

Didactics for Sunday School teachers
Style and philosophy of Dr. Roger Smalling

Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Lesson one:](#) Characteristics of a good Sunday School teacher

[Lesson two:](#) How to write a lesson plan

[Sample](#) of a lesson plan

[Lesson three:](#) Interactive methods

[Lesson four:](#) What I teach in Sunday School

[Lesson five:](#) Teaching the doctrines of grace

[Lesson six:](#) Teaching biblical apologetics

[Sample](#) apologetics for kids

[Lesson seven:](#) Teaching new converts

[Final exam](#)

Introduction

The hook

Illustration: I was attacked by a large dog in the park. Atonished, I fell backward, pulling a muscle in my leg and landed on my back. I looked up to see the dog with its two front paws between my legs, looking at me quietly, apparently as astonished I was. Fortunately, the dog was on a long leash, was simply showing off for its master and had no serious intent of harming me. The injury to my leg was therefore self-inflicted by my reaction. The owner pulled the dog back with apologies. I used this incident in a lecture on spiritual warfare. Satan is on a long leash and is limited in what he can do to us. Most of the injury done to us is self-inflicted.

What I just did was use a hook to grab the attention of the audience. This is the first practical principle in teaching.

Whatever you teach, whether a lesson, a sermon or a political speech — you must gain the attention of the audience within the first 10 seconds or many in your audience may assume you are boring and will stop listening to you. Studies in didactics show that the average person will decide within less than a minute whether or not he is going to bother to listen to you.

That is why I started this course with a hook. Find a hook for each lesson. It can be anything. A personal experience, a story you have heard, a current event, a joke, something that will grab the attention of your audience.

During this conference, I will intersperse other principles and techniques as we proceed with this conference. I started with this “hook” technique because it is the most obvious one with which to start.

A personal comment

This manual is not about the best way to teach Sunday School. It is about **my** way. I have my own style and philosophy about didactics. If mine fails to fit your need, do something else. Take what is useful and discard the rest.

The target audience for this manual was originally for hispanics in their particular cultural context and in their language. Some aspects, such as communicating the gospel to Catholics, may be unnecessary in your context.

Most of my teaching experience, both in the gospel and in secular teaching, has been on the adult level; secondary level in the public schools, seminars in churches and seminary classes and Sunday School in church. Nevertheless, the principles here apply to teaching

small children. The lesson plan and the exercises will be simpler but the principles are the same.

The promise

I highly recommend Howard Hendricksen's book **THE SEVEN LAWS OF THE TEACHER**. It contains excellent advice for those already gifted to be teachers. Much of it is theory but not quite as much about practical techniques in a Sunday School settings as I would like. Among the practical techniques is the "hook" as illustrated above. I did not get the idea from that book because I've used that technique for years before the book was written. By all means get the book. But I want you to have a bit more than that.

Practical aspects you may glean from this study guide

- What is a called and gifted teacher.
- How to prepare an effective lesson plan.
- Interactive techniques to make your class more interesting and increase retention of the material in the minds of your students.
- Focus and goal: What to teach in Sunday School settings and why.
- How to teach grace.
- How to teach new converts.

Lesson one: Characteristics of a gifted Sunday School teacher

Illustration: On a mission team in Ecuador, we were discussing the need for teachers. One of the missionaries said, "Teaching is no big deal. Anyone can teach." I did not want to create a scene by contradicting him at that point but felt like asking, "Why then are your Sunday School lessons so boring?"

Objective

Help teachers evaluate if they are truly gifted and called to this ministry.

No substitute for giftedness

By the end of this lesson, you should know if you are called to a ministry of teaching. Are you a Sunday School teacher merely because the pastor asked you to do it and no one else was available? Perhaps out of the goodness of your heart, you accepted though you feel uncomfortable in that role.

This lesson will confirm to you if you are truly called and gifted. If you find you are not gifted, then at the end of this lesson we can discuss how to get out of it.

Teaching techniques will make a gifted teacher excellent. They can make a non-gifted person less mediocre but not excellent.

Gift or no, you need grace to do it right

All epistles start and end with grace. Without the grace of God and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, you will succeed only in imparting religious knowledge but not spiritual life transformation.

In this lesson therefore, we will discuss the characteristics of a gifted teacher and how to get out of it if you realize you are not gifted for this particular ministry.

How to know you are gifted

Passion

Illustration: The pastor who wanted to write a book.

A pastor invited me to lunch to pick my brain on how I write books. He was retiring and wanted to spend more time writing. He said he had trouble getting started. I asked him what he was interested in writing about. He was hesitant; maybe this, maybe that. I told him his problem was a lack of passion. He asked what I meant. I got in his face and said loudly, "My passion is reformation in Latin America. I live and breath for that. Nothing and nobody is going to stop me. If I have to advance in a wheel chair, you better stay out of my way or I will run you down!" He laughed and said he got the message. I

mentioned, “If you are passionate enough about something, you will not be able to stop yourself from writing.”

Gifted teachers have a passion for their subject and a strong desire to communicate it.

Passion for the gospel

Illustration: A teacher asked a group of children, “What lives in trees, has a bushy tail and eats nuts?” A little boy said, “I know! It’s Jesus!” The teacher said, “What made you think it was Jesus?” The boy replied, “I know the answer is always Jesus but it sounds like a squirrel to me!”

Despite the temporary misunderstanding, it looks like the teacher was doing a great job with those kids. In the Bible, everything points to Christ and his work of salvation. Gifted Bible teachers know how to bring every lesson back to Christ, regardless of the subject.

You will teach well what you have a passion for. If you lack passion for what you teach, your students will have no passion for learning it.

All Christians deeply appreciate the gospel. Others are passionate about it. The former communicate knowledge, the latter spiritual life.

Passion for the students

Gifted teachers know that the goal of biblical teaching is to make disciples for Christ.

Illustration: University teachers are sometimes cold in their lectures. No interest in students. They lecture and walk out. I have forgotten the names of most courses I took in college, along with the names of the teachers. One teacher I remember well; Dr. Dean, Educational Psychology. Why do I remember him? He was not only passionate about his subject but determined to make his students good teachers. He took a personal interest in students with a keen interest in the course. Some of the theory in this manual I recall from his teaching... 29 years ago.

Gifted teachers have strong personal devotional life

Our leadership training course starts with **PERSONAL REVIVAL**. How to have a quiet time and hear from God out of the word and be led by the Holy Spirit. To teach others how to walk with God, we must have that walk ourselves.

Gifted teachers are specialists

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; Romans 12:6,7

If gifted, be a specialist. Learn all you can about teaching. Peruse every book you can on that subject. Observe gifted teachers and try to emulate their techniques. Specialization is a key to effective ministry in any calling.

Gifted teachers have hobbies

A key characteristic of a gifted teacher is strong curiosity and desire to learn. Not just their subject, but everything. Normally they have at least one hobby and show interest in a variety of subjects. They seem to know a little about many things. This is a result of a passion for truth and knowledge.

Always have learning project. Have at least one personal learning program at the time. It need not be in your specialty of teaching. Maybe learn a musical instrument. Study a science. Raise parrots. Take up a sport. **I took up basketball. I'm not good at it but I'm learning something new nevertheless.**

You will be amazed at the number of illustrations you will glean for your classes from interests that seem unrelated to your Sunday School teaching ministry.

Gifted teachers are creative

Their creativity may be expressed in different art forms: Painting, literature, decorating or music. This does not mean that a creative person is necessarily called to be a teacher. Some creative people cannot teach at all. My experience, I have noticed that good teachers tend to be creative individuals.

If you are gifted to teach...

- You like to do it. You feel incomplete if you are not teaching.
- Other people like you to do it. They ask you to teach.
- Other people will tell you that teaching is your gift.

How to know you are not gifted to teach

- It seems like a duty and you don't look forward to it. Normally a person with a gift enjoys doing it. People with a gift of hospitality like visitors in their home. Others dread it when people visit.
- You prefer to rely heavily on material prepared by others people than create your own. Gifted teachers feel more comfortable using their own material. Using other people's material is not wrong. You are like a person who can't cook but must prepare a meal of a large group of people. So they hire someone to do it for them. That works for a while but sooner or later it will become obvious that you cannot

cook. A study of teaching techniques will make an ungifted teacher less mediocre, but no more than that.

What to do if you know you are not gifted and can't get out of it

We are all called to do ministry from time to time for which we are not gifted. But these situations are only temporary.

It is possible that you as a reader of this manual may be a Sunday School teacher only because church leaders convinced you of the need and asked you to do it. They appealed to your concern for children so you accepted the assignment, although in your heart of hearts you know it is not your gift. What should you do?

Put the problem back where it belongs, on the shoulders of the leadership. The problem is not yours to own. First, try to identify what really is your gift then tell the leadership you will be unavailable to teach, except as an occasional substitute. Instead, you will be doing the ministry you feel is your gift. It is their problem to solve, not yours.

From this lesson we learn...

1. There is no substitute for giftedness in teaching. If you lack the gift, do something else.
2. Gifted teachers have a passion for their subjects as well as for their students.
3. Gifted teachers have a strong devotional life, tend to be creative and have a desire to learn and grow in knowledge in general.

Lesson two: How to write a lesson plan

Illustration: In Ecuador, I caused panic in a candidate for the ministry. I asked him to teach my course on the doctrines of grace while I prepared another class. He said he had no idea what to do. So I agreed I would help him prepare a lesson plan. He made me promise to be in the class in case he had trouble. By the third lesson, he had lost his fear, was preparing lessons on his own and mentioned he did not feel the need of my help in the class. His lessons were excellent. The whole key to his confidence was having in hand a good lesson plan. He is an effective teacher today.

Objective

Show elements of a lesson plan and how to write it.

The outline of the plan should follow a simple but consistent pattern. If you use the same pattern in every lesson, your students will adapt to it quickly and this will help them fit into your style of teaching. Once you establish the habit of a consistent template, learning will be easier for students and teaching less stressful for you.

Template for a lesson plan

The hook

The theme

The promise

The point

The application

The review [From this lesson we learn...]

What is a hook?

The hook is an interesting story or illustration to get the attention of the students. If you do not get the attention of the students within the first few seconds, some will assume the lesson is boring and will lose interest.

What is a good illustration? The best ones are from your own experience. Or something in current events.

The theme

After you get their attention, you must say what the lesson is about.

The promise

State how the students will benefit from the lesson. Why should they pay attention to it? How will it improve their lives?

The point

One point per lesson only. If you cannot describe in one sentence the entire point of the lesson, then you need to simplify it or divide it into two or more lessons.

The application

Show the students how to apply the key point of the lesson to their lives. Or, set up the lesson in such a way that they deduce for themselves the application and express it back to the you.

The review

At the end of each lesson, I usually write, “From this lesson we learn...” This is the summary.

Define your audience

When you prepare your plan, picture in your mind one of the students. Prepare the lesson as though it were for that person alone. This helps you focus and will make the lesson seem more personal. This is your “focus person.” No one but you will know who that person is.

Prepare the lesson for the most interested students. Some people are in Sunday School for other reasons other than interest in material. Some may be parents who are in your class because their kids are in Sunday School and they themselves have no other place to go.

Other uses for your lesson plans

- Create a manual to give to a fledgling teacher to teach your subject. Avoid teaching the same subject twice in the same place if you can help it. Mentor others to teach.
- The lesson plans can be the outline for chapters of a book.

From this lesson we learn...

1. Using a “hook” in the form of an interesting story or illustration is a good way to start a lesson.
2. When preparing a lesson, think about one student as through you were conversing with him. This helps you focus in the preparation.

3. Allow time for review before the end of the lesson. This helps students retain the information better.

Sample of a Lesson Plan

Note: The sentences in brackets are reminders for the teacher or perhaps answers to questions. When the teacher gets ready to print these for handouts to the students, he will remove those sentences in brackets so the students do not see them.

Lesson: The Sovereignty of God

The hook: *[An illustration or story from the teacher's own experience here.]*

Purpose: Teach about the sovereignty of God to help increase the faith of the students.

Promise: Understanding the sovereignty of God will help increase your faith, pray more effectively, endure trials better and evangelize with more confidence.

Proof: Acts 4:23-32

What is the name the apostles called God in verse 24? _____

[Other verses using the term "sovereign" in reference to God may be shown here. 1Tim 6:15]

What did the apostles say in verse 24 in reference to the sovereignty of God?

[Other verses showing God's control over nature are Job 41:11; Ps 24:1; Ps 89:11]

Is there anything in the apostle's prayer to show that God is in control of history?

[Ask the students to think of other historical events showing God's control of history. Some verses for this are Dan 2:21; Prov 21:1]

Is God able to bring good out of evil? If the answer is affirmative, does there exist evidence in the apostles' prayer to show this?

From this lesson we learned that God is sovereign because...

1. The word "sovereign" is a part of his name.
2. He is creator, sustainer and owner of all creation.
3. He is in control of the events of history.
4. He is able to produce good from evil.

Application

5. How does an understanding of the sovereignty of God affect your prayer life?

6. How does an understanding of the sovereignty of God affect the way you perceive the promises of God?
7. How does an understanding of the sovereignty of God affect your attitude toward evangelism?

Lesson three: Interactive methods

Illustration: I had a small group of peasants in Ecuador memorize John 3:16. At the next lesson, I asked some to quote the verse, which they did. Then I asked them what is it God loves? Some had no idea. They had memorized the verse but understood nothing of the meaning. I realised I needed to change my teaching methods with that group. They were memorizing but not learning.

Objective

Show interactive methods and why they are useful.

What are interactive methods?

Methods that involved the activity and participation of the students, as opposed just listening to a lecturer. These activities include small-group analysis of a question; fill-in-the-blank questions; attack and defense exercises; quizzes and others. These provoke the students to think rather than merely memorize.

Why interactive methods?

Studies in universities on learning and retention levels show that retention increase the more students participate in the class, beyond merely listening to a lecture.

Lecturing is the least effective method of teaching. 20% retención

Lecturing means that the teacher simply talks non-stop throughout the lesson and the students do nothing other than listen.

Lecturing plus feedback from the students. Retention increases to 30%-50%.

This means the students repeat back to the teacher what they have heard. This can be done with a number of techniques.

Lecturing plus feedback from the students plus the student teaches the material to another student. Retention increases to 80%-90%.

This means the students repeat back to the teacher what they have heard and then teach it to someone else.

Memorizing is not learning

Some cultures have a history of dictatorships. In some countries, the so-called education consists in having the students write down in a notebook what the teacher dictates then take it home to memorize and repeat it the next day. A recording device can do the same thing. This is not education. It is brainwashing.

Why do such cultures do this? Dictators do not want students to learn how to think. They might evolve ideas like freedom, democracy and overthrowing dictators.

For small children, memorizing verses is o.k. They can learn later what it means. The word of God may have its effect later. Some come to Christ later through the verse memorized. Nevertheless, small children can also be challenged to think about what it means. Studies in Switzerland have found that children are more capable of abstract reasoning than previously thought.

Interactive techniques make the act of teaching easier for the teacher. There is a dictum in teaching: *If you are working harder than the students, you are doing it wrong. The students should be working harder to learn than you are to teach them.*

Interactive lessons are harder for the teacher to prepare initially but worth the effort in the long run. It puts more of the burden on the students. Once the teacher gets into the habit of including student activities in the lesson, a lot of the stress in lesson preparation is relieved.

Inductive versus deductive

Inductive: Gather evidence and see where it leads.

Deductive: State a proposition, then give evidence to prove it.

Illustration: The difference between a detective and a prosecuting attorney. A detective gathers evidence from a crime without bias as to suspects. After gathering all the facts, he draws a conclusion as to who is the guilty party. This is inductive logic.

The prosecuting attorney in court starts by stating that the suspect is guilty. Then he goes about showing the evidence to prove that his declaration of guilt is correct. This is deductive.

Neither approach is right or wrong. It depends on the situation. Sermons and evangelistic settings are examples of deductive approaches.

Inductive approaches in teaching tend to provoke thinking. This is healthy for those who have not been well educated. Most adults prefer an interactive, inductive approach because it makes them feel like they are being treated as adults.

Illustration: A lady said to me, “Don’t make me study, just tell me what to believe!” I made it clear to her that I was not going to give her that luxury.

The interactive techniques mentioned in this manual are all inductive in nature. Experience shows this is much better for teaching students to think.

Individual interactive techniques

Fill in the blanks

1. Simply write out a verse and leave blank the part with the key point. Have the students look up the verse and fill in the blank.

Example: *For God so loved the world, that he gave _____, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16*

2. Ask a question with a verse reference and then fill in the blank. Example:

What do we have as a result of justification? _____ Romans 5:1

3. Give a series of Bible references with a question, such as “What do these verses teach us about heaven? Then let the students tell you as the teacher what they say. You can supplement their comments with your own.

Group interactive activities

Group agreement

Divide the class into small groups of three or five, depending on the size of the class. Give a series of verses and tell them to deduce what they teach. Tell the group to agree on one single statement as the answer. This provokes discussion and negotiation for meaning which by itself provokes thought and is instructive

During a group agreement exercise, the teacher can wander around the class and observe how the students interact with one another. This helps the teacher learn about the students so as to mentor them better.

These exercises should take no more than ten minutes because of the limitation of the class time.

An important benefit for the teacher is that such exercises help identify emerging leaders. If someone is leading, do the others show respect for him or her? Does one person seem to be teaching the others?

Another benefit is that it helps students relate to one another who might not do so otherwise in ordinary social contexts.

Any of the techniques for individuals below can also be used for group exercises.

Attack and defense

This technique is good for teaching adults and young people to defend biblical teachings. For example, defending salvation by grace as opposed to salvation by works. It is also good for practice in evangelism. Divide the students into pairs. Have one person plays

the role of the defender of a doctrine and the other the opponent. Then have them change roles and practice it again.

Experience shows that people who think they understand a doctrine well, discover they do not know it as well as they thought when they have to defend it.

True or false quizzes

Why not have a brief quiz at the end of the lesson? Quizzes can be an effective teaching technique in themselves.

Illustration: I was teaching on Romans 1 in Ecuador for a month. I said, “The last half of the last class will be the final exam.” At exam time, one of the ladies said, “I know the exam counts for nothing. But I studied all week because I cannot stand the thought of getting a bad grade.”

At the end of some of my manuals, I have a few true or false questions, usually no more than ten, not less than five. I do this at the end of Sunday School lessons also. After the students have had time to answer the questions on their own, you may ask the class what are the answers. Some students will get wrong answers and this can provoke discussion as to why the answers are wrong.

Sometimes this generates a healthy competition. If the competition seems inappropriate for the class, discard this kind of exercise.

Class competition

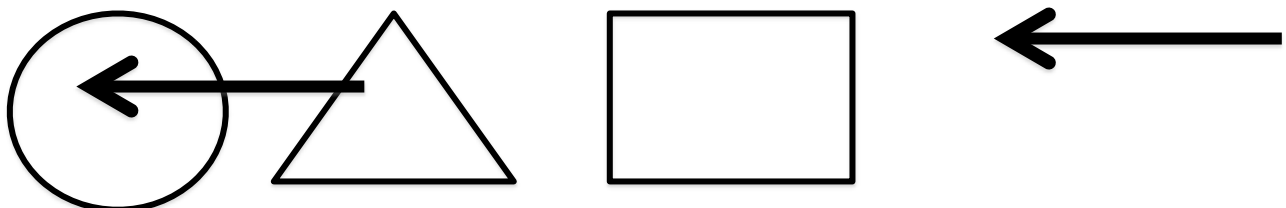
This technique works well with young people because they normally like to compete.

Divide the class into two groups. Have a representative of each group come up to the blackboard. Ask a question and have them write the answer on the board. The first to write the correct answer gets a point. If one person writes a wrong answer, he must yield his place to the next person in line to give the correct answer. The group the with highest score wins.

Visual aids

Many abstract ideas can be illustrated by simple geometric figures: Circles, squares, triangles and arrows. It requires no artist skills to do them on a blackboard.

Many abstract ideas can be illustrated by simple geometric figures: Circles, squares, triangles and arrows. It requires no artist skills to do them on a blackboard.



Which of these four diagrams would be best to illustrate the Trinity? Which would you chose to illustrate eternity? How would you combine two of these figures to show the members of the Trinity are eternal?

Group exercise

Divide the students and have the combine two or more of the diagrams to express a concept.

From this lesson we learn...

1. Retention levels increase when students participate interactively in the learning process rather than just listening to lectures.
2. Interactive teaching methods help students learn how to think rather than merely memorize data.
3. Lesson preparation that incorporates interactive methods is harder initially but makes the act of teaching easier in the long run.
4. Group exercises provide the teacher an opportunity to observe students and learn about them.

Lesson four: What I teach in Sunday school

Illustration: A pastor was strolling down the hallway one Sunday morning and observed a Sunday School teacher explaining to the children, “If you are good girls and boys, when you die, you will go to heaven.” After the class, the pastor asked her, “Why are you teaching heresy to children?” She was shocked. He explained that he was teaching them salvation by works, which is heresy. She replied that she thought the kids were too young to understand the gospel. The pastor said, “When they get older, are you then going to tell them you were teaching them false doctrine before?” The teacher got the point as well as some tips on how to teach the gospel of grace to young children.

Objective

Show the ultimate goal in teaching Sunday School and the dangers of deviating from that goal.

The goal

In the Great Commission, Jesus declared the one and only mission of the church: Make disciples for Jesus. (Matthew 28:19) He said to Peter how to go about it. “Feed my sheep.” Peter tells us what to feed them; the word of God. *Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation. 1Peter 2:2*

No other goal. No other method.

The danger of moralism in Christian education

Becoming a mere moralist is a particular danger for teachers of children. Teaching good behavior is not teaching the gospel. Paul’s epistles are full of exhortations to Christians about good conduct and how to behave in life. But all his epistles start and end with grace. Unless your teaching leads to the last verse of the Bible, then you are missing the target.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen. Rev 22:21

Illustration: Pastor preached on Colossians and said, “Do you think you can do any of this?” The answer is no. You need the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ to do any of it. You need Jesus for everything.

The danger in being a moralist is that it always leads to the sin of legalism, which is not only a false gospel but is frequently worse than the sins we are attempting to avoid.

One goal only

Make disciples for Jesus Christ. Only one means exist for that goal: The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. No other goal. No other means. Mt 28:19,20

Everything we teach, even Old Testament laws in Leviticus, must point back to Jesus as the only way to obtain the grace of God for salvation and Christian living.

Review the basics

Illustration: I shared the gospel for 15 minutes to a man in Mexico. He was a boxer. I explained that salvation is by Christ alone through faith alone. I asked him what he thought I said. He replied, “We have to be self-reliant.” The exact reverse of everything I just said! It takes revelation of the Holy Spirit to get the point across.

Your job as a Sunday School teacher is provide the Holy Spirit with a platform of Scripture to use. Only God can open their eyes. You have not necessarily failed if that does not happen.

...remembering you in my prayers, ...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, Eph 1:16,17

The carnal nature will always translate the gospel into a works-righteousness message. Remember: You can say to an audience a thousand times, *Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, not by our merits.* If you ask them afterwards to define what you said, most of them, most of the time will swear they heard you say, “Be good and God will be good to you.”

Refer back to the frequently to the basics: Grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Illustration: A football coach took a football in his hand and said to a team of professional players, “Gentlemen, this is a football.” By this he was emphasizing, “Never forget the basics. Those are the foundation for victory.”

In discipleship, always go back to the basics of Christian living: The three means of grace: The word, prayer and fellowship of the church.

Verify that your students understand the basics

Illustration: When I was teaching in a public school, I taught a lesson how to conjugate a verb. Toward the end of the class, a student asked, “Mr. Smalling, what is a verb?” I was shocked. I had assumed the students understood more than they did, resulting in confusion. The fault was mine.

It is easy to assume your students understand the obvious. What is obvious to you may not be obvious to them.

With adults, I teach mostly from the New Testament

Since my goal is to teach Christians how to live the Christian life, most of my teaching comes from the New Testament in an adult setting. Old Testament fore types and background are fine for illustrations but limitations of time in Sunday School makes me want to get directly to the point. Beware of spending too much time on background information and not enough on the main point. Some teachers are enamoured with Old Testament fore types and use their teaching opportunities to discuss them. Sometimes I wonder if such teachers are simply entertaining themselves more than trying to make disciples for Christ.

What I avoid in my teaching: 1Timothy 1:1-7

- Disputable and controversial issues.
- Obscure doctrines with little practical implications for Christian living.

Some teachers delight in showing their scholarship. This may be pride. What is interesting to you as a teacher may not be useful to your students.

The purpose of Sunday School is to make disciples for Jesus Christ. Don't lose site of your goal: Making disciples for Jesus Christ.

What I always refer back to:

- The grace of God.
- The person of Jesus Christ who applies God's grace through faith in him.
- Discipline in the three means of growth: The word, prayer and fellowship of the church (which includes the sacraments.)

From this lesson we learn...

1. Sunday School teachers have one goal and one method: Make disciples for Jesus Christ through teaching the gospel.
2. Teaching morality is necessary but it must lead to dependence on Jesus Christ and the grace of God or it is mere legalism.
3. Teachers must verify that the students have understood the material. This can be done by questions in the class, quizzes or other exercises.
4. Good Sunday School teachers know how to avoid unnecessary and secondary questions.

Exam: True or false

1. ___F___ The ultimate goal in teaching children in Sunday School is to make sure they understand the difference between right and wrong.

2. ___T___ Always try to verify that the students have understood the material.
3. ___F___ Most people understand the gospel of grace the first or second time it is explained clearly.
4. ___T___ Christians need to be taught discipline in applying to themselves the ordinary means of grace such as the word of God and prayer.
5. ___F___ The apostle Paul recommends studying Old Testament words and genealogies to give a good background to New Testament discipleship.

Lesson five: Teaching the doctrines of grace

In this lesson, I will show you how to make people think you are crazy until they realize you are not. Three out of four of the elders in the Presbytery said that during their training, they thought at one time or another, that I had a screw loose. But all finished with the attitude that they were willing to die for what I was teaching. What was it?

If you teach the doctrines of sovereign grace correctly, then you may be viewed at first as off the wall. At the end of the course, however, when the students have clearly grasped the concept of grace, they will be grateful for the teaching.

Objective

Show why it is necessary to teach the reformed doctrines of grace and suggestions on how to do that.

Why is it necessary to teach these doctrines?

A false definition of grace reigns in the entire culture and including among most evangelicals. The false definition says that grace is God's favorable response to us as we employ our free will in seeking him.

This is heresy because it implies that God is not sovereign and is dependent upon the will of man.

In the Bible, grace is a sovereign work of God to bring his elect to faith in Christ. Yes, they must exercise their wills. But even this only comes about by a work of grace given to them sovereignly.

With adults, I use the *tulip* acrostic, but only after a thorough lesson in the sovereignty of God:

Total depravity

Unconditional election

Limited atonement

Irresistible grace

Preservation of the elect

Note: In Spanish, I use my *Si, Jesus* acrostic:

Soberanía absoluta divina

Incapacidad total humana

Justificación por la fe

Elección incondicional

Sacrificio eficaz de Cristo

Unidad e universalidad de la iglesia

Seguridad de los elegidos

The entire strategy of this acrostic is to nail down the concept of sovereign grace; that God is sovereign in salvation.

I take as much time with the first two points as with all the other five together. Why?

Sovereignty of God is foundational

Everything else flows from it. If people fail to understand this, the other points in the acrostic will make little sense.

My starting point is the apostle's prayer in Acts 4:27-31. (See *Sample Lesson Plan* for an example of this.)

A fundamental problem in teaching the doctrines of grace

Anthropomorphism: The idea that God is a big human being.

Many people, especially children, think of God as a big human being. Until this notion is removed, the other doctrines will make little sense to them. It is normal for children to think like this but is unacceptable for adults.

I use two lines of teaching to remove the anthropomorphism:

- Teaching the three incommunicable attributes of God; Almighty, all knowing and all present. (Omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent)
- Certain lines of teaching about big things God controls, such as the events of history and the actions of people.

Total depravity

I use Romans 3:19-29 to begin this lesson.

This is where the teacher must undermine in the students any hope of salvation in human merits or human ability to respond to God without a special work of grace. (John 6:44,45) If the teacher fails to communicate this, the other doctrines will make no sense to the students.

The entire surrounding culture with its humanistic philosophy and the influence of Catholicism has rooted in the minds of people that a sinner possesses the power of will to convert himself if he wishes. Unless this notion is destroyed, the students will continue in a false definition of grace that will affect their walk with the Lord.

What about teaching this to children and young people?

Children are capable of understanding the basic idea of grace if it is taught simply.

From this lesson we learn...

1. The reformed doctrines of grace must be taught to believers to undermine false thinking about grace.
2. Anthropomorphic views of God must be eliminated before students can grasp the doctrines of grace. Teaching the incommunicable attributes is a good place to start.
3. It is important to teach the sovereignty of God and inability of man as foundational for understanding biblical grace in general.

Lesson six: Teaching biblical apologetics

Illustration: The great apologist C.S. Lewis said about himself before becoming a Christian. “I was an atheist. And further more, I was angry at God for creating this kind of world.” Such is the irrationality of an unbeliever.

Objective

Show teachers how to prepare believers for a basic rational defense of the Christian faith.

always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 1Peter 3:15

The apologetics of the Bible

Apologetics means the rational defense of the Christian faith.

For Sunday School settings, I stick with the apologetics the Bible uses. These simple points are good for both adults and children. I avoid deeper historical apologetics like the five ways of Aquinas, presuppositionalism versus evidentialism or complex philosophical discussions. Those are reserved for seminary classes and do little to increase the faith of the common believer in a Sunday School setting.

My purpose is to confirm the faith the believers and equip them to deal with unbelievers.

The book of Romans contains all three of Paul’s basic arguments for the existence of God and validity of the Christian faith. All three start with the letter “C” and are easy to remember in their order:

LAS TRES REVELACIONES DE DIOS



Creation: If there is a creation, there is a Creator.

Conscience: If there are moral laws written in our minds, it is because there is a moral lawgiver.

Christ: The miraculous life of Christ speaks for itself.

Each of these evidences has sub-points the teacher may use if he sees fit.

A study in Romans 1:18-25

1. God is angry at humanity. Why? [For their wickedness and suppression of truths revealed to them.]
2. Is the evidence for God's existence obscure or difficult to deduce? [No. It has been *clearly* revealed by the things that have been created.]
3. How does carnal man react to the evidence? [They suppress it.]
4. What are the two principle attributes of God revealed in creation? [His eternal power and deity.]
5. Does verse 21 indicate that pagans are ignorant of the existence of God and what kind of God he is? [No. They are not ignorant. They are rebellious.]
6. Is idolatry and pagan worship entirely a result of ignorance? [No. They do it to avoid the real God by inventing false ones.]
7. According to verses 21 and 22, what is the origin of philosophy? [The corrupt reasonings of man, designed to avoid the truth about God.]
8. According to verse 23, what is the origin of pagan religion? [The corruption of man, designed to avoid God.]
9. According to verse 24, what is the origin of sexual perversion? [The origin is in a previous rejection of God.]
10. In verse 25, how does Paul summarize human reactions against the existence of God? [They change the revealed truths about God into lies, both by philosophy and by pagan religion.]

Apologetics for kids: Preparing against relativism

Society is brainwashing our children in relativistic, anti-Christian presuppositions. From school, TV, literature and friends, they hear truth is relative to the individual, belief in God is not provable, morality is a question of personal taste and it does not matter what we believe as long as we believe in something.

Nonsense like this will become part of the very fabric of a child's being if not refuted early.

Most catechisms were written before relativism became the politically correct religion of the culture. Our children need to be taught to counter these ungodly thought forms with rational and biblical presuppositions.

Below are sample questions based on Romans Chapters One and Two. Young children can learn these biblical defenses.

QUESTION 1: What are three ways we know God exists?

ANSWER: Creation, conscience and Christ.

QUESTION 2: How does creation show there is a God?

ANSWER: If there is a creation, there must be a Creator.

QUESTION 3: What is a conscience?

ANSWER: Conscience is our minds telling us what is right and wrong.

QUESTION 4: Why does our conscience prove there is a God?

ANSWER: If we know right and wrong, moral law, there must be a moral lawgiver.

QUESTION 5: What do we mean when we say Christ proves God exists?

ANSWER: His miracles, his perfect holiness and his resurrection from the dead show God exists.

QUESTION 6: Is it clear to everyone that God exists?

ANSWER: Yes. It is very clear to everyone.

QUESTION 7: Why do we say it is clear to everyone?

ANSWER: Because everyone is a part of creation and everyone has a conscience. So everyone sees the proof.

QUESTION 8: Why do some people say God's existence is not clear?

ANSWER: Because they do not want God to rule over them.

QUESTION 9: Why do some people not want God to rule over them?

ANSWER: Because they love their sins.

QUESTION 10: What do we mean when we say something is true?

ANSWER: We mean it really exists.

QUESTION 11: Can truth be just a matter of opinion?

ANSWER: No. A thing is true whether anyone thinks it is or not.

QUESTION 12: What do we mean when we say 'have faith in God?'

ANSWER: We mean trust his promises.

From this lesson we learn...

1. It is helpful in a Sunday School setting to stick to the apologetics that the Bible itself uses.
2. A basic apologetics lesson for the existence of God can be: *Creation, conscience* and *Christ*. These are found in the book of Romans.
3. A study of Romans 1:18-25 is a good introduction to biblical apologetics in Sunday School setting.
4. Relativism is a serious problem today and children must be prepared to reject it.

Lesson seven: Teaching new converts

Objective

Show ways to help new converts in their initial walk with Christ.

Converts from Catholicism

Using the Five Solas

The new convert from Catholicism will have serious doubts. They have been taught that it is a serious sin to associate with protestants. They have been told that there are many false cults and groups and must stay away from them because the Catholic Church is the only true one and the only one capable of saving them. They have been told that giving up Catholicism is abandonment of any hope of salvation. So they have lurking in their minds that they may be falling into a false religion that will ultimately do them harm.

When asked the difference between us and the Catholic Church, the Five Solas is the best I have found for answering that question.

- Christ alone: Not Christ plus Mary plus saints. 1Tim 2:5; John 14:6; Hechos 4:12
- Grace alone: Not grace plus good works or merits. Eph 2:8-10; Titus 3:5
- Faith alone: Not faith plus baptism or sacraments. Rom 5:1
- Scripture alone: Not Scripture plus papal decrees or church traditions. 2Timothy 3:16,17
- Glory of God alone: Not the glory of a particular church or institution. Rom 11:36

Converts from little or no religious background

Where to start

It is normally unnecessary to start with a defense of the authority of the Bible. In my experience, very few new converts question its authority. They know the message of the Bible has changed them and made them better and more happy, so they normally accept it without question.

A more pressing question in their minds is to define exactly what has happened to them. They know they have had a religious experience and feel differently but are unclear as to exactly what has happened and what it means. A discussion of the authority of Scripture can be done later.

Explain what happened to them: Using Ephesians Chapter Two

Explain what we were, what we are now and what we will become.

- What we were: Sinners, under the control of our own corruption, Satan and mentality of the world.
- What we are: Rescued by God's grace and have experienced a spiritual resurrection.
- We will be: Seated with Christ and joined with him forever.

Feeding themselves

New converts, like babies, perceive others as a source of food. A baby can do nothing else but sit there and let food be put into its mouth. But as they grow, they learn to pick up food for themselves and put it in their mouth.

Likewise, new converts may be spiritually and emotionally dependent on you as a teacher for a while. That is normal. But like growing babies, they need to learn quickly how to feed themselves.

Teach them how to read the word of God for themselves and hear from the Holy Spirit through it. God speaks to us personally by the Holy Spirit through his word to our inner man. The new convert must learn quickly how to experience this because that is how they feed themselves spiritually.

Get them into the Gospel of John to get acquainted with the person of Christ.

Identify their needs

Many people who come to Christ do so because of a serious problem of one sort or another. This is where your role as a mentor comes in. You are not just a dispenser of spiritual information and knowledge. A genuine teacher is also a mentor and counselor.

This is where the personal relationship aspect of teaching comes in. A biblical teacher is willing to get involved in the lives of his or her students. This is especially vital with new converts. Everything else in the growth of a new convert stems from this.

Their relationship to the church

It is premature to deal with questions of church membership or baptism until the new convert has had his doubts assuaged and shows progress in applying the word of God and prayer.

After the above has been clarified, then the mentor can help the convert see that their relationship with the church is one of the means of grace that God uses to grow them spiritually, not just the word of God and prayer.

From this lesson we learn...

- Converts from Catholicism need reassurance that they have not fallen into a false cult. The Five Solas are good for this.
- Converts generally want to understand what has happened to them in experiencing salvation. Ephesians Two is a good chapter to help them with this.
- All new converts must be taught how to feed themselves spiritually from the word of God and prayer so they are weaned from total dependence on others for their spiritual growth.
- A good teacher is aware of the personal needs of new converts and adjusts the mentoring process accordingly.

Exam: True and false questions

1. ___F___ In teaching new converts, it is usually necessary in the first lesson to prove the authority of Scripture.
2. ___T___ A primary concern of many new converts is to understand their conversion experience.
3. ___T___ New converts need to be taught quickly now to feed themselves spiritually.
4. ___F___ It is a good idea to recommend to new converts that they start reading the Bible straight through, starting from Genesis.

Final exam: True and false questions

1. ___F___ The ultimate goal in teaching children in Sunday School is to make sure they understand the differences between right and wrong.
2. ___F___ A teacher who is not gifted can be just as effective as a gifted one if they use good teaching methods.
3. ___T___ Always try to verify that the students have understood the material.
4. ___T___ Retention levels increase when students participate interactively in the learning process rather than just listening to lectures.
5. ___T___ Christians need to be taught discipline in applying to themselves the ordinary means of grace such as the word of God and prayer.
6. ___F___ Most people understand the gospel of grace the first or second time it is explained clearly.
7. ___T___ Christians need to be taught discipline in applying to themselves the ordinary means of grace such as the word of God and prayer.
8. ___F___ The apostle Paul recommends studying genealogies of the Old Testament to give a good background to New Testament discipleship.
9. ___F___ In teaching new converts, it is usually necessary in the first lesson to prove the authority of Scripture.
10. ___F___ A primary concern of many new converts is to understand their conversion experience.
11. ___F___ New converts need to be taught quickly now to feed themselves spiritually.
12. ___F___ It is a good idea to recommend to new converts that they start reading the Bible straight through, starting from Genesis.
13. ___T___ Using a “hook” in the form of an interesting story or illustration is a good way to start the lesson.
14. ___F___ When preparing a lesson, think about the class as a whole and prepare the lesson for the weakest student.
15. ___T___ Interactive teaching methods help the students to learn how to think rather than merely memorize data.
16. ___T___ Retention levels are highest with traditional lecturing as primary teaching method.

17. ___T___ Group exercises provide the teacher an opportunity to observe the students.
18. ___T___ In teaching apologetics in a Sunday School setting, it is a good idea to stick to the apologetics that the Bible itself uses.