

Apostolic Foundations for Christian Presentations

Examining the Source of Christian Education

(2008)

In the study of what makes a Bible message it is important for every Christian to remember that the Bible does not prepare sermons; it prepares preachers. A preacher of any generation "...Cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard," Acts 4:20. This is the impetus behind all ethos. The Christian has both seen and heard from God and thus obeys the new desires of a new heart. There are two manifestly beneficial areas of examination for Christians in the preparation of any Godly communiqué: 1) how the Apostles delivered their own messages since they too were teachers, and 2) how preachers today may best be suited to follow the Apostolic charter. Some may at first have difficulty seeing and savoring the distinction between how an Apostle taught and how they are to teach, but this should be easily clarified in subordination to their inherent authority. Examining an Apostle's receivership of the faith and communication of it seems most appropriate up front. This seems evident since their students are not only to follow their teaching, but also their manner of life which, by definition, has already been demonstrated.

"For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient," Romans 15:18. Paul loved to glory in the cross. He loved the works he had performed in God, not on account of his own strength, but in the dispensation of the grace *given* to him. He first received the knowledge of his faith by revelation (Galatians 1:12) and then it was lived out through his experiences. This is certain, but his Damascus road experience, which was likely his primary focus in Galatians 1:12, was the initiation of his revelatory receivership. So which was truly first; the experience or the revelation? It matters! Would the experience mean anything without the following Biblical revelation? Would the following revelation have been given without God desiring Paul to have that experience? All of these questions can get at the heart of Christian education for the instructor and can show its blessed foundation for what it is, and from Whom it truly comes.

The Apostles often had experiences that were only solidified by God *after the fact*. A simple example of this is Peter's vision in Acts 10. He *first* receives the vision and then later, after an experience among the Gentiles, is led to its scriptural authority by Apostolic inspiration. The revelation of God's worldwide evangelistic plan was only given to Peter after his experience in the home of Cornelius. His Biblical doctrine was therefore a divinely orchestrated result of his special vision and experience. Peter delivers the final result of God's experiential lesson to several other Jews in Acts 11:2-17. This is Apostolic methodology that even they did not devise. Peter the teacher has thus prepared his lesson plan from a completely personal experience and delivers it with God's total seal of approval. This precedent is much of the focus of this letter. Is God preparing Christian students today by the same means through which He prepared His Apostles? A similar question is: Are Bible educators supposed to teach from new experiences as illustrated with Peter? The answer is safely, no. Christians today should know that their experiences do not validate the scriptures, but rather scripture validates their experiences. The canon is closed. We have nothing that is new like Peter's revelation was new to the Christians in his day.

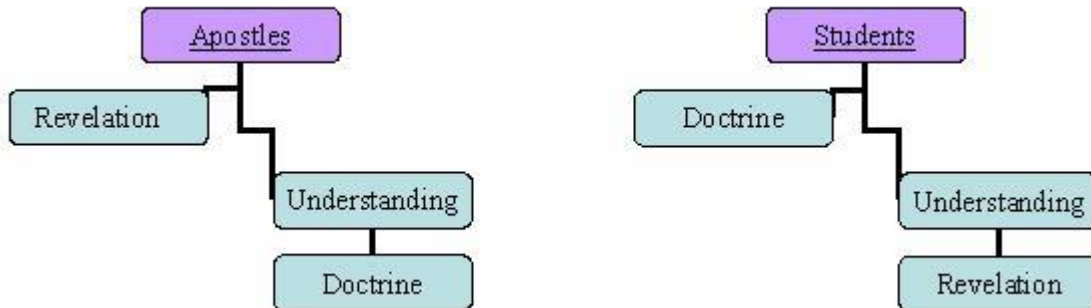
The Apostles were different. They were in a class all by themselves. The Apostles all had life experiences, but Apostolic revelation either preceded them in some measure or was a direct result. One could say this of all Christians, but nothing in any other person's life carries the authority of their words. This is what makes them and their words different in Christian education. Their teaching was radical, but built soundly on the foundation of the Old Testament. It was seen only by the Apostles in such clarity. The disciples who became writers of the New Testament, for example, had little understanding of Jesus being the promise to Abraham as the Seed to bless all of the nations. They, only after God sent the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles came to see it clearly by a divinely "new" Old Testament insight. The Apostles then began to see this truth, by God's guidance, all through the writings of the Law and the prophets. They saw it all fulfilled in the death of their God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Educators look and prepare their modern lessons by the results of the Apostolic faith in both epistle and narrative, respectively. They do not learn like the Apostles; they learn (and teach) from the Apostles. Many of the Apostle's experiences were recorded in the historical narrative now called *Acts*. Christians can see them being tried, tempted

and cast down but not destroyed through the stories therein. This history is extremely valuable, but then the epistles were written. These letters are the Apostolic lesson plan. The epistles take on a greater value, not in inspiration, but through the insight and focus in the pen of a teacher having learned from an event. This knowledge (post an event) is fundamentally absent before that event transpires. This is how God chose to bring the faith into the world after the ascension. He chose eight or nine men and established them as the instruments to bring forth His singular revelation. The epistles therefore are the lessons the Apostles wanted Christians to learn from them and their lives. From the knowledge gained through experience (post revelation) the Apostolic lessons or letters to the churches were distilled, refined and divinely recorded. It is from these writings and experiences that all Christian education finds its validity. To them in the first century it may have been viewed as new revelation, and indeed in many ways it was, but Christian educators following that generation have nothing new in the form of doctrine. Christians are not given rooftop visions with the same intent. If Christians today have visions it is only to reveal what has already been revealed in the book. Their visions do not become authoritative or absolute but work only like mirrors to reflect the image of God's established revelation. Hence we must conclude that the contemporary Christian educator's approach to teaching is not truly formed like that of the Apostle. This is true both in how God built the lesson plan and the heavenly authority of all lessons produced.

The epistles are the foundation of the Christian faith. Instead of the believer today simply examining an experience in *Acts* and attempting to find the meaning, the Apostle can later give, by inspiration, what believers should learn from any experience written. It is very valuable that the Apostle wrote his letter(s) after what Christians saw of him at the first. This is the value of the teacher refining his lessons, if you will, after his experiences. The epistles, or lesson plans of the first teachers, were the results of the revelation given them and the subsequent effects foretold by their teacher Jesus Christ. The conclusion is that Christians learn the most fundamental truths about the Christian faith, not first from personal experience, but from set canonical revelation. An example is simple in this regard: No contemporary Christian educator must see Jesus come out of the tomb. The writings of those who saw Jesus after His Resurrection, with the witness of the Holy Spirit, is the all sufficient revelation. It is not by that *same* Apostolic

experience that Christians today have born witness to Jesus' Resurrection. The following chart may help to illustrate the God-patterned order of this point in Christian education:



For the Christian lesson planner doctrine is a certainty that must be understood first for any subsequent experiences or revelations to be valid for them or their students. “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God,” 1 Corinthians 2:10. This is how Christian educators know anything for certain. It is in the complete and total dependence upon a right division of God’s self revelation through His word. This is the result of the Apostles. This word stands true alone, however, and is only brought to conviction in the hearts of sinners by the Spirit of God alone. When the Spirit bears witness with the word to the Gospel, salvation occurs in a heart. Subsequently it is the same as the Christian matures and studies to rightly divide the word of truth. Christians must define themselves as people of the book. Christianity is not a private faith, but a communal revelation that all Christians worldwide come to in mutual adoration.

There is a sickness today that corrupts Christian classes and perverts the glory of God’s established education. It is the deconstruction of absolutes. After surveying thousands of Christians over several decades George Barna comments, “Our failure to recognize absolute truth as the cornerstone of a viable worldview and to defend it against the attack of modernism and postmodernism, has resulted in each individual’s becoming his own arbiter and standard of truth.” (Barna 2001, 71.) The standard of experience in the contemporary church is a re-arrangement of the order of learning. We don’t learn like the Apostles did – by new understandings. Even our understanding of the Bible is not like their edification in previous Old Testament scripture. We can be

certain that God is not going to give any new revelation. If Christians take unbiblical experiences and trump Bible doctrine then heresy quickly occurs. If this occurs then all hope is lost because the Bible's set wisdom has been abandoned. The Bible is the absolute truth of the church and all information bows its knee. Christian teachers compose their lessons first with doctrine and then move to other blessed accompaniments like experience or application. The Bible teacher must begin with a solid foundation. He must prepare messages as a representative of heaven. He must see the very throne of God behind him examining every word and its motive. He must accept that he will incur a stricter judgment. Soberness is the creed for the Bible teacher and a joy in seeing it taught right. In short, absolutes are absolutely necessary in the Christian Bible classroom. They should be established and guarded. The word of God should continuously be distributed from a "divide if necessary" standpoint. "We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error," 1 John 4:6.

Christ and the certainty of Christian hope is the focus of all teaching. "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption," 1 Corinthians 1:30. This chapter in first Corinthians is full of so many popular and powerfully cogent statements. This passage shows what Christ means to the Christian. He is the Christian's redemption, yes, but also his righteousness and sanctification. Christ is everything. It is from faith to faith that the Christian grows. The Christian teacher grows and is sanctified while he teaches others. The Christian teacher must know that he does not teach a wisdom of the world. He must know that it is the wisdom of God that demands his attention. "For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit," 2 Peter 1:21. The Christian teacher knows that he has received the faith from *the faith* itself; they possess no similar Apostolic authority to dictate faith. The Christian teacher prepares his messages knowing that this is the subordinate model that he follows and instills. They teach from God for God and teach best what they need to learn most.

A Christian educator's primary course of love to students should be in the surety of the information given. They begin with sound doctrine and only then seek to use experience, anecdotes, allegories or acronyms to relay that same foundation to

others with love. Relating it to them and finding its application is secondary in lesson planning. This is certain because the application of ungodly principles, even if superficially beneficial, is neither maturing nor God honoring. The information is paramount. Christian educators take the distilled wisdom of God's Apostles, see it experienced in historical narrative and find their faith built upon it. From this issues their own experiences and abilities to communicate that which they too have seen and heard.

If in the path of any Christian's life they are made to set their precedent first on the foundations of the faith, then a Godly product will be the result. If a Christian minister then prepares a systematic approach to any Biblical lesson deemed valuable, a church would be wise to recognize it. Solid and sequential instruction is the foundation of the Christian faith. The letters from the Apostles to the churches was a wisely built plan. Christian teachers can use the structured curriculum of other teachers when it is found worthy. The wisdom and transcendence of the Bible itself is seen in that it is not common to any one man or any one generation. Its wisdom is for every generation and deals with the issues of all men everywhere. When a teacher experiences great knowledge in Africa he can share it with Christians in Australia. It is this very core that makes the church universal. It is wise to accept accumulated wisdom from approved sources. If a Christian accepts the lettered result of forty years of Christian instruction from a pastor he is wise. If he supplements his pastor's instruction throughout the week with studies from two other men with forty years of experience each then he is wiser still because he now has one hundred and twenty years of wisdom being presented to him. Christians should seek to emulate those who went before them and inherited blessings. This was true in the Apostolic Church, it was true in the Early Church and is equally true today to the glory of our common faith.

Thank you for your attention to this letter.