

Extending Christian Morals Beyond the Classroom

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Who needs help—teachers or students? The assignment committee did not specify. Have the children entrusted into our care become so radically different? Are students today so messed up on the inside with the breakdown of the family, single parents, and live-ins, that they present a formidable challenge to our school environment? Can we no longer count on a stable situation at home to reinforce what goes on at school? Many will heartily agree in the affirmative.

“We live in a changing world. According to the Fullerton Police Department and the California Department of Education, the top seven discipline problems in the public school in the 1940’s were:

- 1) Talking
- 2) Chewing gum
- 3) Making noise
- 4) Running in the halls
- 5) Getting out of turn in line
- 6) Wearing improper clothing
- 7) Not putting paper in wastebaskets

Some 40 years later the list looks like this:

- 1) Drug abuse
- 2) Alcohol abuse
- 3) Pregnancy
- 4) Suicide
- 5) Rape
- 6) Robbery
- 7) Assault
- 8) Burglary
- 9) Arson
- 10) Bombings
- 11) Murder
- 12) Absenteeism
- 13) Vandalism
- 14) Extortion
- 15) Gang warfare
- 16) Abortion
- 17) Venereal disease”

(“The Gospel in The Classroom” by Pastor Carl Henkel, pages 11-12)

Have teachers changed? Have we failed to instill our teachers with the lofty and sacred responsibility of instructing Jesus’ lambs? Have teachers become apathetic? Are the pressures of society so constricting that it is mission impossible for teachers to stem the tide of new morality and humanism in their own lives and in the application of their divine calls? Are they caving in to the majority? Are we losing sight of our purpose for existing? The dedication of many teachers is questioned in quiet private conversations.

I offer it's some of both. No one group is totally at fault. These are difficult times. Yet wise Solomon wrote, "There is nothing new under the sun." (Ecc. 1:9) The problem is not new. Neither is the solution.

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith." (Rom. 1:16-17) Jesus doesn't change, but Jesus changes people. The laws of the land produce outward righteousness and obedience. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a power to change us and our students within. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ." (II Cor. 5:17,18)

The solution is more of the Word of God. Every single conference paper I read contained an encouragement for more Word of God in our lives. Turn the Holy Spirit loose to accomplish that which we can't. "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." (Phil. 2:13) We know that, at least we give lip service to knowing that, but how do we do it? How do we increase church attendance beyond 50%? How do we invite more parents to be strengthened at the Lord's altar with his life-giving body and blood? How do we get our people into the Bible? How do we convert head knowledge into heart action?

A word of caution is in place. One sure way to hinder Christian morals beyond the classroom is to hopelessly confuse the application of law and gospel for our students. We are not tough military-type private schools. We are not the disciplinarians of the Golden Rule, law and order, and the 10 Commandments. The work of the law is preparatory to the gospel. The law shows our shortcomings, our failures. The gospel shows Christ our Savior. "I can do everything through him (Christ) who gives me strength." (Phil. 4:13)

Most of our schools will have plenty of physical evidence of Christ around. Crosses, pictures, displays, and bulletin boards, but do we really allow Christ to live in us? We must not hinder the gospel power by making the law force fruits of faith. We may get the proper behavior for entirely the wrong reason. Do as I say! Children will respond but don't know why.

Most readers of a conference essay will first glance at the number of pages and wonder whether they will be able to make the end without becoming bone weary and brain dead. Upon reading it, and a few polite questions, they will set it aside, finish their agenda, and file it away upon returning home. A few discussion questions are provided to avoid that fate.

The title "Extending Christian Morals Beyond the Classroom" does not suggest a presentation of why it should be done, or what should be done, but how it should be done. It would be presumptuous of me to entertain thoughts of giving you the final word on how to extend Christian morals beyond the classroom, but perhaps together we can share some mutually edifying ways to live for Jesus. To extend Christian morals beyond the classroom assumes Christian morals exist in the classroom.

I like the comment by Pastor Carl Henkel about a grade school teacher of his.

"One teacher that I was privileged to have many years ago is still teaching at the same school. She came to our town unattached, and is now a grandmother with one of her grandchildren as a student. When asked whether her grandchild called her 'Grandma or Mrs.____,' she answered, 'Grandma'. She quickly and lovingly added, 'But it doesn't really matter what she calls me because they're all my children.' That kind of love is real." ("The Gospel in the Classroom" by Pastor Carl Henkel, page 3)

We do not need nor can we tolerate another teacher who dashes into school at the opening bell and punches out with the kids after school. There is a dangerous attitude around which proclaims “Give me my four walls and 25 students and expect nothing more from me. It’s not in my call.” Those teachers belong in the public system under contract controlled by a union, but not in the service of the Savior.

More “mother-hen” teachers are desired to reflect Gospel motivated Christian love for their students. You simply cannot ignore the hurting needful child for the sake of forging ahead. Deal with the problem. If the only mention of Jesus is a printed prayer from the devotion book, you are missing wonderful opportunities. The first hour of religion may not be the best application of Christianity. Solving a “real” problem on the playground at recess may make the lasting impression. Let your students see your believing heart shared freely throughout the day. Jesus can come to art class too. Lighten up. Enjoy your work. God has entrusted you with molding and shaping eternal beings. You do not work on an assembly line creating parts with planned obsolescence.

As a minister of the Gospel be visible to your students outside of the classroom. Don’t wait for a Parent-Teacher meeting to discuss a student’s problem with Mom or Dad. Call them up! Visits can be made during the school year too. If a child invites you to their house or wishes to share an important family event—go if at all possible.

Discipline will be outlined by the faculty and printed in a handbook in most cases. Rules are not made for punishment of offenders, but created in love to insure a safe environment. A teacher must never use rules to legislate morality for the sake of rules, but to prompt keeping of school regulations out of love for Christ. Beware the attitude which at first sign of classroom upset brands certain students as trouble makers. Remember these are blood-bought souls your living Savior died for. To secretly long for their withdrawal from school or to ignore a problem is inviting Satan to multiply the evil.

Every student that reads should have a Bible to read. We must advance beyond extracting the right answers without the why. Assignments can and should go home for parent and pupil consideration, also in the area of the Book of Books. Instead of only placing hymnals in our pews a Bible Church needs to be just that—a Bible Church. If we used Bibles in church to locate epistles, gospels, and sermon text by page number it may provide familiarity and promote Bible searching at home. Have you examined your school library for proper Biblical material? Those books go home too.

Do you have a time in the week for hymn and hymnal study? Ask the pastor for Sunday’s hymns. Sing them on Friday. Explain hard words. Show the sermons in hymns. Pick your singing selections for use in church carefully. Plan ahead so your singing edifies both students and hearers. We have begun holding an elderly communion service in our congregation every other month. Last time we planned a time of sharing between 6 year olds and 96 year olds. It made quite an impression on both groups. The children then sang from the chancel steps to the wheelchairs directly in front of them. A few tears were shed. Let them sing “I Am Jesus’ Little Lamb” at a funeral.

Ask the pastor for Sunday’s sermon or at least an outline of it. Teach it to your students. Tell them what to listen for on Sunday. Send notes home for family discussion. Involve Mom and Dad in a study of God’s Word. Monday devotions can use Sunday worship profitably. Suggest publishing sermon notes in the bulletin.

Students memorize passages for use later in life, what about teachers? Is it allowable to hide behind the introduction of a new Bible translation to excuse lack of effort? Do the words of

our eternal Savior merit something less than *ultimum* diligence? We encourage students to memorize multiples of passages because they will not be carrying catechisms or Bibles around with them the rest of their days. Neither will we. Memorize!

The Word of God is still primary. Study! Read! Pray! Study! Your presence should be a foregone conclusion in the Bible. If we must get our people into the Word of God to place them under God's influence, it begins with us. Faculty meetings without a study of God's Word with appropriate application to the classroom lacks purpose in a Christian school. No one should have to invite you to the congregation's Bible Class. You will want to be there to avoid giving the devil any room to dull your enthusiasm for Jesus. Don't be afraid to speak up. You may even offer to lead a study now and then during the year.

When a pastor makes a hospital or shut-in call, the hearers expect a sharing of Jesus to take place, prayer to follow, and comfort to be dispensed. Most pastors will point to this part of their ministry as one of the most enjoyable and uplifting. If parents visiting school or teachers visiting homes could share Christ under similar circumstances, what a delightful God-pleasing relationship it would be. Religion would no longer be sterilized as an isolated disease but be regarded as a necessary daily vitamin. Work at it.

To foster an awareness of the multi-faceted ministry of the church to the soul, students must be aware of their teacher in the ministry of the church. Select another area of service besides your classroom. Help with Sunday School. Assist with Vacation Bible School. Sing in choir. Show up on the work day to paint your classroom. Stick around after church and visit with students and parents. Be there during the summer. Prepare at school for next year. Don't spread yourself too thin but do something other than teach. You are a member of the Body of Christ.

Prayer is important to a healthy Christian life. The Lord's Prayer and a few selected memorized prayers are not the sum total of our prayer life. Encourage *ex corde* prayer in your classroom. Pray for sick relatives of the students. Send cards. Promote thoughtfulness toward others. Those actions will automatically carry over to the home.

The church members of tomorrow must leave the classrooms of today equipped to minister, to evangelize, to tell God's Good News. The concept of show and tell was not conceived in nursery class. It's Biblical. God shows us the way of salvation in Christ apart from the deeds of the law and asks a life of telling in return. Children need to leave school wanting to tell about Jesus as much as they want to tell about coloring pictures, math grades, and dissecting frogs. You plan to send papers home for review by parents. Prepare and plan to send Jesus home in the hearts of your students to love those at home.

School must not become an isolated event apart from the real world of Christian living. Church, School, and Home must coordinate and compliment each other. One helps the other. "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." (I Cor. 12:26) Extending Christian morals beyond the classroom requires all the cylinders of the Christian motor to be operating smoothly.

Comments have been made to indicate some areas where improvements can be made. Hopefully they will be accepted in the spirit of helpfulness they were intended. Questions for discussion to further stimulate dialogue follow.

Discussion Questions

1. Church or School should provide some sort of support group or counseling program to children from broken homes?
2. Children from broken homes should be given special privileges when it comes to homework?
3. Children from live-in situations, member or not, should not be in our school?
4. Tuition students should be limited to maintain proper control of Christian morality?
5. Working mothers (Titus 2:3-5) should stay home to improve conditions for their children at home and school?
6. I approve of taking church attendance for school children?
7. The taking of church attendance should include the parents as well?
8. Recording church attendance is legalism and confuses law and gospel motivation?
9. Children should be required to be present when their class sings in church?
10. All disciplinary action at school should be transmitted immediately to the home?
11. All family problems involving students should be directed to the pastor?
12. The best way to handle a parent who displays a poor example of Christian morality to their child would be what course of action?
13. What can we do to encourage Christian morality in the area of extracurricular activities, especially sports?
14. A school dress code helps or hinders Christian morality beyond the classroom?
15. How do you draw the fine line between Christian liberty and legalism?

Prayer: Lord, preserve the lambs of Your flock that none be lost by our insincere or incomplete efforts to promote Christ like morality beyond our classrooms. Cause us to live and teach to Your glory. Amen.