

CHAPTER 39

WHAT MADE CHRIST A GREAT TEACHER?

1. HE WAS A MASTER OF HIS SUBJECT.

- a. Christ knew the Old Testament scriptures inside and out.
- b. He virtually had committed them to memory and could quote any passage at will.
- c. He was imminently familiar with their background and contents (history, prophecy, chronology, law, etc.) and highly skilled in their use.
- d. Even more important, He thoroughly understood their spiritual meaning and knew how to apply them to any situation in life.
- e. No scholar of His day could come close to His knowledge, qualifications and expertise as a teacher.

2. HE SPOKE WITH CONFIDENCE AND AUTHORITY.

- a. His positive assertions came from walking with God and personally experiencing His Word.
- b. When Christ spoke, His audience listened because He believed in what He said and was always able to give a convincing answer.
- c. He expressed faith in His teachings because He knew they were inspired of God and founded on truth.
- d. His utterances were logical and sound and none could prove Him wrong.
- e. His was not an arrogant self-confidence, but a confidence that came from sure knowledge and a steady walk with God.
- f. He assumed a certain positive authority by asserting He was the Messiah and establishing this fact through a display of power and mighty miracles.

3. HIS MOST CONVINCING FORM OF TEACHING WAS BY EXAMPLE.

- a. His works matched His words.
- b. Every command He gave, He also lived.
- c. He is called the "Word of God" because that's what He literally was.
- d. He was the living message sent from God so that men may have a model to follow.
- e. All that He ever spoke, He practiced — His works and words were inseparable.
- f. He would never command without doing.
- g. There is no more convincing form of teaching than by example.

4. HIS FORCE OF PERSONALITY DREW PEOPLE TO HIM.

- a. The personality of Christ embodied the total attributes of His life and character.
- b. It was an expression of a perfectly balanced life — God's nature in Him.
- c. His personality was what gave life and color, spontaneity and meaning to His message.
- d. He deeply experienced every emotion common to man — love, joy, peace, anger, sorrow, pain, etc. — yet He never sinned.
- e. The influence of His personality attracted people to Him and served as a great tool in teaching.

5. ALTHOUGH A DYNAMIC SPEAKER, CHRIST DIDN'T OVER-DRAMATIZE OR USE THEATRICALS TO IMPRESS HIS FOLLOWERS.

- a. He was more concerned with getting His message across than with speaking style or the dignity of eloquence.
- b. His supreme desire was that of preaching the gospel in the most effective way possible, and introducing God and His Plan to mankind.
- c. He was powerful and zealous — but His delivery was natural, heartfelt and spontaneous.

- d. For Him to use artificial stimuli, studied methods and religious fanaticism to whip up the emotions of His followers was contrary to His basic nature.
- e. He valued man's free moral right to think for himself and make his own decisions without being duped into an artificial religious life.

6. HE EXPRESSED AN OUTWARD LOVE AND CONCERN FOR PEOPLE AND DESIRE TO SEE THEM LEARN.

- a. He really cared! It showed and the people who heard Him speak could detect it.
- b. He expressed warmth and compassion! No one except His hardened critics would question His sincerity
- c. Christ desperately wanted people to believe His message and turn to God — above all things.
- d. Being all things to all men, He was approachable, kind and gentle.
- e. He was always willing to explain things or to repeat lessons only partially learned.
- f. Jesus believed in His true followers and instilled in them a confidence that they would make good.
- g. He was no respecter of persons, but treated all men with genuine concern.

7. CHRIST NEVER HELD MAN IN DISDAIN OR CONTEMPT, BUT HONORED HIM GREATLY AS A POTENTIAL SON.

- a. He reflected this attitude not only in words, but in deeds and actions.
- b. The respect for human dignity was a priceless thing in Christ's eyes.
- c. He didn't die for monkeys and apes, but He did die for man who was made in God's image.
- d. Those who had willing ears could sense His love and esteem for them for it was so outwardly obvious.

8. HE COULD INSTANTLY DISCERN HIS AUDIENCE AND ADAPT HIS TEACHINGS TO THEIR LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING.

- a. The following quote describes Christ perfectly: *"To be able to confront an audience and immediately to detect the general level of its ability to follow and to be able therefore to adapt oneself in the use of language and illustration so as to convey essential truth to that audience is the supreme quality of great teaching."*
- b. Generally His message was very simple, being addressed chiefly to the common people — not to the scholars or the fashions of the schools of the day.

9. CHRIST WAS MORE CONCERNED WITH STIRRING MAN'S HEART THAN ILLUMINATING HIS INTELLECT WITH DRY, MECHANICAL KNOWLEDGE.

- a. His greatest concern was the state of man's heart and his relationship to God.
- b. Revealing the Great God and His purpose was by far more important to Christ than any other knowledge.
- c. Note the difference between the lessons Christ taught and that of the scholars of His day.
- d. Man's standard of worth depends on the quality of his inner spiritual life, and this is a lesson He wanted made known.

10. CHRIST LAID GREATER STRESS ON DEVELOPING CHARACTER THAN ON BECOMING AN EXPERT IN DOCTRINE.

- a. A quick survey of all of Christ's teachings will prove that He spent more time showing man how to live a godly life, than on the exposition of doctrine.
- b. He most assuredly taught doctrine, but He was also concerned that His true followers see the higher and broader spiritual lessons.
- c. Doctrine is imperative — but to stop with an intellectual apprehension of it and fail to go on to higher ground — that which doctrine points to and explains — is dangerous. It can lead to self-deception and a false sense of security.
- d. Thus, throughout His teachings, Christ gives suggestions, visions, principles of conduct and flashes of insight for the quickening of man's mind, heart and inner life.

11. THE GREAT THEME THAT CHRIST STRESSED THROUGHOUT HIS TEACHINGS WAS MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO GOD AND TO NEIGHBOR.

- a. To grasp this simple yet profound concept sums up the totality of religion.
- b. Every doctrine and every law hinges on it — this includes the very Plan of God.
- c. Love is the heart and core of the gospel — the greatest teaching there is when fully grasped in all of its ramifications.
- d. Christ is less concerned with history, economics, philosophy or science, although His words touch on all these departments of human thought and life.
- e. A wise minister of God should keep this theme in mind when preparing his sermons.

12. THE MOST OUTSTANDING FEATURE OF CHRIST'S TEACHING ABILITY WAS HIS HABITUAL USE OF PICTURE-SPEECH.

- a. He was gifted with a creative and colorful imagination and a rare speaking eloquence to express it.
- b. He was thoroughly alive to His environment and drew from it graphic word pictures to drive His lessons home.
- c. Christ constantly made use of familiar imagery in everyday life and surroundings to express His thoughts.

13. TYPES OF IMAGERY AND PICTURE-SPEECH CHRIST USED:

Examples:

- (1) The illustration of general principles by concrete cases.
 - (a) The Sermon on the Mount contains many of these.
- (2) Similes
 - (a) A figure of speech comparing two unlike things that is often introduced by "like" or "as":
 - (b) "*Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, shall not enter therein* (Mk. 10:15)
- (3) Metaphors
 - (a) A figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them.
 - (b) "*When thou doest alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee*" (Matt. 6:2)
- (4) Analogies
 - (a) Resemblance in some particulars between things otherwise unlike — similarities.
 - (b) "*Ye are the light of the world*" (Matt. 5:14).
 - (c) "*The Kingdom of God is as a great pearl...*"
- (5) Parable
 - (a) A short fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or religious principle.
 - (b) There are many of these scattered throughout the gospels. The sower and the seed; the unmerciful servant; laborers in the vineyard.
 - (c) These were used to hide the meaning for some, but to unveil the truth for others.

14. HE ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS BEFORE THEY AROSE.

- a. Here again is the mark of a great teacher.
- b. To be able to discern the attitudes, needs and questions of people is a rare gift of insight and ability.
- c. Although Christ was inherently gifted with this ability, no doubt He sharpened it through working with people and observing their behavior.

15. CHRIST LAID DOWN BROAD TRUTHS AND PRINCIPLES — NOT THOUSANDS OF PETTY RULES AND REGULATIONS.

- a. He placed greater worth on the spirit and life of the law than on strict adherence to the letter — although He taught the letter, too.
- b. The overriding principle in all His teaching was LOVE.
- c. He got down to intent and motive, showing that walking in a loving relationship with God and fellowman is the all-encompassing attitude that really matters.
- d. Principles are easier to remember than rules.

16. CHRIST'S TEACHINGS WERE RELEVANT TO EVERYDAY LIFE.

- a. They had to do with man's present condition and His future state — in short, how to live successfully.
- b. He talked about anxiety and God's care for men.
- c. He talked about health and healing.
- d. Christ showed man how to co-exist with his neighbor and make peace with his enemies.
- e. Again to accomplish this, He was direct and plain, avoiding theories and speculations that were empty and vain and which didn't satisfy man's spiritual thirst and hunger.

17. CHRIST PLANTED SEED THOUGHTS IN THE FORM OF TERSE EXPRESSIONS EASY TO BE REMEMBERED.

- a. These seed thoughts, although uttered almost 2,000 years ago, are still living with us today.
- b. *Examples:*
 - (1) Ye are the salt of the earth.
 - (2) Ye are the light of the world.
 - (3) Go the extra mile.
 - (4) Do unto others as you would have men do to you.
 - (5) Take up your cross daily.
- c. Seed thoughts have a way of imbedding themselves in our memories and germinating when the right occasion comes.
- d. They are brief, simple, easy to be tucked away for ready reference and jam-packed with rich meaning.

18. HE USED SIMPLER DIRECT AND CONCRETE LANGUAGE FAMILIAR TO HIS HEARERS.

- a. He talked about things in nature and extracted from them spiritual lessons.
- b. He used illustrations easy to understand and showed in effect that the invisible things of God can be clearly understood by the things which are seen.
- c. He talked about sinners, not sinfulness; poor people, not poverty; about the Kingdom of God, not going to heaven.
- d. Christ called Himself the door, the good shepherd, the way, the truth and life.
- e. Trivial incidents of the day were made to yield their lessons in clear, concrete language.

19. HE WAS A MASTER IN THE ART OF REPETITION AND REVIEW.

- a. The vital lessons of life He went over time and again so as to ingrain these truths in the mind of His true followers.
- b. He talked about the Kingdom of God repeatedly, about repentance, about bearing fruit, about His Father and obedience to Him.
- c. But in reviewing familiar material, He would cover different ground to enlarge their understanding and give freshness to His approach.
- d. The Kingdom of God is as this or that....
- e. Human beings so quickly forget and must be reminded.

20. IN LAYING DOWN PRINCIPLES, CHRIST ALWAYS GAVE CLEAR EXAMPLES OF HOW THEY SHOULD BE APPLIED.

- a. His method was to state a principle first, then fill in with details.
- b. He went from the general to the particular, from extensive to intensive, from outward to inward.
- c. Christ first gave an overview followed by enough illustrations so that men may learn how to apply His Word to all situations in life.
- d. The Sermon on the Mount is an excellent example of this.

21. HE OFTEN UPED THE FORCE OF A ONE-SIDED STATEMENT TO STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF A CONCEPT.

- a. Example: "*it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God*" (Matt. 19:24).
- b. This method of teaching is used for emphasis and to make men think.

- c. For Christ to have overqualified such statements with a string of exceptions would have weakened His point.
- d. Too many qualifications can take the force and power out of a message.
- e. The listener is to be entrusted with some responsibility of supplying the qualifications and exceptions himself through other texts and God's Holy Spirit.

22. HE ALWAYS HELD HIS EMOTIONS IN CHECK IN EVERY DIFFICULT TEACHING SITUATION.

- a. When opposed He answered wisely; when heckled He guarded His reactions.
- b. He put His critics in their place by pointing out fallacies in their own arguments and reasonings.
- c. He epitomized self-control and discipline even when righteously indignant.
- d. He made sure that no response or erratic behavior on His part could be used against Him later.
- e. This discipline came only through preparation, knowing His subject, perceptive forethought and walking with God.

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