

TWO TIMOTHY TWO:TWO

"And what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

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PREFACE

Very shortly, after becoming a Christian, I heard an impassioned sermon on Titus 2:14, "...who (Jesus Christ) gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." The preacher spent the bulk of his sermon on the latter part of the verse. He painted a beautiful, eloquent word picture of what a marvelous and loving group of people Christians were. I remember thinking how lucky I was to be a part of such a group, and I eagerly began looking for the people described by the minister. I did not find them. I didn't realize it at the time, but my juvenile disappointment was the beginning of a hypercritical attitude towards the organized church and its leaders. I sincerely believed their leadership was not producing the kind of people the pages of Scripture had led me to expect.

Years later, as a teacher of religion in a large Lutheran high school, it came as a shock to realize that I was a part of that establishment and was faring little better than those I was so critical of. The students we were graduating were, for the most part, academically well-rounded and socially well-adjusted young men and women we could be proud of. However, spiritually they were neither as knowledgeable about God and His Word as they needed to be for their own good nor as loving towards one another as even they would have liked to be. Somehow we were failing our students. It would have been convenient to believe that they were failing us, but conscience and reason dictated otherwise.

I thank my God on a regular basis for bringing me, in His own inimitable way, to a school where the administration was sensitive to this problem and make it their number one priority and for surrounding me with loving and supportive co-workers. In short, I found myself among the very kind of people I so much longed to be a part of when I first became a Christian. In an environment like this, it was not too difficult to sit down and with prayer, planning, and trial and error to search for a better way. What we have come up with is neither new nor revolutionary but rather a back-to-basics approach educators always fall back on when the learning process breaks down. By no means do we feel that we have all the answers; but what we are now doing is working, even though sometimes we are not sure why.

Our back-to-basics of course was Scripture and as we prayed and searched through the Word for our answers, two things began to emerge. One was the tremendous emphasis upon the Holy Ghost as the prime mover in spiritual growth and that His only teaching tool was the Word. We found that we were assuming too much of the responsibility for the growth of our students and not trusting enough in the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, to restore the flagging interests of our students, we were too often resorting to texts and materials outside of Scripture. We were unintentionally but effectively limiting God by taking the tool of the Spirit out of the hands of our students. Our first order of business was to have greater faith in the Spirit and to do His work and to learn how to stay out of His way without becoming

foolishly charismatic. We also needed to agree that our only classroom text would be the Bible.

The second thing to capture our attention was an objective. During the course of our self-studies over the years, our religion department had developed many goals and objectives. All of them were biblical, God-pleasing ideals. For the most part, however, they were difficult to measure and there was serious question as to whether we were meeting even some of them.

Two verses in Scripture gradually impressed themselves upon us to such an extent that they subsequently became the basis for our whole approach to teaching religion. They are 2 Timothy 2:2, "and what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also," and Hebrews 5:12, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of God's word. You need milk, not solid food." It seemed apparent to us that the teachers in the early church expected their students to grow to a point spiritually and intellectually where they became active participants in the discipling process. What an exciting objective to teach others to teach others. Exciting yes, but two questions arose. First, was it pragmatic, would it work with high school students? Second, could we justify making it our sole objective?

The answer to the first question was an unqualified yes. The parochial high school is a unique and unprecedented opportunity. For the four years immediately preceding their age of majority, young and active minds are exposed to the pure Word of God on a daily basis, not just in religion classes but also in every aspect of the educational process. In many cases, a religion teacher will have more opportunities to share the Word of God with individuals than their respective pastors will have in a lifetime. To complete the picture, you have an entire faculty serving as role models for the very principles of Scripture you are teaching.

The second question is a bit misleading. Equipping students to be teachers is not our only objective. We have not thrown out all of our other goals, which are admittedly good. However, we have found that teaching to teach is the simplest, quickest, and most effective method of achieving all other goals. Once the student is aware of your objective and becomes a willing participant, exciting and fascinating things begin to happen.

How these things happen would be simpler to explain if they just involved pedagogical technique, but they don't. They occur as a result of a delicate and often indefinable interplay between the Holy Spirit, the teacher, and the student, working together in the Word of God. What I wish to share in this report are some of the things, which we have found profitable as well as some of the false starts and dead ends. It is our prayer that this report will be of some value to others who are, as we, searching for a better way.

THE SPIRIT

In any discussion concerning the effective teaching of the Word of God, it is absolutely essential to begin at the beginning -- with the Holy Ghost. The night before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth." (John 16:13) The teacher of the Word must be confident that the Spirit will do just that, guide him into all truth. This does not happen in some vague and undisciplined way. It happens by sitting down with the Word of God and permitting the Spirit to teach you the deep things of God in a highly personalized way.

At the risk of stating the obvious, this preparation is the key. This is the edge the teacher of religion has over all other types of teaching -- to be equipped for and daily assisted in his work by the Holy Ghost Himself. The primary use of Scripture is personal growth; the proper and effective use of one's gifts will follow quite automatically. One of the hazards of the ministry is to become so preoccupied with serving Him that we do not provide the time for the Lord to service us. This is referred to as the barrenness of a busy life. Jesus Himself often found it necessary to get away from the crowds and His disciples and be ministered to by the Father.

Confidence

I have begun at this point for three reasons. The first is confidence. Teaching the precepts of God to His lambs can be an intimidating experience. It is quite common for a young teacher to have great confidence in his ability to coach an athletic team or teach an academic subject and yet, be very insecure about being able to teach religion effectively. It is necessary to have total and absolute confidence in the power of God to work in and through you. The last thing Jesus said to His disciples before His ascension was, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem and Judea." (Acts 1:8) The Greek word for power is *dunamis*, from which we derive the words dynamic and dynamite. To heed the command of the Lord to be a witness without trusting in His promise to provide the dynamics is self-defeating. Our power source is the Holy Ghost working in and through the Word. It is a great relief to realize that the responsibility for equipping the saints is not ours but the Spirit's and that as we dwell in the Word, we are empowered to be effective tools of the Spirit. This is confidence building; this is dynamite. And anyone who thinks that dynamite is boring or ineffective has simply not experienced its power.

Experience

The second reason for beginning with the Spirit is experience. As we experience the power of the Holy Ghost to equip us personally through the Word, we begin to understand how true spiritual growth occurs; and through this understanding we gain insights into how best to prepare others to experience this growth. As a

convert to Christianity, I found myself very dependent upon others to tell me what it was all about. I found the Bible difficult to understand and the complexities of church doctrine beyond my meager capacity to comprehend. Even as my knowledge expanded and my gifts began to emerge, I found myself caught in a pattern of dependency. I read extensively what others had written about God's Word and listened attentively to gifted men expound upon it and thought I was equipped to teach. I was wrong; I had great knowledge of God's Word but little experience in it, a subtle but dramatic difference. I was teaching what I had been taught, as I had been taught just as others had been taught; and it wasn't coming out as good news, but more like the old news that it was. Sheer frustration compelled me to set aside all my commentaries, tapes, and various other dependencies I had acquired. Like a child deprived of his security blanket -- half in anger, half in fear -- I sat down, opened the Word, and said, "All right, you tell me what to say." Even though this was a step taken more out of frustration than faith, the Lord provided. I began to experience firsthand the relevancies and insight's the Lord has prepared for us. No more attention-getting techniques, no more gimmicks, no more second-hand teaching. The pure Word of God excited me, and this excitement communicated itself in the classroom.

It was interesting for me to note that the content of my teaching had not changed, only my effectiveness. There was nothing wrong or lacking in my training -- I had been exposed to the writing and thoughts of the finest minds the church had produced. All that had changed was that I now depended upon the Holy Spirit first and my training second. Fortunately for me at least, this requires no great wisdom, only a little patience. As I gradually learned to trust the Spirit to synthesize and coordinate my training and experiences through the Word, I began to experience firsthand what Jesus told His disciples in Luke 12:12: "For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what you ought to say." Recently, after an extemporaneous talk, someone said to me, "You think well on your feet." I am ashamed to admit that I did not correct him. I wasn't thinking as much as I was trusting.

It is important to emphasize at this point that I have not suggested that we eliminate all teaching aids and techniques nor that we ignore twenty centuries of church thinking and tradition. The training and background are indispensable; however, there is a point in the life of every Christian at which he must be able to go one-on-one with the Holy Spirit in Scripture, independent of the thinking of other men. John anticipated this point when he wrote, "But the anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him." (1 John 2:27) The Greek word translated in this passage as anointing is *chrisma*. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament describes the use of *chrisma* in 1 John 2:20 and 27 this way: "Xpisma is used of the gift of the Holy Spirit, as the efficient aid in getting a knowledge of the truth." Every teacher of the Word must be aware of and living in this anointing. It is much like learning to fly.

Trying to fly an airplane without proper training is irresponsible and dangerous. Trying to teach religion either to oneself or to others without first being exposed to the wisdom, example, and teaching of others is equally hazardous. Learning how to teach, like learning how to fly, is relatively simple. When you, as a beginner, are at the controls of an airplane at five thousand feet, it is a great comfort to know that there is an experienced teacher sitting next to you; and if you make a mistake or get confused, he will take over the controls and get you down safely. But somewhere along the line you have to solo. You have to break the dependency upon the human instructor and fly, just you and the plane. Then and only then can you experience the thrill and the freedom of flying. I admit the analogy is a bit lame. The Holy Spirit is more than an airplane and we are less than pilots in God's Word; nevertheless, the principle is the same. The teacher must learn firsthand (soloing) what the Holy Ghost has to teach him personally in the Word. He must learn that teachers of the Word are not mass-produced but individually formed, shaped, and directed by God Himself. Until you have had this experience, you are not a teacher, just a trainee. For many Christians this experience is so dramatic and memorable that they confuse it with regeneration. When they refer to their born-again experiences they are really talking about that point in their lives when they graduated from walking to flying.

Trust

The third point under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is a natural product of the second. Having experienced the power of the Spirit in my own life, it is logical to trust that He can and will do the same in the lives of those I teach. As logical and simple as this sounds, it is a difficult step of faith to take. When Jesus complained about His disciples' lack of faith, it wasn't that they didn't believe He was the Son of God; they did. But they had difficulty comprehending or trusting the limitless power He had to effect marvelous change. When Jesus asked His disciples how they could feed five thousand people, they were right to assume that it could not be done by human means. They had neither enough food nor enough money. They were wrong to overlook His power, which they had experienced many times before. When we are faced with the task of equipping the saints, it is a mistake to rely first upon human resources, as appealing as they may seem. Having experienced the power of God in our own lives, we must trust the Spirit first and foremost to effect marvelous change in the lives of those we teach.

This third point, trusting the Holy Spirit to do the teaching, I have found to be both the most important and the most difficult step of all. It is important because without it there is no real lasting success; it is difficult because, first, there appears to be an aura of danger about it. If you just turn students loose in Scripture, aren't you opening the door to all kinds of misinterpretations and heresies? This is a strange fear indeed when we consider what Jesus promised in John 8:31-32: "Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'if you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'" True

discipleship, truth, and freedom -- next to salvation, what greater blessings could we wish for our students?

Second, trusting the Spirit to teach is difficult because it is so vague. What does it mean and how does it work? Since Scripture is silent on this point, other than telling us that the Holy Ghost is the teacher and the Word is His means, it seems pointless to try and define His role further. We, as teachers of the Word, however, can and must define our own role in this process. Our principal function is to lead the student into the Word so that the Holy Spirit can do the teaching. The teacher of religion is a pedagogue in the purest sense of the word. For Greek and Roman boys, the *paidagogos* was not their teacher so much as he was their guide and protector. He would take them to the teacher, sit with them, see that they paid attention, and then take them home again and help them with their homework.

The role of the religion teacher is identical. We lead the students to the Spirit and the Word, allow the Spirit to do His work, and then help the students understand what they are learning. We are the motivators and the facilitators; the Holy Spirit is the teacher. This truth is both the advantage and the handicap of the religion teacher. It is an advantage because it shifts the ultimate burden of responsibility from our shoulders to God's. It is a handicap because all of our training in education has taught us that we must be the teachers; we must be in control. It is difficult to resist the urge to take charge for the Holy Ghost in our classrooms. It is difficult to learn to get out of the Spirit's way and let Him work, and yet it is the very essence of teaching religion. It is trusting, the Spirit to do what only He can do.

Confidence in, experience with, and trust of the power of the Holy Spirit are the cornerstones for the effective use of the Word. Dynamic and successful teaching is a direct result of this dependent relationship with the Spirit. The classic example of this process is Paul's experience with the Corinthians. He explains his methodology in 1 Corinthians, Chapter 2:1-16:

“When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the, power of God.

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for

if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him,'

God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit, which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.

The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. 'For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him!' But we have the mind of Christ."

The apostle Paul was one of the most highly educated men of his day; however, he claims to have relied upon none of his considerable educational background in his work of converting the Corinthian Christians. In fact, he seems to have deliberately avoided using his oratorical skill and relied instead upon a simple proclamation of the Gospel. He explains that he did this so that they might see the power of the Holy Spirit at work and know that they had been convinced by the power of God and not by the cleverness of man.

Another point of interest and encouragement to the teacher of religion is found in Verse 2, where Paul says he was with them in weakness and with much fear and trembling. The immediate response is to wonder why Paul was in much fear and trembling. It is unlikely that Paul feared physical harm because God promised him that during Paul's year-and-a-half ministry among the Corinthians, no man would harm him (Acts 18:9-11). It is likely that the same things that intimidate us produced Paul's anxieties. When we read passages like James 3:1 -- "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness." -- it is only natural to wonder if we are in the right profession. When we compare our own weakness and unworthiness to the enormity of our calling, which is to feed God's people with wisdom and understanding (Jer. 3:15), fear and trembling are the only logical responses. In a sense the feelings of personal inadequacies may even be healthy if they compel us to do what Paul did -- that is to trust the Spirit to accomplish through us what no amount of human training could ever equip us to do.

It is equally encouraging for teachers to note that Paul did not always feel compelled to use spiritual baby talk. He says in Verse 6 that to those who were farther along in their spiritual growth, he would teach the deeper things of God. These profound insights into God's plans and will are, as Paul once again assures us, products of the Spirit's teaching, not man's thinking. In fact, he says in Verse 12 that one of the reasons for the presence of the in-dwelling Holy Spirit is that we may understand these truths that God so freely gives to those who love Him. Paul even goes so far as to make the astonishing claim that the Spirit-taught, spiritually mature man has insights into all things, that he has the power to discern the truth of not just spiritual matters, but in all things (Verse 15). Paul's explanation for that startling statement is the simple sentence that ends the paragraph, "But we have the mind of Christ." We could wish that Paul had expanded upon that statement, but perhaps it's best he did not. Perhaps it is best just to accept it for what it is -- a simple statement of fact. We have possession of and access to the mind that planned, created, and redeemed the universe. God has entrusted us with awesome potential if we have the wit to trust the Spirit.

THE TEACHER

We live in an age where academicians of foresight share some justifiable concerns about eventually being replaced by Computers. Indeed, computer technologists steadfastly maintain that by the year 2000 teaching machines will be doing the job of the classroom teacher more efficiently and more economically than can be done by humans. Whether this claim is future fact or science fiction, the teacher of the Word of God can stand secure in the knowledge that he has job security. He is irreplaceable for the simple reason that God chose human beings to be the means by which He purveys His life-giving plan of salvation. If I were even tempted to question the wisdom of God, it would be on this point. How could God entrust something of such eternal consequence to someone so flawed and incompetent as sinful man? But the fact is that He did; and since He did, it behooves us to look carefully at what makes the teacher of religion unique and indispensable in God's grand scheme.

Taught by Christ

In Acts 4 we see the religious leaders of Israel in a state of shock over the alarming numbers of people that the disciples were converting to a belief in Christ. In a matter of mere days, the Church in Jerusalem had swelled to over 5,000 strong; consequently, the authorities apprehended Peter and John and asked them to explain by what authority they were doing these things. Peter gives a brief courageous defense, which produced a remarkable response among their detractors. Verse 13 says, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they wondered; and they recognized that they had been with Jesus." Even the enemies of the Church recognized that being taught by Jesus was the key to transforming otherwise unpolished and ordinary men into effective and confident communicators of His Gospel.

For three years the main thrust of Christ's time and energy had been to equip the disciples to be the agents through which He would found His Church. He was remarkably successful with them. It seems obvious that anyone who would be a teacher for Christ must first allow Christ to be a teacher for him. In Acts 1, when the Apostles were attempting to fill the spot vacated by Judas, Peter determined that it had to be someone who was with them from the beginning, from the baptism to the ascension. Peter understood the importance of having Christ as a teacher. Is it possible for us to have the same first-hand advantage the disciples had? I believe that in a very real sense we can; otherwise, the Lord would appear to be uncharacteristically shortsighted in planning for the care of His Church. Through the Gospel accounts, we can sit at His feet, listen to His teaching, take His tests, and learn from His rebukes.

This process involves a bit more than a one-semester course in the life of Christ or a casual reading of the Gospels. It involves being so acquainted with the

details of Christ's life that you have lived it, not just read it. It involves being brought by the Spirit to such a degree of intimacy with the Lord Jesus that He says, "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends." (John 15:15) Friendship involves a minimum of two people. It is one thing to have a friend in Jesus; it is quite another thing to be a friend to Jesus. It is no small thing to boast that Jesus is my personal Savior; however, the question must be answered, "Am I on equally intimate terms with Him?" Being taught by the Lord Jesus is hearing what is said by and about Him as if we were hearing it for the first time. It is responding to what is said, as did those who were hearing it for the first time. It is building a rapport between the disciple and Christ that grows into true friendship. This all results in the words of Jesus, in our knowing what He is doing, which in turn results in our knowing what we are doing.

Full of the Holy Ghost

It is interesting to note that the early Church seemed to have only three criteria for selecting workers. In Acts 6 we read of the first reported problem in the Christian Church. It was a welfare problem, and the apostles responded to it by delegating their authority, saying, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the Word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty." (Acts 6:2-3) The Church has always demanded good character in its workers and it has built institutions for training them, praying that this training will produce wisdom. Being full of the Holy Spirit, however, seems to be so subjective a method of determining one's readiness to serve in the Church that we shy away from using it; furthermore, the very ambiguity of the phrase can and too frequently does lend itself to a form of legalistic sign seeking that both alarms and threatens the organized Church.

Since there is so much controversy about the filling by the Holy Spirit and when and how it occurs, it would seem both pointless and presumptions for me to attempt to unscrew the inscrutable. For our purpose, however, which is to provide for our children teachers who are apt to teach, it seems dangerously irresponsible to ignore the very characteristic, which the early Church found to be of primary importance. Can we discern whether someone is filled with the Holy Spirit to such an extent that he is equipped to be a teacher of God's people? The disciples seemed to consider the question so elemental that they simply said, "Do it," and didn't feel it necessary to tell us how. To be faithful to their example and directive, we must have an answer, if not the answer, to the question, "How can we discern whether a candidate for teaching the Word is full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom?"

Perhaps the simplest interpretation the Acts 6:3 text will bear is to assume that the disciples intended the phrase "full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" to be one characteristic rather than two separate and distinct ones. I do not wish to imply here that if one is full of the Holy Spirit, he is automatically full of wisdom, too. It is possible to be spirit filled and not have wisdom; it is not possible, however, to have wisdom without first being filled with the Holy Ghost. For the sake of semantics, it should be stated here that the wisdom I am speaking of is that which Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 2:13: "And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit."

Since it seems evident in Scripture that being full of both the Holy Spirit and wisdom involves a process, it would seem wise to try to understand the mechanics behind this development. As a writer I recognize, as I pray the reader will, the dangers implicit in trying to systematize spiritual truths that can only be taught by the Spirit. This thought is offered by way of apology to those who will disagree with or be confused by what follows.

The Process

Receiving the Holy Spirit and being filled by Him are two different things. Receiving the Holy Spirit, as we do in baptism, takes no time at all; and the mechanics by which God performs this lifesaving miracle are totally obscured in Scripture. Jesus implies to Nicodemus that we could not understand it even if we were told. Being filled with the Spirit, however, seems to be a cumulative rather than an instantaneous process. The length of time involved may range from a relatively short period of time to many years. Everybody is full of something, be it self, occupation, family, and sports, ad infinitum. The number of preoccupations that can possess the human soul seems inexhaustible. In God's economy it is necessary to be emptied of whatever we are filled with in order to be filled by Him with the Holy Spirit. This involves a conscious, systematic commitment of every facet of a Christian's life to the lordship of Christ and the leadership of the Spirit. It is a sad reality that this process is never completed in the lives of many Christians; it is tragic and pernicious when it is lacking in Christian teachers.

The question still remains, "Is this fullness of the Spirit discernable?" The answer is yes; not only is it discernable, it is like most truths in Scripture -- simple enough to make us uncomfortable using it. In fact, very little discernment is required. It is the nature of a human being, when pressed into conversation, to turn the dialog as rapidly as possible to whatever it is that fills or preoccupies him. An individual full of the Holy Spirit is that "city set on a hill that cannot be hid." (Matthew 5:14) In order to produce steam, three ingredients are necessary -- a container, water, and applied heat. If we can picture the individual as a teakettle, the Word of God as water, and the Holy Ghost as applied heat, we can then see that the inevitable result must be visible energy. There is no other process by which flawed mortals can generate the energy to light up the world.

Full of Wisdom

As in the case of the Spirit, the filling of wisdom is a cumulative process. It begins with the acquiring of knowledge -- not knowledge in general, but a complete and comprehensive knowledge of the Word of God. There are no shortcuts or alternate routes for us to take. God is quite adamant on this point. In his second letter, Peter brings the importance of knowledge into sharp focus. In Chapter 1, Verse 2, he tells us that grace and peace are multiplied in us through "the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord." In Verse 3 he says that God provides everything that pertains to life and godliness "through the knowledge of him that has called us to glory and virtue"; and in Verse 8 he tells us that our productivity, our usefulness rest upon the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The adage "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing" is, perhaps, never truer than in the case of an under-informed Christian, as in the example of Simon the sorcerer in Acts 9:9-24. Philip converted Simon; he believed, was baptized, stopped practicing sorcery, and became a diligent student of Philip. But when he saw the

power and effectiveness of the Apostles, he wanted what they possessed without paying their dues. He offered to buy with money that which Jesus says can only be obtained by continuing in His Word. (John 8:31,32) Simon was severely censured by Peter, and we hear no more of him. Simon has many spiritual ancestors around today. The Christian who looks for shortcuts to sanctification is condemning himself to a life of defeat, for there are none. In His high priestly prayers in John 17:17, Jesus says to the Father "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

Solomon said, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." That will serve to get us into the Word. The acquiring of knowledge is a prerequisite for wisdom, but it is no guarantee. It is possible to be knowledgeable in the Word of God and still not be full of wisdom. The night before His crucifixion, Jesus said to His disciples, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. How be it when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth." (John 16:12-13) The disciples had knowledge. They had three years of training from the Lord Jesus Himself, but they were still lacking the wisdom to understand the deeper truths of God. Consequently, we do not see the disciples immediately rushing out to obey the Lord's command, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." Recognizing that they were not yet fully equipped to do what they had been commissioned to do, they followed the only course of action open to them. In the interim between Ascension and Pentecost we see the disciples gathered together in the upper room, praying. "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." (Acts 1:14)

How do we become filled with wisdom? Again, the answer provided in Scripture seems almost too simple to be useful for general application. You ask for it. The formula for acquiring wisdom is completed for us in James 1:5,6: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." Notice the phrases "if any of you" and "give to all men." This is a process that will work for all of God's people, not just a spiritual elite. Why is it then that wisdom does not seem all that prevalent among Christians? Perhaps the answer is the one James gives to the early Church in Chapter 4:2, "You have not, because you ask not."

Apt To Teach

The principles discussed thus far apply to all Christians, not just to the professional teacher. There is a general and often repeated directive in Scripture for all Christians to be knowledgeable in the Word and to communicate this knowledge freely, Paul tells the Colossians in Chapter 3:16, 'let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.' Peter tells us that we are to be ready at all times to give an answer to everyone who asks us the reason for our hope. (1 Peter 3:15) And the writer of Hebrews chides the Church for having to be repeatedly taught the A B C's of Christianity at a time when they ought to be teaching others. (Hebrews 5:12)

It is clear that teaching the Word whenever the opportunity arises is the avocation of every Christian. It is equally clear that teaching, as a vocation is not for everyone. Paul, in explaining the diversity of gifts to the Corinthians, asks the rhetorical questions, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?" (1 Corinthians 12:29) And James says that not many of us should be teachers. (James 3:1) Besides being Spirit- and wisdom-filled, the full-time teacher of God's Word must have the gift of teaching he must be apt to teach. (1 Timothy 3:2)

The ability to divide and impart correctly the Word of God is a gift. It is not learned or acquired through practice; God gives it for the express purpose of producing spiritual maturity among His saints. Anyone desiring to be a teacher of religion must be sensitive to Jesus' words, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." (John 15:16) Among the original twelve disciples, there are only two whom we know had the gift of teaching -- Peter and John. The seven men chosen by the Church for administrative work in Acts, Chapter 6 were full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom; but we see only two exercising the gift of teaching -- Stephen and Philip. The spiritual gifts are given to individuals for the edification of the church. To try to work in any given area without the specific gift is not only frustrating but also deleterious to the cause. It is imperative for the health and well being of the Church that individuals be cognizant of their gifts. It is equally important for churches and schools to be sure that the people they choose to minister the Word have been equipped by God to do what they are asked to do.

The proper use of gifts has always been a problem for the Church. It was a source of great conflict and division for the Corinthian church and continues to be in many churches today. Perhaps the simplest way to identify the presence of a gift is to describe it as a pressure. Using the teakettle analogy once again -- when a container is filled with water and heat is applied, steam must be produced. When an individual is filled with the Word and the Spirit turns up the heat, pressure is produced. A gift is -- if you will an overfilling. It must have an outlet. A gift in a Spirit-filled man will produce a pressure that will not allow him to be content until the pressure finds a release. Paul describes this pressure in 1 Corinthians 9:16: "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" To paraphrase Paul's words in Romans 12:6-8, if you have the pressure to preach, then preach; to minister, then minister; to teach, then teach; to encourage, then encourage; to give, then give; to administer, then administer. Every Christian has at least one unique gift from God that will enable him should he choose to exercise it -- to be a special blessing to the Church.

One who has the gift of teaching and is equipped by the Spirit to the point that he is apt to teach will quickly become visible to any and all interested observers. God has a marvelous way of bringing together searching souls and willing workers. A good example of this is the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10. Cornelius was a devout Gentile who was doing all the right things but was sadly lacking in

knowledge. Peter was uniquely equipped by God to fill Cornelius's need. God brought the two together, and the Church was enlarged. The organized Church is not always ready to accept the authority of these God-gifted men to do what they are doing. The Church at Jerusalem had strong reservations about the rightness of Peter's activities with Cornelius and called him to task. (Acts 11) Even Jesus was asked, "By what authority do you do these things?" and "Who gave you this authority to do these things?" (Mark 11:28) But with or without recognized authority, one who had the gift of teaching will teach, and his teaching will bear fruit.

One further thought on the gifts. It is possible to spend a great deal of time, effort and money in training for an area of service for which we have not been gifted. I believe there are many such misplaced souls, like Martha, trying hard to serve but frustrated because they are serving in the wrong place or in the wrong way. It is obvious that the gifts need to be identified as quickly as possible. As the Church is structured today, it would seem that the best place to do this is in the parochial school. If identifying gifts is or becomes a primary goal of Christian education, then the parochial school becomes a necessity. If not, then perhaps it is a luxury the Church will not long be able to afford.

THE RESPONSIBILITY

The religion classroom can be the most frustrating of all worlds. With rare exceptions, religion teachers I have known have been deeply committed highly concerned individuals. Far too many of them have also been discouraged and frustrated. Some of them labor under a crushing burden of self-defeat; some quit; and a few, perhaps quite a few, resort to self-deception. When our best efforts produce few visible effects, strange things begin to happen to attitude. I remember one very gifted minister of the Gospel giving this advice to a group of teachers: "In the ministry you must keep your eye on the shepherd and not on the sheep or you will go crazy." Properly understood, this is sound advice; however, it can easily become an admission of defeat. It is difficult for a shepherd to feed and protect his flock if he is not keeping an eye on them. However, if the wolves are devouring your lambs and you can't stop them, it is more comfortable not to watch it happening.

As a teacher, I understand how this can occur. If you are boring your class to tears, if they are falling asleep or studying for a biology exam, you can fool yourself into thinking they are attentive if you just don't look at them. Given practice and the infinite capacity of the human mind for self-deception, we can develop a form of blindness that allows us to believe we are doing our jobs well in spite of all evidence to the contrary. God, however, takes a very dim view of this. He goads us with His Word. He afflicts us with that feeling of restlessness and vague discontent that will not let us get too comfortable. He compels us to look at the kind of leadership He has promised His people and to assume the responsibility to measure up.

In Jeremiah 3:15 He said, "I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding." God promised His people to provide them with teachers who will impart wisdom and understanding. He promised that they will be men after His own heart -- that is, teachers who know His will and are willing to do His business, His way. Quite obviously, God expects to keep that promise. He expects a body of believers who will grow to the level of knowledge and understanding on a par with their teachers. The Lord goes on to say in Jeremiah 3:16-19 that He will pour out remarkable blessings on a people taught in this fashion. Spiritual growth is the key with which He unlocks the windows of heaven. God expects His teachers to be the catalyst by which He pours out the abundant life upon His people.

The importance of a body of believers transforming from the taught into the teachers is emphasized in Hebrews 5:11-6:1: "We have much to say which is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of God's word. You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for

those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.
Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity."

THE PROBLEM

God expects His people to grow into spiritual adulthood. Spiritual immaturity has always been and still is their major cause for concern in the Church. The writer of Hebrews complains of immaturity, as does Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians 3:1-3: "But I, Brethren, could not- address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men?" There were many problems in Paul's church at Corinth, ranging from gross immorality to schisms, but they were only symptoms. The disease raging through the Corinthian church, as in the Church today, was spiritual immaturity.

Since many Christians are unclear about this point, let's pause for a moment to examine the make-up of a Christian. Natural man is a bipartite being, body and soul. He is born spiritually dead, with a body that will die and a mind that will not. That is the tragedy of mankind -- an immortal mind condemned to an eternal separation from light and truth and love. The Christian, on the other hand, is a tripartite being -- body, soul, and spirit: "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23) Paul places the three parts of our being in their correct order of importance -- spirit first, body last. We have a tendency to reverse them.

At whatever point in life we become Christians, God gives us a living spirit, which sets us apart from all the rest of mankind. Exactly how God does this is both the mystery and the essence of Christianity. But Jesus told Nicodemus that unless this second birth occurs, there is no entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Our spirit is the workshop of the Holy Ghost. It is here that occur all of our knowledge of God and growth (Romans 8:16, 1 Corinthians 2:10-16), all communion with God (1 Corinthians 14:14), all service to Him (Romans 1:9).

It is important to notice that the spirit is not given to us full grown. It must grow to maturity in much the same fashion, as do the mind and the body. Like the mind and the body, it must be fed to attain full growth. This full growth is referred to in Scripture as perfection: "Let us go unto perfection" (Hebrews 6:1); "a perfect man." (Ephesians 4:13) Through the media, we are all familiar with the pathetic pictures of starving children. We are appalled at their bloated bellies, their skeletal limbs twisted by malnutrition, and their large accusing eyes. Consider for a moment what God's feelings must be as He views His people with well-fed, well-groomed bodies, educated, alert minds, and starving spirits. How we must distress our God as He sees our willingness to feed, clothe, exercise, sanitize, and deodorize our bodies, which must die, and our reluctance to give at least equal time to our spirits, which are our passports to eternal life.

Many are willing to spend a significant portion of their lives educating their minds (souls) to succeed in this life while spiritually they go bankrupt. Spirit, mind, and body must grow to maturity at an equal rate. There must be at least parity between spirit and body. According to Paul (Romans 8:1-16), our souls are controlled either by God through our spirit or by Satan through our flesh. Our bodies are not our friends. To walk after the flesh is death; to walk after the spirit is peace and life. So there is a war going on within us for control of our lifestyle. To harbor an underfed, infantile spirit in an adult, X-rated body is an incredibly dangerous way to live.

To a church comprised primarily of spiritual infants, the consequences are devastating. Since the Word of God is the food of the spirit and the only tool the Holy Spirit uses to do His work, how it is served is the key factor in the wellbeing of the individual and the church. Babies, of course, need baby food; it is all they can digest. But pabulum and strained carrots are not very tasty. I often wondered why our children took such delight in spitting the baby food back at us as my wife or I fed them. One day I tasted the pabulum, and I understood completely. If, as adults, we were still living on baby food, we wouldn't much enjoy coming to the table, regardless of how beautifully it was set. Baby food is fine to begin with, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby:" (1 Peter 2:2); but we have to get to the meat of Scripture before it becomes really tasty. If we continue to spoon-feed spiritual pabulum and predigested theology to our charges, is it any wonder that they lose their appetite?

We are beginning to hear more and more about an illness called anorexia nervosa. It afflicts primarily young women who, for reasons real or imagined, see themselves as overweight. They begin to curtail their food intake and gradually not only lose their taste for food but also develop an aversion to it. Even though they become walking skeletons, when they look in a mirror they still see themselves as overweight. Left untreated, they die of malnutrition. I find an alarming number of Christians, particularly among the young, who are suffering from a form of spiritual anorexia. Even though they are subsisting on the barest minimum of food for survival, they feel they have had religion up to the gag limit. They find religion distasteful and boring. Left to their own initiative and without constant prodding, they gradually and inexorably starve themselves into spiritual death.

This analogy may sound like a melodramatic overstatement to some but not to a concerned teacher of God's Word. It is small comfort to know that God has forewarned us of this danger. In Revelation 10:8-11, the Lord uses a dramatic visual aid to illustrate this point to the apostle, John. Through an angel, God gives John His Word in the form of a little book and tells him to eat it. Verse 9 says, "And I went unto the angel and said unto him, 'Give me the little book.' And he said unto me, take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey." We find virtually the same picture in Jeremiah 15:15-18 and in Ezekiel 3:1-15. Notice that the phrase "little book" is stressed. The Bible may

seem forbiddingly large and difficult to digest; this is a satanic deception. In reality, one tough college literature course expects us to read and digest more information than is found in all of Scripture. A comprehensive manual on automobile repair is larger than the Bible. As we read and digest God's Word, we discover that it is indeed sweet on the tongue. As we attempt to share this sweetness with others, we all too often discover also the bitterness in the belly. Even so, we cannot shrug our evangelical shoulders and say, "oh, well, that's the way it goes; even God says so" especially in the light of James 3:1. Satan knows far better than we how devastating it is when God's children do not taste the goodness of God's Word. I suspect He spends far more time creating this problem than we do trying to solve it.

The similarity between physical growth and spiritual growth can be very useful in demonstrating the disparity between what the majority of God's people are and what He expects them to be. For example, all babies look pretty much alike when they are born. It is impossible to match up a newborn baby with its parents by appearance; but as the child grows, the genes of the parents begin to assert themselves, and it begins to look like one of the family. Likewise, when a natural man is born again and, spiritually speaking, inherits a full complement of divine genes, at first he does not appear all that different from those who are not regenerated. But as the Word of God feeds him, he gradually begins to develop the characteristics of the Father. This process is called sanctification. It can occur no other way than by growing through the Word. Jesus' prayer for us in John 17:17 is "Sanctify them in the truth, thy word is truth."

There is nothing wrong with spiritual babyhood. It is the beginning of eternal life. But spiritual retardation is quite another thing. Babies provide some of the greatest joys in life. We don't mind at all feeding them on one end and cleaning up on the other end; however, if we are still spoon-feeding and diapering them eighteen years later, the joy will have long since changed to frustration and bitterness. Out from under the watchful eye of a parent, a baby leads a very dangerous life. The simplest things can become life threatening -- an open stairway, the cleaning fluid under the sink, an electrical outlet, the street crossing. It is a great relief when they mature and can take care of themselves. A Christian who has matured in mind and body but remains a spiritual infant likewise walks in danger all the way. Paul urged the Ephesian Christians to grow "that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles." (4:14)

The first responsibility of Christian teachers is the same as that of parents -- to provide the nutrition, the environment, and the training that will produce intelligent adults who can act independently of them. In his first letter, John warns his flock about the testing of their faith. He says in Chapter 2:26-27, "I write this to you about those who would deceive you; but the anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that any man teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him." The statement "You have no need that any man teach you" is not written to

spiritual babies. It is the confidence a Christian teacher has in his students who have grown into a mature relationship with God and simply do not need him anymore. John refers to the Holy Spirit as their teacher and does not mention his own role in their education. If it appears that I am overstressing the human participation in spiritual growth and neglecting the work of the Spirit, it is because we know He does His work perfectly. If there is malpractice in the sanctifying processes, it is our fault, not God's. I believe a large part of that fault is that we as teachers too often actually hinder the work of the Spirit. Learning that I had to get out of the Spirit's way before anything decent happened was the single most important teaching technique I ever learned.

THE PROCESS

God expects His teachers to be the means by which He produces spiritual maturity in His Church. Ephesians 4:11-16 is the definitive statement of this expectation: "And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together, by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and up builds itself in Love." God gifts His servants for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of ministry.

It is absolutely essential that every Christian in every pew of every church, in every religion or Bible class understand that he or she is in training for the ministry. Each must realize that whatever one's occupation in life is, it is merely an avocation. Our real calling, our vocation, is the ministry, not necessarily the pulpit variety but ministry according to the gifts God has given us. Every Christian has at least one of these special gifts to be used for the benefit of the church. "For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophesy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness." (Romans 12:4-8)

Teaching To Teach

If God expects every Christian to become a full-participation member of the Church, it seems reasonable that we expect the same thing. A professor of medicine has every right to expect that his students realize they will someday be performing operations. If one has little interest in anatomy and doesn't know an appendix from an adenoid, his days as a medical student will be mercifully short. A teacher of religion has every right to expect that his students understand that they are in career education. Jesus Christ practiced what today is called "tough love." It is interesting that the Gospel records Jesus turning away more candidates than He accepts. It is no blessing to be admitted to the body of Christ without a clear understanding of what God considers a reasonable service (Romans 12:1). A bad doctor is a hazard only to life and limb; an ill-equipped Christian is a menace of more eternal consequence. Perhaps it is time for the Church to practice a little "tough love," to do a little

pruning of the dead wood. Certainly we must raise our level of expectation to meet that of God's.

One of the fascinating things about teaching is that, despite all of our limitations, students actually do learn. It is a unique kind of joy to watch a student's grasp of a subject grow to a point where he not only understands but can also explain it to others. A few years ago, one of my Latin teachers was ill for the entire second semester, and we were not able to find a replacement. I experimented with using fourth-year Latin students to teach first-year Latin. It was a humbling experience. Not only did they do well, they produced better results than I was accustomed to getting myself. They related better and had fewer discipline problems than you would expect from experienced teachers. An added bonus was that they learned more as teachers than they ever did as students. As a result of this experience, several of them went on to major in classics. This should come as no surprise to a teacher. It is our goal, our ideal, to produce students whose skills rival our own.

Indoctrination Versus Teaching

If growth can happen in the academic classroom, how much more shouldn't we expect in the religion classroom? The religion teacher has an advantage over all other teachers. He is not the teacher; the Holy Ghost is the educator. The human is merely a facilitator. God certainly has high expectations in this area. In Ephesians 4:13 He says our teaching is to produce this result: "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood." The organized Church feels very strongly about unity of faith. The main thrust of confirmation classes and of most other areas of teaching is that we know and accept (take on faith) what our particular Church teaches. Based on Scripture and not on tradition, this practice is fine; but too often it is as far as we go. We have members who have great faith in their Church but little real knowledge about Him upon whom the Church is founded.

We believe and teach, "The just shall live by faith." For a Christian, this is one of the most exciting themes in Scripture; however, we must remember that one's faith is only as valid as the object of his faith. Everyone lives by faith every day of his life. When we step into an airplane, we are exercising tremendous faith in both machine and pilot. If we should happen to overhear the pilot asking the stewardess how to start the engines, we would deplane posthaste. Faith without a valid object is easily shaken. Christian teachers are charged with the responsibility and gifted with the ability to develop students whose knowledge of the Son of God matches their own. A teacher's job is to make himself expendable. True spiritual adulthood requires a unity of both faith and knowledge. One final note on Verse 13 -- notice that God says "all," "until we all attain a unity of faith and knowledge." A Christian teacher who takes this seriously knows just how Noah felt when God said, "Build yourself an ark."

Verse 14 of Ephesians 4 gives us the first reason for all of this growing "So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine." Children are very dependent upon the adults in their world to tell them what the truth is. A child believes everything he is told, which makes him so susceptible to false teaching. If you tell a child often enough that grass is red and roses are green, he will have an awful time with traffic lights when he begins to drive. Since children do accept uncritically what we tell them, we frequently find it more convenient to indoctrinate them rather than to teach them. And with children indoctrination is often necessary because they are not yet able to understand why certain things are true. So we simply tell them what to believe. However, we should never confuse indoctrination with teaching. Indoctrination is to persuade one to accept uncritically what he is told is true. Teaching is showing one how to find the truth for himself. Indoctrination is as different from teaching as a photograph is from the real thing. A beautifully painted picture of a bowl of fruit is little comfort to a starving man.

Too often what passes for teaching in the classroom is in reality indoctrination -- first, because it is easier; second, and somewhat more nobly, since we know the truth, why not spare the learner the difficult and lengthy process of discovering it for himself. "Let me do your thinking for you" is a terrible attitude for a Christian teacher to have. It is, carrying the picture of the shepherd and his flock beyond what Christ intended. Saints are not sheep, and they don't arrive at the throne of God in flocks but as individuals. We can think for someone else, but we cannot believe for him. What has been programmed can be deprogrammed. What has been learned through personal experience with the Son of God in His Word can and will withstand the assaults of hell itself. Paul sets the example for all Christian teachers when he praises the Berean Christians. He called them more noble because they listened to what he had to say with "all readiness of mind" and then went home and searched the Scriptures daily to see if he was telling them the truth (Acts 17:11).

Truth and Love

Ephesians 4:15 gives us the second reason for spiritual growth -- "speaking the truth in love." Two little verbs in Scripture summarize a normal Christian life -- come and go. Jesus said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:2,8) Then He turns right around and says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20) Coming to Christ is the easy part because God does all the work. He attracts us to Christ; He provides the faith in Christ; and He justifies us through that faith.

It is the second verb that has produced so much difficulty within the Church. Go and make disciples. The King James says, "Go ye therefore and teach"; however, Matthew used the Greek verb for disciple. Go and do in all nations what Christ did in the twelve. Jesus gave the procedure for this discipling process. First you baptize,

and then you teach them to observe all that He has commanded. Again notice the word all. The Spanish explorers and conquerors first brought Christianity to the New World. One technique used for saving souls was to have the priests baptize large groups of Indians and then have the soldiers slaughter them before they could recant. A drastic method of avoiding the discipline process to be sure, but there are times when I wonder how much we have improved on it. In between the coming to Christ and the going to make disciples is the growing to maturity described in Ephesians 4:11-16. If there is no effective growing, there can be no effective going.

One sign of spiritual maturity is to speak the truth. What is truth? Jesus didn't answer Pilate's question, but He did tell His disciples how to find it. He said, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8:31-32) Jesus states it in the positive, but the negative is equally true. If you do not continue in my Word, you are not my disciples; you will not know the truth; you will not be free. There are no shortcuts to discipleship. We grow up into Him in all things only by continuing in His Word. Paul tells his disciple Timothy to "study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15) Two paragraphs later Paul again emphasizes the importance of Scripture to growth: "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17) Becoming a skilled workman is not easy, nor does it happen over night. Fortunately, Jesus tells us that we are not involved in this process alone. The night before His crucifixion, He told His Disciples, "When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth." (John 16:13) Spiritual maturity through the Word enables God's people both to know the truth and to go and speak the truth because they have it on the highest authority.

The second hallmark of spiritual maturity is love. The Greek word used for love in Ephesians 4:15 is *agape*. It is the love that God has for us and the love He gives us to share with each other. It is the ability to put someone else's best interest ahead of our own. It is the love all Christian teachers must have for those they teach. I have known teachers who had great knowledge and skill in the Word but little apparent love for their students. You can learn about God from those teachers, but you cannot see God in them. Likewise, there are many loving, well-meaning Christians who are embarrassingly ignorant about the Word of God. One who is apt to teach must deal both in truth and in love.

We see the final product, the totality of God's expectations, in Verse 16 of Ephesians 4. It is a unified body of believers, receiving its dynamics from Christ the head, with each individual member using the gifts God has provided for the mutual benefit and growth of the whole body. The medium by which this growth is accomplished, and the best measurement of how well we are using His gifts, is love. In 1 Timothy 1:3-7, Paul instructs Timothy to remain at Ephesus and straighten out certain teachers there who were confused about what and how they should be

teaching. He reminds Timothy that the purpose of their instruction is to produce love in those whom they teach. Paul's indictment of the Ephesian teachers stands as a warning for us all: "By swerving from these (teaching to produce love) they have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions." (1 Timothy 1:6-7) My purpose as a teacher of God's Word is to be the agent through whom the Spirit produces people who will be able to teach the truth in love to more people who will be able to teach the truth in love to even more people who will be able to teach the truth in love until teaching is no longer needed.

THE PRACTICE

There are three things we do in religious classes that seem to facilitate this desired result. The first and most important is to have no text other than the Bible in our religion classrooms. It is essential for the student to be in the tool of the Spirit in order to be taught by the Spirit to obtain the fruit of the Spirit. It really doesn't matter what you teach as long as it is in Scripture. By that I mean it is nice, and perhaps even desirable, to have a cohesive and established curriculum of religious education -- administrators and boards of education take much comfort in this -- but it is not necessary. There is a certain sense of security and order in knowing that in the second semester of every year all junior religion students will be studying Paul's letter to the Romans. But the reality of the matter is that the needs of an individual class at a specific time can rarely be met with an inflexible curriculum. Being open to the leadership of the Spirit and in persistent prayer to the Father for His will is the only effective method we have found of tailoring a curriculum to the needs of our students.

The second technique is student sharing. We ask all of our students to spend some time in front of the class sharing personal insights God has given them as they search the Scripture. This practice produces a number of lovely results. First, it gets them into the Word on their own time, not in a casual way but with the specific prayer and expectation that the Spirit will provide them with insights that are worth sharing and will make them blessings to their classmates and teachers. It is also very instrumental in providing a sense of unity and caring concern for one another. Since many of the sharings are highly personal, the students begin to gain understanding and to develop with one another rapport that is indispensable to the concept of one body in Christ. The teacher also benefits greatly from this opportunity to gain insights into his students that he might never have had otherwise. Furthermore, it is a remarkable experience for a teacher to be taught by his students. Just recently a senior boy came up with an exciting and, I think, inspired idea by connecting the mark of the beast in Revelation 13:18 with John 6:66, which I am going to steal and use unashamedly. Even for the shy and insecure, for which sharing is very difficult, there are blessings. They learn the truth of Jesus' words in Matthew 10:19-20: "But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what you shall speak for it shall be given you in that same hour what you shall speak. For it is not you that speak but the Spirit of your Father which speaks in you." They learn to trust the Spirit to do in and through them what they know they are not able to do themselves. Finally, it gives the students an opportunity to practice, in a friendly and familiar environment, doing what the Lord commands us all to do -- to confess Him before men.

The third technique is we ask our students to write to us. On a regular basis, approximately once a month, we take a class period and have our students tell us in letterform what is on their minds -- their problems, worries, questions, hopes, etc. It is amazing how open most young people are when they begin writing about themselves. We explain to them that if we are to minister effectively, we must know

them; and writing is the easiest and quickest way to accomplish this. The problem this practice produces is time. These papers must, of course, be read, preferably several times, because when students bare their souls to you, they expect you to remember what they have told you. Also, many of these papers demand a personal response from you. It is a wonderful opportunity for one-on-one ministry and for developing personal relationships that are very difficult and time-consuming to develop in other ways. The letters cut through all the chitchat and easing into serious discussion that normally accompany the counseling process. Since the student has already trusted-you to the point of revealing his problems or needs, the ministering process can begin immediately. The only problem with this practice is time. At present, all the counseling is being done during the teacher's free time and often involved pulling students out of other classes. This stealing of time is not the best way, but under our present structure it's the only one we have.

Earlier last year a reporter from The Milwaukee Journal spent several weeks at our school. She spent much time in the religion classrooms, listening to the sharing and talking to students. With the students' permission, she read many of the letters they had written. At the end of her stay she made this comment, "You don't have any psychologists or social workers at your high school, but with this system of teaching religion you don't need any." In the Journal article published December 17, 1983, she wrote, "Again and again students cited religion teachers as the people they would choose to go to with serious personal problems."

"Sometimes only you and the Lord understand," a senior girl wrote a religion teacher in a regularly assigned essay on the pressures and problems in the students' lives.

"A lot of religion teachers you can really get close to," said a boy who had drug and academic problems last year. "It seems like they care more."

"The religion teacher breaks down all the barriers," said a girl from a public school background.

"In the religion class, religious faith becomes a force in drawing the students together, opening them up to each other and to themselves and away from the pull of the peer group culture to which even Lutheran kids are not impervious."

Needless to say, this kind of perception from an impartial and objective observer is highly gratifying. There are problems, of course. Not every student will share or get into Scripture willingly. There are students who have no desire to open up their lives to you in writing or in any other way. And Satan is always hard at work, planting seeds of doubt and discouragement. But we feel good about what God is doing here, and we shall continue until a better way is found.