes to audibly express to God a burden on the hearts of God's people. Could the Lord possibly fail to bless? Would souls still be saved in numbers so small that we could count only half a dozen in as many years?

As we look forward to another year, in His will, let us resolve as never before — individually and as local churches to concentrate on the priority tasks which the Lord has assigned us, to be fully obedient to His will in all things, and to go forward in prayerful love and unity to witness unto Him!

To Resolve or Not Resolve (Jan 1964)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 10 No. 1, Jan 1964.

I wonder how many assemblies I have made New Year's resolutions for 1964. Possibly none. Perhaps we don't believe in them. But why shouldn't we?

Would it be wrong to make up our minds that in the next twelve months, by the grace of God and in the power of His Spirit, we will make an impact upon our communities that they have never known 'before? Wouldn't it be a good idea to resolve that in 1964, we will thoroughly evangelize our neighbourhoods for Christ — in God's way and for His glory?

The church at Jerusalem probably never heard of New Year's resolutions. But that's no reason why we shouldn't decide right now to follow their example of community evangelism by a local church. What better time to start than now?

How did they do the job? What did they have that we don't have? What was the secret of the success which brought thousands into the fellowship of the local church in a matter of days? We find clues in Acts 1:8. They had the power necessary for effective community evangelism, and their witness was consistently Christ-centred.

Just before His ascension, the Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem. He promised them power, the power of the Holy Spirit. Subsequently we read that "with great power gave the apostles witness" (Acts 4:33). Stephen was described as "a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost … full of grace and power… And they

were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake" (Acts 6:5, 8, 10). In other words, the community evangelism of the church at Jerusalem was characterized by irresistible power.

Where is our power? No matter what part of the New Testament we read, it is clear that the Holy Spirit of God was working in power; the evidence of His presence and work was abundantly obvious. And if we don't see the results of His powerful work today, we can rest assured He is not at work in our midst.

Are we as individual Christians filled with the Holy Spirit? Are we effective in personal witnessing? If not, we need not be surprised that our collective witness is also weak and ineffective.

How much time do we devote to the spiritual exercises that are essential for power-filled witness? How about daily prayer and reading of the Word? Do we set aside the requisite hours for these vital matters?

Are we practising the truths of Romans 6, John 15, and Galatians 2:20? Or are these purely theoretical doctrines? To what extent are we daily and hourly reckoning ourselves dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God? (Rom. 6:11). Are we abiding in Christ? Do we even know what this means and how it can be achieved? Am I willing in truth to say with Paul, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me"?

Unless we really experience these truths daily, we cannot hope to witness with power, either individually or as a local church. If we're going to reach out with new resolve and vigour in the coming year, this is where we have to begin — with confession, fresh yielding, and a

vital rededication of our hearts and lives to God our Saviour.

We need to notice also that when the Spirit of God was working in the church at Jerusalem, others were attracted. Do we fail to attract people to Christ? If so, we need to examine ourselves!

True, those who reject Christ will also reject His followers. But when the Spirit of God is exalting Christ through His people, at least some will be drawn from the world to the Saviour. And if we're not drawing sinners to Him, let's avoid the delusion of excusing our fruitlessness; let's not say this is simply our lot as followers of Christ!

What happened in Jerusalem? "The multitude came together." "There were added unto them about 3,000 souls." "All the people ran together unto them." "The number of the men was about 5,000." "There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem." "The number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 2:6, 41; 3:11; 4:4; 5:16; 6:7).

If we don't see such effects in our assemblies today, we can only conclude that the Spirit of God is not working through us in the way that He did through the believers at Jerusalem.

Are we content with such conditions? Or are we going to resolve that by the power of the Spirit of God, things are going to be different in 1964? Here's a New Year's resolution with unlimited possibilities. God Himself is interested. In fact, we can count on Him for all the help needed to carry out a resolution like this.

In addition to the power of the Spirit in their service, the church at Jerusalem had a Christ-centred witness. The Lord had told them, “Ye shall be witnesses unto Me” (Acts 1:8) and they were obedient to this command. Listen to Peter preaching: “God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). Throughout the record of the community evangelism conducted by the church at Jerusalem, we find the same thing over and over: their witness was pointedly and thoroughly focussed on Christ Himself.

“In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” “The God of our fathers hath glorified His Son Jesus.” “The name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead.” “And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.” “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.” “The Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers” (Acts 3:6, 13; 4:10, 33; 5:30; 7:52).

The basis for a Christ-centred collective witness is a Christ-centred life on the part of each believer. Our personal Bible study should be directed to learning more of Him, His person and His work. Our lives should be Christ-like in every department — at home, at school, at work, in the community. The honour of Christ should be the explicit objective of all our lives and testimony.

Attendance at the Lord’s supper should be thoughtful and regular, not routine or sporadic. A prominent place should be given to the four Gospels in our personal devotion, conversations, Sunday school teaching, and Gospel preaching.

What proportion of our Gospel messages do we devote directly and explicitly to the person and work of Christ? How often does the preacher expound the Scriptures which declare who Jesus Christ is, what kind of a life He lived, what transpired at His death and following His resurrection?

It's important to tell people that they are sinners in danger of eternal punishment. Exhortations to be saved are in order whenever the Gospel is preached. The dangers of making a false profession of faith in Christ need to be brought to the attention of careless types. But let's remember that the important and indispensable part of every Gospel message is the person and work of Christ. These topics should invariably makeup the bulk of our evangelistic preaching. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me" (John 12:32). Christ draws men to Himself, but this is possible only when they hear about Him!

Want a good resolution for 1964? One that God Himself is willing to help you keep? One that will not only transform our personal witness but also revolutionize the community evangelism of our local churches? How about this: Resolved that in 1964, I will do my utmost, in full dependence upon God and in the power of His Holy Spirit, to know Christ and to make Him known!

Contacts Are Crucial (Feb 1964)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 10 No. 2, Feb 1964.

This is the third in a continuing series of articles on community evangelism by the local church.

Imagine an assembly located in a predominantly Jewish neighbourhood, with no permanent meeting place — not even a rented store!! No duplicating machine for printing letters to the community, no mailing lists, no tract distribution, no Gospel broadcast, and no newspaper ads. The believers have nothing to speak of in the way of Sunday school children's meetings, or young people's meetings.

How would you rate their prospects for successful community evangelism?

Were this assembly located in a typical North American community today, we would say the prospects were poor. But strangely enough, such an assembly did exist in Jerusalem 19 centuries ago and its program of community evangelism was eminently effective.

How do you suppose they managed it? We find the answers in the first chapters of The Acts.

First, they were obedient to the Lord and their efforts were initially concentrated in the immediate neighbourhood. Also the believers were united in love and prayer, and their message was centred in Christ and delivered in the power of the Spirit. (See Food for the Flock, December 1963, page 230, and January 1964, page 11).

These features are basic, but they are incomplete without good personal contacts and effective communications — essentials the Jerusalem assembly had in abundance despite the lack of modern machinery and media. The believers there were in touch with people and they communicated the Gospel to them.

This is not to belittle the facilities available to us today; let's make full use of them as God leads and provides. The sad facts of the matter are that today we often fail to use the superior means at our disposal; worse still, we even fail to do as well as the early church did in making contacts and in communicating the Gospel.

Much more than the assembly in Jerusalem, we in the twentieth century are highly responsible for contacting needy people and for getting the Gospel to them efficiently and effectively. We have far greater resources in personnel and money, and much better means for disseminating the Gospel. But in spite of all this, few if any assemblies today are even beginning to do the job of community evangelism that the church in Jerusalem did in the first century. We seem to have forgotten that "unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required" (Luke 12:48). Shame on us that the first church, with few of our resources and practically none of our facilities, should have done a job so vastly superior to ours!

Despite their greater accomplishments, however, the Christians in Jersualem had no mysterious secret of success. One of their methods was amazingly simple: they just made sure that they went where the people were; for example, "in the temple." "Peter and John went up together into the temple." "They were all with

one accord in Solomon's porch" (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:12). And what was the advantage of this? The Christians thus found themselves in the midst of large masses of the population to which the church was called to witness.

True, at this stage of church history, the believers were in a "transition period." But this idea of a "transition period" can be pushed too far. Let's not be guilty of throwing up this idea as a pseudo-spiritual smoke-screen, obscuring both the fact that the early church had numerous contacts with the masses and also the fact that often we have few or none!

But the assembly in Jerusalem recognized its responsibility to follow the example and teaching of the Lord. He was continually in touch with people; thus He was constantly finding opportunities to communicate to people "the things concerning Himself."

On one occasion, we find Him a guest at a wedding, not just sitting "separated" in a corner by Himself, but participating actively in the proceedings (John 2). We often see Him at the centre of a throng, as when He fed thousands at a time (John 6). Through such contacts He could meet the needs of the people and thus draw some to Himself.

Jesus also appears in the temple and teaches (John 7:14), an example which the church at Jerusalem followed explicitly. He mingles freely with the people and ministers the Gospel to them. For the same reasons, we find Him in the synagogues, and also in the homes of interested people (including a Pharisee!) who invited Him as a guest (Luke 4:16; 7:36). Wherever He goes, He is in touch with people, He communicates with them, He ministers to them. True, He is separate from sinners, but

let’s always remember, He receives sinners and He eats with them (Heb. 7:26. Luke 15:2).

All year long, we need to remember the lesson of the Incarnation. God made people and is interested in people. But in addition, He wants to be with people. So, as the Babe of Bethlehem, He entered our humanity that He might have better contacts with people, that He might be better able to communicate with people.

The apostles and the church at Jerusalem got the message; they followed the divine example; their community evangelism was unique! And they reached out to every level in the community, including even the leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 4:1-8).

Are we doing anything to contact our leaders and to communicate the Gospel to them? How about the mayor and the town council? Do they know we exist? If so, do they know what we believe and preach? If not, they should, and we are responsible to get through to them.

If we’re erecting a new building, why not invite the mayor and some town officials to the sod-turning? They could also be given a personal invitation to attend the official opening. Elections present another opportunity. Send a personal letter to each successful candidate, assuring him that the Christians are praying for him. Send special personal greetings at Christmas and Easter, reminding them of the assembly’s continuing interest and prayers. Such contacts can lead to opportunities both for telling community leaders what the assembly believes and teaches, and for giving a tactful, Spirit-led witness at the appropriate moment.

And what are we doing to contact the ordinary citizens of the community? What about our neighbours and the

people living near the assembly's meeting place? Do any of these people know what we believe about Christ? What are we doing to make opportunities for mingling with them? Contacts are crucial if there's going to be communication.

Do our lives in the community speak for Christ? Are we exemplary citizens and neighbours? Or are we better known for crabbing at other people's kids for cutting across our lawns? Do the neighbours know us for our care and interest when they're sick and bereaved? Or do we just go our own sweet way, minding our own business, and letting the world mind theirs? Do they ever get a card of sympathy, get-well wishes, or flowers, either from individual Christians or from the assembly? Or are we known simply as a group of otherworldly types who seem to be rather remote from the community and even semi-cloistered?

Do we live in the same community as the assembly, so that we can be constantly near the people we are seeking to reach? Do we learn the neighbours' names so that we can greet them personally and effectively in the shopping centre or at the local garage? Do we accept invitations to hospitality in the homes of our neighbours? Do we ever invite them into our homes, for a chat or coffee? For dinner or an evening? And if we do, are we praying that soon we shall have an opportunity of witnessing about the Lord, in a friendly, inoffensive manner like His?

Somehow, somewhere, some time, we must find opportunities to be with the people, to show our love, our interest, our concern. And if we don't like doing this, and if we're not interested in trying to do it increasingly,

we had better stop calling ourselves followers of Christ. He was with the people; He shared their interests, sorrows, cares, and need; He communicated the Gospel to people by showing His love and concern for them. And if we're not doing the same, we're not really following Him!

Many assemblies do make opportunities for mixing with people in the community. Sunday school treats, picnics, Christmas and Easter programs, parents' nights — all are good opportunities, particularly for meeting the parents of young people in our Sunday schools and youth groups. There should be many more such occasions, and we should try for better turn-outs as well. A personal call at the home and a friendly invitation can do wonders for the attendance.

But Christians should also support these events, not only by attending, but also by mingling with the visitors. Do we do this? Or do we huddle together, leaving the visitors by themselves elsewhere? Do we welcome visitors as they arrive? Do we speak to them as they leave? If we don't show our interest and concern for them as individuals, we might as well forget about winning them for Christ.

It is clearly our responsibility to be with the people, to go out to those who don't come in, to contact them, to show them our love, to reveal Christ to their needy souls.

Can any of us claim we're doing this as we should? How many of us can claim we're doing it at all?

Competence Is Critical (Apr 1964)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 10 No. 4, Apr 1964.

This is the fourth and last in a series of articles on Community Evangelism by the Local Church as exemplified in the church at Jerusalem and recorded in the first seven chapters of The Acts.

The church in Jerusalem did a marvellous job of evangelizing the surrounding community. By contrast, most churches today do a terrible job. Why the difference? Simple. The Christians at Jerusalem had the spiritual competence to do the job, and we don't!

Who led the evangelistic thrust of the early church? Peter—a man of faith, courage, ability single-hearted devotion to the Lord. Read his sermons in The Acts. Feel your soul thrill to his vibrant, challenging message.

"Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it" (Acts 2:22-24).

Peter believed what he preached. He had the courage to deliver the message pointedly and vigorously. He was able to hold his audience and to make them feel the impact of his words. He was all-out for Christ. Nothing restrained him from devoting his life and energies wholly to the cause of Christ. He had the spiritual competence to do the job!

True, it was God who gave Peter the competence. And Peter would be the first to admit it. Peter was empowered by the Holy Spirit and the message went forth as from God Himself. Peter had no virtue or power of his own—only what God had graciously condescended to exhibit through a weak and failing human vessel (Acts 3:12-16).

But then, this is precisely wherein spiritual competence lies — in a yielding to the power of the Spirit of God in such a way that God's work is done in His way, in His power, for His glory, and to the salvation of sinners.

God is the same today; His Spirit has not changed; His Word is eternally established. There is only one possible explanation for our failure to evangelize effectively and with God-honouring results. There is but a single reason why we're not doing the job we should: we can't do it! We're spiritually incompetent!

Peter's competence was dependent on the Spirit of God. But in addition, Peter spent three years in constant companionship with Christ. We're incompetent today — not only because we lack the power of the Spirit, but also because we lack companionship with Christ.

What a joy to walk with Him! To hear Him announce His Messiahship in the synagogue in Nazareth. To see Him heal Peter's mother-in-law, and the lepers, and the paralytics. To hear Him call His future disciples to follow Him.

How challenging to hear from His own lips the Sermon on the Mount, the parables of the house on the rock; the creditor and his two debtors; the sower, the seed and the soil.

What a thrill to observe His mastery over nature: He stills the waves; He quiets the storm; He reveals His glory in transfiguration; He feeds the 5,000; He dies and rises; He lives forevermore!

How often do we walk with the Saviour — thinking of what He said, how He acted, the people who responded to Him, those who rejected Him, the ones He loved despite their sin and failure? How often have we felt our hearts burn within us while He talked with us by the way?

Let's admit the truth when we're faced with it. We're incompetent to evangelize our communities. And one reason for our incompetence is our failure to walk in constant companionship with the Saviour!

He loves us. He died for us. He lives to intercede for us. He left us to be witnesses, to tell others. But we're not doing it. And when we do try, we fail. The results are miserable. Why? We're not walking with Him! Hence we're incompetent!

Not so with the early church. Not so with Peter. "As they observed the boldness of Peter and John, and noted that they were untrained laymen, they began to wonder, then recognized them as former companions of Jesus" (Acts 4:13 — N.E.B.).

And Peter was not the only gifted evangelist in the church at Jerusalem. Think of Stephen. "They were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake" (Acts 6:8-10). Think of Philip the evangelist. "The people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake" (Acts 8:6).

We often think of Stephen and Philip as deacons, chosen to perform certain temporal tasks in the church. Let's always remember that they were men filled with the Spirit, spiritually qualified to do a spiritual work of God. And they did it with resolve and effectiveness — because they were trained by God, fitted by the Spirit and yielded to Him. They were competent to do His work in His way!

Let's remember too that the leadership in the church at Jerusalem left no options as to spiritual competence. When men were to be chosen, even for a seemingly secondary task, spiritual competence was essential and there was no compromise. "Brethren, look ye out among you seven of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business….And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip…." Acts 6:3-8).

Do our local churches today lack gifted, competent, effective evangelists who can minister the Gospel in the power of the Spirit? Are we short of men who with the help of God can bring souls face to face with the Saviour so that they bow in His presence and yield their hearts and lives to Him? If so, we need not wonder greatly why our community evangelism is so ineffective.

No doubt there is a vital, essential place for personal work, visitation, Sunday school teaching, mailing of Christian literature, and many other means of getting to grips with souls about their need of Christ (See the three previous articles in this series).

Nevertheless, with all the personal work by the church in Jerusalem (and no doubt there was much done that is not recorded), we must mourn the fact that in many — if

not most — of our assemblies today, there is not a single gifted public evangelist who can preach the Gospel in power and see men and women from the community brought in, saved, and added to the church! In other words, we just don't have the competence to get the job done that is crying out to be done every day of our lives!

Why don't we? Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:11 that Christ gives evangelists to the Church. We might well ask the Lord (and ourselves) why He isn't giving them to our local assemblies. Should it not be the heart-cry of every assembly that the Lord would raise up at least one man, filled with the Spirit and gifted by Him to proclaim the Gospel in convicting, convincing power? What hinders the Lord from producing such spiritual competence among the members of our churches today?

Why do we appear to be so dependent upon intinerant evangelists to do the job of community evangelism for us? Particularly when there are so many unreached areas claiming the attention and energies of our travelling preachers. What makes it seemingly necessary to hold long series of Gospel meetings with visiting speakers in order to get souls saved? Why do we not have the local gift to minister the Gospel in such a way that souls are saved through the ministry of gifted public evangelists raised up within the local church? We profess to have independent churches, antonomous and indigenous. Then how come we are so incompetent to carry on our own ministry of public evangelism in the community, so that our friends and neighbours in the surrounding area are won for Christ?

Answers to these questions do not come readily; but only because we don't want to face the obvious answer:

we’re spiritually incompetent! And the reason for our spiritual incompetence is the fact that we are not allowing the Lord Himself to raise up the gift so essential to the effective evangelism of our communities today. We’re too busy trying to be competent in every other sphere, and we give too little time to allowing the Spirit of God to make us competent for community evangelism.

The only solution is confession, repentence, fresh yielding to the Lord. Every member of the local church must yield all his members as instruments of righteousness, his body a living sacrifice (Rom. 6:13; 12:1). Each of us must seek to discover and perform his individual function as a member of the Body of Christ, as a member of the local church. There must be urgent prayer that the Lord will give to each church at least one gifted public evangelist whose calling and gift will result in the salvation of souls from the community.

And in all of this concern, the elders of course are ultimately and fully responsible to lead God’s people. Peter was not only an evangelist; he was also an elder. And he discharged both responsibilities in exemplary fashion.

Unless the elders of our assemblies are dedicated wholly to God with a view to seeing His hand at work in raising up men with the requisite competence — either from their own number, from among the deacons, or from among other members of the local church — we can fully expect to see things go on as they are. The Lord will continue to use other channels, other means, other instruments. We shall be passed over and left alone to wallow in our smugness.

That’s why competence is so critical!