

GUARDING AGAINST MORALIZING IN OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHING

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The wording of our topic suggests immediately that moralizing is something we as Sunday school teachers ought to guard against. We may have some rather foggy ideas about what moralizing is, but we sense at once on hearing the title of this essay that it is something to be avoided in our teaching.

If moralizing is objectionable and if there is any danger that we may become guilty of it in our teaching, it is certainly important that we know what moralizing is. We can hardly guard against it if we don't know what it is, and we will hardly consider it important to guard against it unless we know why it is objectionable. In the first part of this paper, then, we will attempt to define and describe moralizing itself. In the second part we will try to define and describe Christian instruction and endeavor to show how it differs from moralizing.

What is Moralizing?

Let's pay a visit to a Sunday school class taught by Miss Mary Morality. She is winding up a lesson on the story of the Good Samaritan. "Now the moral of this story is....," she says as she moves into the application of the story. She has impressed on the class how kind and helpful the Samaritan was in contrast to the hard-hearted lack of concern shown by the priest and the Levite. Bringing the lesson to a close, she emphasizes the words, "Go, and do thou likewise!" "Now let's all try to be more like the Good Samaritan," she says, shaking her finger and driving home the point. "Then some day we'll go to heaven too! Class dismissed!"

On another Sunday we find Miss Morality teaching the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Telling how Lot's wife became a pillar of salt, she concludes the lesson with the moral, "Now don't disobey God as Lot's wife did. Remember what happened to her!" I'm sure that all of us have heard teachers like Miss Morality impress on children that they should not tell lies because sooner or later they will be caught at it, or that they should not steal because thieves are eventually apprehended and punished.

These may be crass examples, but they serve to illustrate what we mean by moralizing. In each case the teacher wanted to persuade the children to live a morally upright life: Be like the Good Samaritan! Don't be like Lot's wife! Don't lie! Don't steal!

But what did the teacher do to try to accomplish this goal? In the story of the Good Samaritan Miss Morality tried to get the students to follow the Samaritan's example of neighborliness by holding out the promise, "Do this, and you'll go to heaven." In the story of Lot's wife she employed the threat, "Remember what happened to her." You don't want something like that to happen to you, do you? Then don't do as she did! In our other example the teacher likewise tried to threaten or scare children not to lie or steal.

In each instance the teacher was guilty of moralizing. The teacher's aim was to bring about a change in the children's lives. She wanted to get them to live a decent and respectable life. This was her chief concern. To achieve her aim she resorted to threats and promises.

Not only was Miss Morality at fault in what she set as the primary goal of her teaching, but her method, too, was anything but Christian. She was attempting to accomplish by means of the Law what only the Gospel can actually do. Oh yes, the Law may seem to get results. It may frighten the children into obedience, or it may influence them to obey from selfish motives. But this is not Christian obedience. This is not the obedience that pleases God.

Miss Morality was concerned only about the outward behavior of her children. In this she was following in the footsteps of the Pharisees of Jesus, day. The Pharisees did not recognize the necessity of a change of heart. Jesus denounced them in no uncertain terms: "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess" (Matt. 23:25). The

Pharisees' method, too, was that of the Law, using threats and promises, with the result, as Jesus says, that when they gained one proselyte, they made him twofold more the child of hell than themselves (Matt. 23:15)

We might define moralizing, then, as the use of the Law with its threats and promises to try to motivate others to live an outwardly upright life.

But perhaps you are saying to yourself, "Didn't Jesus Himself conclude the story of the Good Samaritan by saying to the teacher of the Law, "Go, and do thou likewise!" (Lk 10:37)? Didn't Jesus Himself say, "Remember Lot's wife." (Lk 17:32)?" You are right, of course. Jesus did say these things. Was Jesus then also guilty of moralizing? Not at all! The next question naturally is, what is the difference between Jesus' teaching and the moralizing of Miss Morality? To find the answer to this question let us consider briefly the fundamental difference between the two chief doctrines of the Bible, the Law and the Gospel.

All of us know what a law is. Laws tell us what we are to do and what we are not to do. In coming to this conference we were required by the traffic laws of our government to stop for a stop sign, and we were forbidden to drive faster than so-and-so many miles per hour. Similarly, the Law of God tells us what we should do and what we should not do. And just as the laws of the state prescribe certain penalties for those who break them, so also the Law of God threatens those who transgress it with punishment.

In His Law God reveals to us His holy, immutable will. As you know, Jesus summed up God's Law in the familiar words, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. 22:37-39). These two commandments summarize the Moral Law, the Ten Commandments.

The Law does, to be sure, promise life to those who keep it. "This do, and thou shalt live.," Jesus told the teacher of the law who wanted to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life (Lk 10:25). But since the Fall of Adam no man, with the exception of Jesus, can keep the Law, and all who fail to keep it come under the wrath of God and are subject to the dire threat, "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them" (Deut. 27:26). In plain words Ezekiel says, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:20). The punishment for disobeying God is death, both temporal and eternal death.

From the Bible we know that God has written His Law in the heart of every human being. Every man has a conscience, which testifies to this inscribed Law (Ro 2:14,15). As a result of sin, however, man's knowledge of the inscribed Law is blurred. He has lost the clear and distinct understanding of God's will which Adam originally had. For that reason God has given us the written revelation of His will in the Holy Scriptures.

From the Scriptures we see that our status by nature actually is. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Ro 3:23). We are all guilty of breaking God's Law. We are all by nature under the wrath of God and doomed to eternal death and damnation. We are by nature without hope because of ourselves we can find no way to escape the just judgment of God.

This, then, is the effect of the Law. We stand condemned by its strict and stern demands. It leaves us helpless and hopeless like the man on the way to Jericho who fell among thieves. They beat him up and left him at the side of the road to die. The Law crushes; it condemns; it kills. It holds out no hope of any kind. And its condemnation is universal. It strikes fear and terror into the heart of every human being because, as has been mentioned, with the sole exception of Jesus Christ, "there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not" (Eccl. 7:20).

In sharp contrast to the death-dealing message of the Law is the other chief doctrine of the Scriptures, the message of the Gospel. The Gospel offers despairing sinners help and hope, life and salvation. It announces the good news that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Jn 3:16).

The Gospel's scope, like that of the Law, is universal. Jesus "died for all" (2 Cor. 5:15). "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor. 5:19). In raising Jesus from the dead God announced to all men that their sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. Jesus "was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification!" (Ro 4:25) We call this declaration of forgiveness objective justification because this verdict of God is an objective reality whether men believe it and actually

enjoy its blessings or not. Only those, of course, who receive it with believing hearts actually possess the salvation Jesus gained for all and which God wants all men to have. The sad fact is that the vast majority of people remain under the terrible condemnation of the Law because they reject the saving good news of the Gospel in blind and stubborn unbelief.

To those, however, who by God's grace accept it the Gospel brings peace and joy. It gives those who by nature were without hope the sure and certain hope of eternal life. It creates spiritual life in hearts that once were spiritually dead. It is the power of God unto salvation., working a joyful faith and trust in God in men who once feared and hated Him. In the words of Paul, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17).

How does this new life manifest itself in Christians? From Scripture and from our own experience we know that it expresses itself in a desire to please Him who showed such a singular and undeserved love for us. The Apostle Paul declares, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

Faith-born love is the motive which prompts a child of God to strive to obey his heavenly Father. The Apostle John expresses this thought very beautifully in the simple words, "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). Deep gratitude and heartfelt thankfulness motivate the Christian to make every effort to live according to the will of God as He has revealed it to us in His holy Law. He will earnestly endeavor to keep God's commandments, not because he is driven by a fear of punishment, nor because he expects to earn some regard, but solely because his heart overflows with thankful love toward the God of his salvation.

What purpose, then, does the Law serve in a Christian's life? According to the Catechism, it functions, as you know, as a mirror, curb, and guide.

With respect to its function as a mirror, the Bible tells us, "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Ro 3:20). As long as the Christian lives in this world, he remains a sinner. The Law serves to show him his sin and his need of daily repentance. We look into a mirror to see the dirt on our face. We look into the mirror of God's Law to see the uncleanness of our souls.

But the Law also serves the Christian as a curb. The Christian is a dual personality. He has within him the New Man., a creation of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost uses the means of grace, the Gospel in the Word and in the Sacraments, to bring this New Man into existence in the sinner's heart. But the Christian must also contend throughout his life with his Old Adam, the unbelieving enemy of God that continues to lurk in his heart, tempting him day after day to sin. Reminding himself of the threats and curses of the Law, the Christian uses the Law as a curb to restrain and check his Old Adam, his sinful flesh. "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee," the Psalmist confesses, "and I am afraid of thy judgments" (Ps 119:220). When the Christian hears in Galatians 5, for example, that those who commit such sins as adultery, fornication, murder, drunkenness, and other works of the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God, he uses this threat to club his Old Adam into submission when he is tempted to do these things.

The final service that the Law renders the Christian is that it functions as a directive or guide, showing him what those good works are "which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). Our Lutheran Confessions call this the Third Use of the Law. This service of the Law is necessary, our Confessions remind us, that believers "may not hit upon a holiness and devotion of their own, and under the pretext of the spirit of God set up a self-chosen worship, without God's Word and command, as it is written Deut. 12,8.28-32: Ye shall not do....every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes, etc., but observe and hear all these words which I command thee. Thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish therefrom" (Formula of Concord, VI, 20; Trig., p 969). It was a failure to use the Law in this way that gave rise to the idea that the unmarried life is a more pleasing state to God than marriage, or that to retire into a monastery and live the life of a monk is a holier kind of life than that of a useful citizen in society faithfully pursuing the calling of a Christian laborer, businessman or housewife.

This Third Use of the Law is restricted, of course, to Christians. Only believers will look to the Law for direction and guidance in running the way of God's commandments (Ps 119:32). Only those who are the

children of God by faith in Christ Jesus will want to please God. Unbelievers do not love Him. “The carnal mind is enmity against God” (Ro 8:7). All the works of unbelievers, even those they proudly point to as shining examples of righteousness, are in God’s sight nothing but filthy rags (Is 64:6). The Bible clearly teaches that “without faith it is impossible to please” God (Heb. 11:6).

Unbelievers may, at best, comply with the outward demands of the Second Table of the Law. They may, for example, refrain from committing the act of murder, from running off with a neighbor’s wife, from embezzling the bank, or from dishonest business practices. But they do not and cannot meet the demands of the Law for a loving, pure, content, and truthful heart. And even their outward obedience to the Law is motivated not by love for God but by the fear of punishment or the hope of reward. They may conduct their business honestly because they recognize that honesty is the best policy. While such civic righteousness may give them a good reputation among their fellow men., as it did the Pharisees, before God it is actually sin. “Without faith,” the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us, as we mentioned earlier, “it is impossible to please him” (Heb. 11:6).

Miss Mary Morality and moralizing teachers like her are under the mistaken impression that such outward obedience to the Law is the sum and substance of Christianity. They fail to realize that God wants not a mere outward conformity to His Law, but an obedience of the heart. If they succeed in threatening or bribing their pupils not to shoplift, not to cheat in a test, not to throw bricks through store windows, but to be obedient to their parents and to live as law-abiding citizens of the state, such teachers have achieved their objective. This is their sole concern. They think this is living a Christian life. They mistake this for Christian sanctification.

In reality, however, such moralizing either drives the students to despair or turns them into Pharisees. If they fail to keep the Law even outwardly, the threats they have heard fill them with terror and may even drive them to suicide. On the other hand, they may pride themselves on their supposed righteousness. Like the Pharisee in the temple, they boast either openly or secretly, “God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are” (Lk. 18:11). Such training does not further the cause of the Gospel; it hinders it. It makes it more difficult for children to recognize their sins and their need of a Savior. Moralizing does not lead children to heaven; it takes them down the broad and busy expressway to hell!

How, then, does Christian teaching differ from moralizing? What will be the aim and the methods of Christian Sunday school teachers? What are the results of truly Christian instruction?

What Is Christian Instruction?

Let us now step into the Sunday school class of Mrs. Bea Christian. She, too, is concluding a lesson on the Good Samaritan. “So we see,” she says to her class, “how often we sin against the Fifth Commandment by not giving help where it is needed. Not to love our neighbor as we love ourselves is a sin against God. Thank God, however, that Jesus kept this Commandment for us. He also suffered the punishment we deserved. So our sins are forgiven, and we will go to heaven, not to hell, when we die. What now can we do to thank our God for His love? Yes, you are right - we will try not to sin any more. Let us try to be more like the Good Samaritan. That will make God happy.”

There is a difference, obviously, between the aim of the moralist and the aim of the Christian teacher. The goal of Miss Morality, as we heard, was to get her children to live up to a certain moral code and to be respectable citizens in this world. Mrs. Christian, on the other hand, is concerned first of all about the eternal salvation of the children entrusted to her care.

In most instances the children in our Sunday school classes are baptized Christians. The aim of the Sunday school teacher will therefore be to nourish and strengthen their Christian faith. During their life their faith in Jesus will be subjected to many attacks. It needs to be firmly rooted if it is to withstand these attacks successfully. The teacher’s chief aim is to establish the children firmly in the Gospel that at the end of their life they may receive the crown of eternal life. If the children happen to come from non-Christian homes, the teacher’s aim will be to lead them to Jesus, their Savior, She will present those truths to them which are able to make them wise unto salvation, knowing that through them the Holy Spirit works faith in the heart. A

secondary aim of the Christian Sunday school teacher will be to train the children in godliness, encouraging and motivating them to live God-pleasing, Christian lives.

To achieve this twofold aim the teacher will seek first of all to deepen the children's awareness of their sinful nature and their need of a Savior. To this end she will use the Law as a mirror. Christian children need to be reminded that their hearts are sinful by nature. The story of Cain and Abel or of Naboth's vineyard or of Peter's denial will, for example, be taught in such a way that the children will recognize more clearly the Cain and the Ahab and the Peter in their own heart.

But never will Mrs. Christian stop with this. The teaching of the Law is for her only preparatory to the teaching of the Gospel. She will remind her class that through Jesus there is forgiveness for every sin, for that of a Cain and an Ahab as well as for that of a Peter. Jesus will hold the center of the stage in every lesson. As a wise teacher, Mrs. Christian knows that the more the children learn to appreciate the love which Jesus has shown to them, the more they in turn will grow in their love for Him. She will encourage a spirit of thankfulness and will channel this gratitude into a pattern of behavior that will please God. To this end she will use the Law as a norm or guide. She will use it like a map or highway sign to show the children how to live a godly life. She will say, "This, not that, is what pleases God."

Always, however, Mrs. Christian will be very careful to let gratitude to God for the blessings of salvation be the motive and incentive for doing His will. In this she will follow the example of the Apostle Paul. In his Epistle to the Romans Paul first of all presents the Gospel of God's grace in all its fulness and beauty and glory. Then, in the hortatory part of his letter he appeals to his readers to show their thankfulness for this blessing in their daily lives. At the beginning of chapter 12 he writes, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." His words, "by the mercies of God," remind us of these mercies and supply the proper, evangelical basis for a sanctified, Christian life.

The difference in the motive that is supplied constitutes a vital difference between the moralizing of Miss Mary Morality and the Christian instruction of Mrs. Bea Christian. While Miss Morality uses the Law as a club to threaten or as a carrot stick to bribe her pupils to obedience, Mrs. Christian uses it as a guide or rule showing how we may express our gratitude to God for the wonderful blessing of salvation. Thankful love is the motive she employs to prompt the children to be obedient.

Perhaps another example will help to make the difference clear. Let us take the story of the twelve year old Jesus in the temple. After telling the story Miss Morality will draw from it the moral: "Be like Jesus. Go to church regularly. Obey your parents as He did. Then some day you'll go to heaven," Mrs. Christian, on the other hand, will point out how we so often fail to come to God's house and to hear and learn His Word as He requires. How often we fail to obey our parents as we should. But Jesus, our Savior, kept God's commandments perfectly for us. God gives us the credit for what Jesus did. When God looks at us now, He does not see our sins but only the perfect obedience of Jesus. Jesus also suffered the punishment we deserved for our disobedience. So we are safe. What a wonderful Savior we have! How thankful we will be to Him! Surely then we won't stay away from God's House unless we are sick. We will gladly hear and learn His Word, and we will try to obey our parents and superiors at all times. We will not want to make God unhappy or displease Him by breaking His commandments.

Mrs. Christian's motivation, you will notice, was entirely different from Miss Morality's. Viewed in a purely outward way, the behavior each teacher was trying to induce in the children was the same, obedience to the Third and Fourth Commandments. In the eyes of God, however, the obedience of the two groups of children was entirely different. Whatever obedience Miss Morality's children rendered was a work of the Law. The Bible tells us plainly as we have pointed out previously that "without faith it is impossible to please" God (Heb. 11.6). it tells us also that "no man is justified by the law in the sight of God" (Gal. 3:11). "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse" (Gal. 3.10). Miss Morality's teaching, as you have undoubtedly recognized, was out and out work righteousness.

Those children, however, who were led by Mrs. Christian's teaching to strive to keep the Third and Fourth Commandments did so as a fruit of their faith. Their obedience was a fruit of the Gospel. By reminding her children of God's love for them, Mrs. Christian was watering the tender plant of faith in the hearts of her children. Through the Gospel Word of the Savior's forgiveness the Holy Ghost strengthened the children's faith, and faith "worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6). Faith manifests itself in love. The love of God awakens a response of love in the hearts and lives of His believing children. Mrs. Christian appealed to this love to influence her class to walk in God's ways.

Mrs. Christian was a wise teacher. She recognized that the only way to change the lives of her children was to change the heart. Such a change can be brought about only by the Spirit of God working through the Gospel. "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean," God promises; "a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:25,26).

The Book of Proverbs admonishes., "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (4:23). Solomon means that the life a person leads will be determined by what is in his heart. Whatever sins are apparent in a person's outward life are only expressions of the sin that is in his heart. Jesus reminds us of this truth when He says "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matt. 15:19). To try to correct the outward manifestations of sin without changing the heart is like trying to empty a polluted river by continually dipping out pails of water. Only if the sources of pollution are eliminated will clean, pure water flow down the stream. Someone has well said, "The heart of Christian education is the education of the heart."

If a tree produces bad fruit, the reason is simply that it is a bad tree. Pounding on the trunk with a club will not make a tree that bears tiny, hard, and sour green apples begin to produce beautiful, flavorful, red delicious, wealthies, or winesaps. Neither will it help to shout at the tree, to scold it, or to try to cajole or bribe it to do better. There is only one remedy. The bad branches must be cut off, and branches from a good, healthy, useful tree must be grafted in.

Jesus Himself impresses this truth on us. He says, "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Matt. 7:17). The point Jesus is making is that if the heart is not right with God, there can be no God-pleasing fruits of faith in a man's life. "Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree rotten, and its fruit rotten; for the tree is known by its fruit" (Matt. 12:33, NASB). Plant a good tree, and it will bear good fruit. Plant a bad tree, and you can expect nothing from it but bad fruit.

Commenting on these words of Jesus, Luther writes, "Good and pious works never produce a good and pious person; but a good and pious person produces good and pious works. In every instance the person must first be good and pious before he can do any good work Fruits do not bear the tree, nor does the tree grow on the fruit, but the reverse - trees bear fruits, and fruits grow on trees. As there must be trees before there can be fruits, and as the fruits do not make the tree either good or corrupt, but the tree produces the fruits., even so man must first be either good or corrupt before he does good or corrupt works.

"We observe this in all the crafts. A good or a bad house does not make a good or a bad carpenter, but a good or bad carpenter builds a good or bad house... Man's works come under the same rule; according as man is either a believer or an unbeliever, his works are either good or evil, not vice versa, so that he would be godly and a believer according to his works. Since works do not make men believers, they do not make him godly either. But faith, which makes men godly., likewise produces good works" (Walther, *Law and Gospel*, p 306; Am. Ed., 31:361).

In his book *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* Dr. C. F. W. Walther points out that the Word of God is not rightly divided when a preacher or teacher "tries to make people believe that they are truly converted as soon as they become rid of certain vices and engage in certain works of piety and virtuous practices" (p 299). He shows that it is a serious confusion of Law and Gospel "to teach men that they become different beings by putting away their vices and leading a virtuous life, while the Word of God teaches us that

we must become different men first, and then we shall put away our particular sins and begin to exercise ourselves in good works” (p 299-300).

When Jesus calls on us to repent, He is calling for a complete change in us, for a new heart and a new spirit. Such a new heart can be ours only through a spiritual rebirth. “Ye must be born again, Jesus said to Nicodemus (Jn 3:7). Only when a person has been born of water and the Spirit will he struggle against the temptations of the devil, the world, and his own sinful flesh. Only the Gospel can produce the new heart of flesh that is needed. The Gospel of Christ is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom. 1:16).

Children will not appreciate the Gospel, however, if they do not recognize their sins, if they feel no need of a Savior. People who think they are well do not usually go to a doctor. This is where the Law comes in. It prepares hearts for the Gospel message. In teaching the Law we need to be careful, therefore, that we do not tone it down, that we do not blunt the sharp Sword of the Spirit (Heb. 4:12), that we do not soften the blows of the hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces (Jer. 23:29). The Law will not serve its vital purpose of exposing sin if in our teaching we make sin less sinful than it really is.

This was the mistake the Pharisees made. In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount He clearly shows that the Law requires far more than that a man merely avoid committing murder or committing adultery with his neighbor’s wife. It requires a heart that is perfectly pure and holy. The Law shows us that “whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer” (I Jn 3:15). According to God’s Law, “whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt. 5:28).

Today many sins against the Sixth Commandment are excused as being natural, a part of life. They may even be defended as a form of love, a higher code of morality than the out-of-date standards of the Ten Commandments. Proponents of the so-called New Morality argue, for example, that stealing is no sin when poor children steal from stores owned by Big Business. Violence, including bodily injury and the destruction of property, is approved and advocated as a means to bring about social changes.

People holding such views are in reality setting aside God’s Law. They are saying, “God, we don’t care what you say. We’ll do what we want to do!”

The Christian Sunday school teacher, on the other hand, will present the Law of God in such a sharp and forceful way that the children will clearly see that they have sinned against God. The threats of the Law will strike terror into their hearts. They must learn to confess with David, “I have sinned against the Lord” (2 Sam. 12:13). Then the Christian teacher will comfort them with the assurance Nathan gave to David, “The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.” Finally, the teacher will use the Law again, pointing out to the children how they can please God in their daily life. “All Scripture,” Paul writes to Timothy, “is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tm 3:16,17).

After Jesus had assured the woman who had been caught in the act of adultery that her sin was forgiven, He told her, “Go and sin no more” (Jn 8:11). Christian children should be taught to imitate the example of Joseph. When Joseph was tempted by Potiphar’s wife, he warded off the temptation, as you well know, with the question, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gn 39:9). For Joseph it was altogether unthinkable that he, a child of God, who had tasted the love and goodness of his heavenly Father, even while he was a slave in the house of the Egyptian, Potiphar, should knowingly and deliberately sin against the Lord. He loved the Lord who had promised his fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that in their seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. Joseph had a love for God like that of which the Apostle John speaks when he says, “This is the love of God that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous” (1 Jh 5:3).

Such love is a fruit of faith. It results from abiding in Christ. Jesus says, “I am the Vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing” (Jn 15:6). Only a strengthening of the bond between the branches and the Vine, between the child and

his Savior, will bring about a greater production of fruit. And this bond can be strengthened only by means of the Gospel, for “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom, 10:17).

Mrs. Bea Christian recognizes this important truth. It determines and governs the entire presentation of her Sunday school lesson. In every lesson her object is therefore to tell the story of God’s love. She knows that this is the pipeline by which the Holy Spirit reaches the hearts of the children in her class. This is the means He uses to strengthen the children’s faith and to cement the bond between sinners and their Savior. The new life, lived according to the directives of God’s holy Law, will be a natural and inevitable fruit of the children’s faith. Above all, such teaching makes the children “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:15). Its chief aim is that they might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing they might have life through His name (Jn 20:31). Its secondary aim is to train them in holiness of living, motivating them by the Gospel, instructing, admonishing, and correcting them as may be necessary by the use of the Law.

We may define Christian instruction, then, as the teaching of God’s Word to sinners to lead them to eternal life and to motivate and train them to live according to God’s will from, a thankful heart. It aims to make and to keep children as disciples of Jesus, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever He has commanded us (Matt. 28:20). Its objective is to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4), that they may be strong, mature,, faithful Christians till God takes them to Himself in heaven.

Mrs. Christian’s teaching has the promise of God’s blessing. His Word will not return unto Him void (Isa. 55:1). Though she will not always see the results of it in this life, the seed which she has sown will, according to God’s promise, bear a rich harvest of fruit that will remain to all eternity. What a blessed and rewarding work hers is!

May all of us who are engaged in the teaching of God’s Word earnestly endeavor to make every lesson a rich and meaningful period of genuine Christian instruction! Faithfulness in carrying out the weighty responsibility that has been entrusted to us, the obligation and privilege of feeding Christ’s lambs, requires that we be on constant guard against the danger of slipping into moralizing. Christian instruction leads to eternal life, moralizing to eternal damnation. Moralizing is what Paul calls “another gospel, which is not another” (Gal. 1:8.,9). God forbid that we who have been called to be Christian teachers unwittingly become guilty of moralizing! May we always be on guard against it, recognizing moralizing for what it is - nothing less than the preaching of a counterfeit Christianity!