

Christian Education

Two commands are to be in the forefront of our minds. They sum up what Moses and the prophets of Old Testament times were inspired to teach.

First, we are to love God. We are to do so with all our heart, mind, soul and strength.

Secondly, we are to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. For a teacher this means loving their pupils.

Russell Bishop is a teacher. He teaches teachers. He also goes into schools to find out how teachers teach. In New Zealand he goes into schools and asks pupils "Does your teacher like you?" The answers he hears are sometimes surprising. Not every child gives the answer yes.

Christian teachers want every child to say yes. Why is that their desire. There are at least three reasons.

One, they know a child learns best when positive pupil-teacher relationships exist.

Two, they want schools and, very importantly, the learners within them to be happy and to succeed.

And three, they want to see God glorified. They want that where they work. And that want to glorify him by the way they work.

The attitude teachers have as they enter a classroom is critical. Those who go in loving their work and loving their pupils because they love God create a lasting impression.

We remember all our lives those who take an interest in us. A child never forgets the teacher who loves him as he helps him learn.

Teachers and Teaching

Most of us have happy memories of our days at school. They include special events or special friends. Often amongst them are special teachers.

What was it about those teachers we remember most? Most commonly it is not what they taught us; nor even the way they taught us; but who they were (or should we say are?).

Influences

Our time at school is affected by many things. The way we behave influences what we get out of our time in education. What we do is influenced by the support (or lack of it) we have in our homes. Obviously the school itself has an

influence upon us. Does it provide an interesting and stimulating curriculum? Is it a friendly and happy place? But, possibly above all, there is the influence of our teachers. What they do and the way they do it are very important.

Approaches

A teacher can set about teaching in a variety of ways. He or she can just see it as a way to earn a living. Perhaps that was what George Bernard Shaw had in mind when he said: "those who can do; those who can't teach; and those who can't teach teach teachers."

Others will focus on what they see is expected of them. They spend time training. It may be in a college or a school. Wherever it is something similar happens. They glean an understanding of what education is and of who students are. But, perhaps above all, they learn something about how to do it.

There is a danger in all this. What is it? It is possible to be preoccupied with the idea that teaching is just a craft. In other words it is possible to focus mainly on what is done in the classroom (a subject or skill is taught) and neglect who we are.

It has been shown that those who concentrate more on a particular way to teach can too easily become more and more skilful at defending the technique they were taught or have developed. As a result such people can sometimes be heard to say, 'You can do it your way. I will do it my way.'

Way or who?

We are not suggesting the way teaching is done is not important. It is. Nor are we saying that what a teacher teaches is trivial. We recognize that there have been many debates on these themes in the past. And can be sure there will be many more in the future.

What we are doing is to seek to highlight the fact that who we are as individuals is of great importance. More and more evidence exists which shows the way teachers interact with pupils is also crucial for successful teaching and learning to take place. In other words the development of good relationships with pupils must be a priority.

Tasks

A good teacher does the following.

First, they challenge pupils to use their minds. We grow in knowledge and understanding as we think about what we are taught, work out how to solve problems, and see how what we learn relates to other things we learn.

Secondly, they expect much of their pupils. They want them to do well.

Thirdly, they help pupils see what they can do and what

they need to do to learn more?

Fourthly, they encourage them to love learning.

Few would question these aims. But some would add to the list. Christians especially also stress it is really important for teachers to be person-centred.

It is good to be a teacher who does the right things. Poor teaching is devastating. It undermines the reputation of a school. More seriously it does not help pupils.

Relationships

However, as indicated above, it is not just good quality teaching that is to be delivered.

The quality of the teacher is also critical. What Heads, governors, colleagues and parents want to see is a teacher who creates positive student-teacher relationships in the class room and school.

It is increasingly being shown that these have an above average effect upon student achievement.

This comes as no surprise to Christians. They have been at the forefront of providing teaching for centuries. God has given us minds. He wants us to use them. Above all he wants us to use them to his glory. To do that we need to learn about him, his will for us, and the world upon which he has placed us. That requires teachers.

Parents and carers have a teaching role. Note how in the book of Proverbs we are taught to follow the wise instruction given by them. The Ten Commandments underline the importance of honouring our parents. Such honour is also to be given to those who help parents. Teachers do that. Why? Because not every parent knows enough about different subjects. Nor do all have the ability to impart such knowledge to a child.