

Education in the School of Christ

“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.”

—II Peter 1:2,3

IN GENERAL, EDUCATION is associated with the acquiring of knowledge—much knowledge, accurate knowledge. However, in order to obtain an education, we find it necessary, additionally, that there be receptivity, sensitiveness, a sincere response, and conscientious use of knowledge as it is received. That “knowledge is power,” is a familiar proverb. Human wisdom has found this to be true. The difference between the various strata of human society

and the advantage each member is able to obtain is usually closely related to the extent of an individual’s education and energy in making use of it.

Society today is not alone in recognizing the great advantages resulting from knowledge. In our opening text, the Apostle Peter speaks of “the

knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.” Jesus said, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:32) Paul says that the Gospel of Christ “is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth,” and again, that he would be willing to forego all the advantages of his human life in order that he might know Christ, that is, gain an intimate acquaintance with him and share his experiences.—Rom. 1:16; Phil. 3:8-11

The prophet says of Jesus, “By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many.” (Isa. 53:11) Jesus, pointing out the difference between himself and others and the great advantages he enjoyed, said, “O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee.” “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:25,3) Paul, pointing out the ultimate unity and perfection of the body of Christ, says that the purpose of all the gifts to the church is that they may “all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” (Eph. 4:13) Thus we see that the ultimate unity of the church is to be based upon the same knowledge of God and the same faith in him that Jesus manifested in his life among men, and which were the foundation of his life and character.

KNOWLEDGE NOT ENOUGH

Knowledge, however, is not enough. In addition, it must be used properly. Jesus not only said that his followers would be made free if they “know the truth,” as previously quoted, but also, “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” (John

13:17) Peter, who states in our opening verses that we have been given a knowledge of God, adds in the same chapter, “If ye do these things ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (II Pet. 1:10,11) Paul not only declares that the Gospel is the means by which we obtain salvation, but again with reference to the Gospel adds, “Through which you are being saved, if you retain a certain word I evangelized to you.”—I Cor. 15:2, *The Emphatic Diaglott*

The importance of using the knowledge of God and his Word of Truth, and of obeying them, cannot be overemphasized if one is to obtain the education that God intends. In the pages of history, we find many illustrations of knowledge gained and the lamentable failure to use it properly. Going back to Eden, we find God’s instructions to our first parents both definite and clear to the effect that if they ate of the forbidden fruit they would die. (Gen. 2:16,17) When Eve was approached by Satan through the serpent, she indicated her thorough knowledge of God’s instruction. She said that it would be impossible for her to partake of the forbidden tree, because if she did, she would lose her life. However, Eve let doubt enter her mind, and when Satan lied about the results of her eating the forbidden fruit, she permitted his lie to take the place of the truth and supplant the warning which God had given. She, therefore, fell into sin and became liable to its penalty.—Gen. 3:1-6

The nation of Israel is another illustration of failure to make use of knowledge. Paul, speaking of his nation, said they had much advantage every

way, “chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.” (Rom. 3:2) However, the apostle further explains that their knowledge was not “mixed with faith in them that heard it.” (Heb. 4:2) The Prophet Hosea foretold the rejection of Israel centuries before it occurred. “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.” (Hos. 4:6) Notice that the prophet says they had rejected the knowledge given to them, and they had forgotten the law of God. We may be certain that this is the underlying reason for failure in any servant of God, namely, that he has not used, or not obeyed, the divine instructions given to him.

THE GREAT EDUCATOR

God is the Great Educator and has designed his plan with the object in view of preparing his creatures for the greatest usefulness and happiness in the eternal life promised to the loyal and obedient. From one point of view, it might appear that the education of the human family was interrupted by the temptation in Eden and their coming under the penalty of death. From one standpoint this is true; as, since the fall, relatively few have obtained more than a glimpse into God’s great attributes of wisdom, justice, love, and power.

However, God has overruled the opposition of Satan and the fall of the human family into sin and death in order to open up to them other and higher branches of learning. First has come their experience

with evil and its consequences. Later, during the world's thousand-year kingdom of righteousness, they will have experience with truth, justice, and uprightness. Thus, first evil, and then good, will be learned. This higher education will include the development of such qualities as patience, meekness, generosity, sympathy, and self-sacrificing love. At the present time, we cannot imagine conditions in a perfect earth, where the inhabitants are pure and holy, and in which these qualities have opportunity for development by practice and personal experience.

A considerable period of time, including both successes and failures, is required to gain an education, whether now in the case of Jesus' footstep followers, or in the coming kingdom of righteousness for the world of mankind in general. A variety of experiences are necessary in acquiring knowledge, especially as it may be used in the development of a noble character. In general, successes are the result of putting knowledge into practice according to God's principles of righteousness, and contrariwise, failures are the result of the improper use of knowledge.

One of the gains resulting from obedience to divine principles is an ever clearer understanding of righteousness, holiness, and how they are exemplified in God and in his Son, Christ Jesus our Lord. The Apostle Paul indicates that the ability to properly apply knowledge comes only to those "who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."—Heb. 5:14

On the other hand, failure to obey and to have one's "senses exercised" to put knowledge into practice, results in weakness of character and the loss

of spiritual development. The psalmist says, “What hast thou to do to ... take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee?” (Ps. 50:16,17) The Apostle Peter declares that one who fails to add the graces of the spirit to their foundation of faith “is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.” (II Pet. 1:9) Notice here the apostle says that failure to make use of knowledge in the building of character will result in blindness and forgetting the fundamental fact that one was purged from his old sins.

FAILURES ILLUSTRATED

There are many illustrations in the Scriptures of the failure to properly use knowledge. As already noted, to Adam and Eve the Lord clearly stated that the penalty for sin would be death, and when pronouncing the sentence upon them after their transgression he confirmed that they would return to the dust from whence they were taken. (Gen. 3:17-19) Yet, only a few centuries later we find that some of their posterity, the inhabitants of Egypt, practiced the slaying of servants and animals, and burying them, together with a supply of food, in the tombs of their kings. Here we see that as mankind became more and more out of harmony with God, further degenerate, their understanding of God’s principles, including the penalty for sin, was lost.

The corrupting nature of sin is illustrated in the fact that the first death recorded in the Bible is the murder of Abel by his brother Cain. The same thought is suggested in the history of Satan himself, for we are told that he was perfect in his ways

until “iniquity was found” in him. (Ezek. 28:15) Indeed, all the horrible evils afflicting the human race can be attributed to Satan as “the god of this world.” (II Cor. 4:4) Another example of the corrupting influence of sin is given by the Lord in his prophetic words recorded in Matthew 24:48,49. Here an “evil servant” is described as first beginning to smite his fellow servants, then eating and drinking with the drunken. Such a pattern we have seen throughout much of Christian history, even down to the present time at the end of the age. In these we see the same sequence: first, a departure from the principles of justice, righteousness, and brotherly love; and then, growing out of that failure to properly apply knowledge, the loss of light and the development of doctrinal errors have followed.

These experiences should forcibly impress this great lesson upon all the Lord’s people and cause us to be very alert and sensitive to the Lord’s Word. We should be diligent in our study and application of its principles in our own life. This should then lead us to accept as elders and teachers only such as are humble and obedient to not only the Word of Truth, but also to its spirit. “Knowledge alone makes people self-righteously arrogant, but love that unselfishly seeks the best for others builds up and encourages others to grow in wisdom.”—I Cor. 8:1, *Amplified Bible*

The special education which the followers of the Lord are receiving during the present Gospel Age is obtained in what we are accustomed to speak of as the school of Christ. In some universities they give special attention to the preparation of those

who are to occupy positions for the instruction of others. Such schools have often been known as “teachers’ colleges.” These correspond well with the special instruction which is being given to the followers of the Lord during the present time—those who are being prepared to be associated with him in the great work of reconciliation during the Messianic kingdom.

The Scriptures clearly indicate that all mankind are ultimately to know the Lord from the least unto the greatest, and that they are to have the law of God written not only in their minds but also in their hearts. (Jer. 31:33,34) That is, they will not only fully understand the law of God, but they will also grow up to a condition in which they will love the law of God and his principles with all their heart. The understanding and love of these principles are being developed in Jesus’ footstep followers during the present age. At the same time, however, their education contains additional features. Just as teachers must not only thoroughly master their subject, they must also be able to instruct other students later in life. They must learn the art of teaching, so that they will be able to effectively transmit their knowledge to future pupils.

PURPOSE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The occasion for this special education is the fact that God has designed that in the “dispensation of the fulness of times” he is to regather in Christ all things. (Eph. 1:10) That is, all who will accept are to be brought back into harmony with God through the ministrations of the Messianic kingdom, in which Christ and the church will participate.

From this standpoint it is apparent that the chief purpose and work of the centuries since Pentecost has been the education of the consecrated followers of Christ. With this thought in mind, how full of meaning is the apostle's exhortation to the Corinthian brethren, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." (I Cor. 15:58) It is interesting to note the meaning of the two words "work" and "labor" in this verse. The work is spoken of as "the work of the Lord," in which we have the privilege of engaging. As the apostle exhorts, we should be very diligent in the carrying out of this work, "abounding in the work of the Lord."

The Greek word translated "work" in the foregoing verse means "business or employment" (*Thayer's Greek Definitions*) and is the same word which the apostle uses in writing to the Thessalonian brethren when he says that he remembers their "work of faith." (I Thess. 1:2,3) Evidently, therefore, the work of the Lord is a work of faith. It is the development of faith in each of the body members of Christ, and the exercise of those members along the lines of faith, building up themselves and exhorting one another to the life of faith. —Jude 1:20

The word "labor" has quite a different thought. This word is also translated "trouble" and "weariness." It is used by the apostle in the text referred to above from I Thessalonians 1:3, where he says that he remembers not only their "work of faith," but also their "labor of love" and their "patience of hope." Because these three actions on their part

gave him great confidence with respect to them, he is assured of their election of God. Here we have the apostle's thought that the faithful overcomers of the present age will be so appreciative of the Lord's work that they will engage in it to the extent of enduring trouble, weariness, sacrifice and suffering in order to cooperate with him in their course of education for future service.

What a beautiful picture is painted by the thought of working and laboring. At present the Lord's people are cooperating in the education of themselves and the other members of the body of Christ, often through difficulty and trial. However, the results of this work of education will continue with them beyond the veil. Then they will have the privilege of cooperating with Christ Jesus in his mediatorial kingdom for the reconciliation of all the families of the earth and bringing them to human perfection and harmony with God and his principles.

GOD WANTS FINISHED PRODUCTS

It is a blessed experience to go to the school of Christ and to be enrolled as a student, but God's great object is not merely the present work of educating his people, but their graduation and future work on behalf of the world of mankind. God is interested in what we may speak of as "finished products," and so must our interest be also. As Paul says, writing to the Corinthian brethren, "and this also we wish, even your perfection." (II Cor. 13:9) The apostle's interest in the development of the church was a beautiful, selfless one. He was interested in their completion, their full development in

the likeness of Christ; and it was an entirely secondary concern as to whether he or another was the instrument God would use in that work. Note his words as recorded in I Corinthians 15:9-11: “I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.”

There is a very helpful lesson for all of the Lord’s people in these words of the Apostle Paul. As with him, so our concern is to be only for the development of the character of Christ in ourselves and in the brotherhood; and whether God uses one instrumentality or another for the accomplishment of that work is immaterial. We are to be as happy if the Lord uses someone else to accomplish his good purposes as if he used us. In any event, as the apostle expresses in the passage just quoted, it is the grace and power of God which accomplishes the divine purpose in the hearts of his people. Any servant of the Lord used to render a helpful service and to give a good example to the brethren must feel as the apostle states he did in an earlier portion of this epistle. “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.”—I Cor. 3:6

Progress in the school of Christ and development in his likeness involves exercise, experience, and activity along various lines. For instance, one of the avenues of service in connection with the work of God is that of preaching the Gospel of the kingdom.

(Matt. 24:14) Another is laboring in the Word of Truth, that is, personal study of the Scriptures. (II Tim. 2:15) A third is the exhortation and encouragement of the brethren. Paul says that we are to exhort one another daily, lest any be “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” (Heb. 3:13) Another avenue of activity and exercise is the judgment of self. The apostle says that if we would judge ourselves we would not be judged, but that if we fail to do so, the Lord will take us in hand and chasten us that we may not be condemned with the world.—I Cor. 11:31,32

Still another means for our growth and maturity in knowledge is association with one another and taking part in the affairs of the brotherhood. This includes suitable activity in connection with meetings of the Lord’s people and in all the interests of the church, including care to see that the collective testimony of our gatherings is in no way injured by teaching or conduct contrary to the Word and the spirit of the Truth. In all of these avenues of activity the followers of Christ are to be vitally interested and as fully engaged as possible.

In our spiritual education, we must be careful to see that we are engaging in a rounded, complete work; that we are paying the proper attention to all aspects of the Christian life; and that we are using the Scriptures for the purpose for which they were given, namely, to prepare the man of God “unto every good work.” (II Tim. 2:21) The spirit of the Lord, which is the spirit of a “sound mind,” will guide us in the proper division of our time among these various lines of endeavor. (II Tim. 1:7) Paramount to this is the importance of daily studying

the Scriptures, realizing that we are to live “by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” (Matt. 4:4) The degree of our devotion and time spent in the study of the Lord’s Word will be revealed in our lives, in our speech, and in our ability to contribute to the spiritual welfare of the Lord’s consecrated people.

We are to keep in mind that the Christian life is an intensely personal matter, and realize the force of the Apostle’s words: “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run their very best to win, but only one receives the prize? Run your race in such a way that you may seize the prize and make it yours!” (I Cor. 9:24, *Amplified*) In other words, we are to consider our relationship to the Lord in the school of Christ as an individual student. We are to be completely devoted to him and to make his Word and his spirit our guide and constant occupation.

What a glorious privilege we have of being educated in the school of Christ, to have the benefit of his instruction and example. If faithful, devoted students, we are being prepared therein for our privileges and responsibilities in the future as kings and priests and judges. Let us be daily faithful in this endeavor! ■