

A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

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"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

It is no secret that there is a growing emphasis upon education in our society. Industrialization since World War II threw education into contrast with it and by this made its need even more apparent than before. The rise of the nations of the East, Japan, China, India, and Russia, has given further reason for added emphasis upon education. The appearance of Sputnik further accentuated the importance of education in the fields of mathematics and the sciences.

It is not education itself but the mood of modern education that is alarming to the people of God. It has become apparent that in public education people are determined not to be informed of things on the level of the divine. Therefore the emphasis is being placed on the human level to the exclusion of the divine. This in turn is limiting the realm of reality so far as human comprehension is concerned. Thus education is being removed from the realm of absolutes, and in turn is producing a theory of relativity that is being applied to everything.

Christian education has therefore felt the impact of this mood. In areas where the Word of God was once regarded as absolute and infallible, there is now a rethinking of the whole doctrine of the Scriptures. Various and sundry approaches are being made to the Scriptures, all of them calculated to reduce their value and end in a purely human selectivity for human convenience. As a result it has produced a spirit of compromise within bodies of believers and a subtle and growing departure from the faith.

This pinpoints a growing need for emphasis upon a sound philosophy in Christian education. This growing need calls for a new look at the foundation of all human knowledge. This means that there must be a recognition of some absolutes. There is need for a recognition of purpose that is brought into conformity with those absolutes. Nothing short of this will reverse the present trend, make for progress in the right direction, and ultimately produce the desired results for the glory of God.

To that end I desire to discuss three things in the text before us. These three things are contained in three important words of the text: "God," "workman," and "truth." When placed in their proper relation to one another the result is a Christian Philosophy of Education. If there is any doubt about the importance of these things, all one need do is to eliminate any one of the three important words from the reading of the text and the result will be an emasculated message.

I. THE FOUNDATION FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IS THE GOD OF TRUTH

The person to whom ultimate appeal is made, according to the text, is God. A Christian student is urged to present himself approved unto God. This is basic. All else in this text goes for nothing if this fact is not clearly understood. The material with which the student works is the

"word of truth." This truth is related to God, and therefore it is to be understood that the word of truth is the Word of God. Since this is the Word of God, it is God that gives value to that word, for He is the God of truth.

The quality of truth must essentially reside in the very person of God. It is significant therefore that in searching for something to give encouragement to the people of Israel for the future, Isaiah turned their attention to the God of truth. Blessing and swearing must be done in the God of truth. "That he who blesseth himself in the earth, shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he that sweareth in the earth, shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hid from mine eyes" (Isa. 65:16). Examination of the Hebrew underlying the English text indicates that the phrase "God of truth" is in reality the "God of the Amen." The root meaning of this word is that of nursing or building up. The derived meaning is that of something established, built up, sure, positive. The word therefore expresses the fact of absolute stability, correctness, and unchangeableness.

Truth is thus essentially to be identified with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who addressed the church in Laodicea and said, "Thus saith the Amen" (Rev. 3:14). This is even a more august and splendid way of saying "I am the truth." In this utterance of Christ concerning Himself, He did not mean, "I teach the truth," or "I declare the truth," or "I explain the truth," though it is true that He does every one of these things. It means precisely what it says, "I am the truth." Truth is essentially resident in a person; truth is essentially a person, and that person is God. From this person there can be no appeal. In this person there is finality, ratification, ultimate authority, absoluteness.

The extent of this person determines the extent of truth. This relation is precisely defined by a statement of Paul written to the same community of believers as the Laodicean letter. In speaking of the mystery of Christ, that is, the secret of His person, he said, "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3; 4:16). Christ is the alpha and the omega. All truth has its beginning and ending in Him. It is His person that gives value and permanence to all truth. It is therefore clearly evident that the only real foundation for Christian education is the God of truth. And that God is revealed in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. THE FRAMEWORK FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IS THE WORD OF TRUTH

Once the absolute of all truth has been established one is then prepared to move from the foundation to the superstructure. Having determined that the God of truth is the foundation, it is only logical to recognize that the framework for Christian education is the word of truth.

The controlling factor relating to the "word of truth" lies in the fact that Christ is not present with men. In order to know Him who is absolute truth, men are dependent upon that objective standard of truth He has given of Himself. Being absolute truth, He gave an absolute testimony of Himself, that testimony being embodied in and identified with the word of truth. Apart from this absolute standard of truth, there is no connection with Him who is the Amen. Thus believers are left with but one choice, if they desire to worship and serve Him who is Truth. They must come to the word of truth. Any deviation from the word of truth is a step into the darkness. It is a step off the narrow path of truth. It is a step into the realm of the relative and the uncertain.

Therefore the central position must be given to the word of truth in the absence of Christ. What Christ is in Himself He imparts to His word. It becomes then the word of the Amen. This is not merely the word which comes from the Amen, but the word is in itself "Yea" and "Amen." It has all the finality, perfectness, certainty, and absolute authority of the person from whom it came. Because of what God is in Himself, He therefore imparts the same to His revelation. There is no exaggeration or minimizing of truth. What He says will be exactly true, because He is in Himself absolute truth, and there is nothing beyond Him in the realm of truth.

The containment within the word of truth is therefore an inescapable necessity. There is no other framework for Christian education. This word is absolute truth representing Him who is absolute truth. There are those who will insist that this extends only to Himself, and is therefore true only in the realm of religious truth. But this is indeed a narrow and inadequate view of the Scriptures. It must be remembered that His person and work cannot be separated, and both are set forth in the Scriptures. To that extent in which the word of truth deals with His works, to that same extent the entire realm of reality is under consideration. The works of His hands, consisting of the heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, are in some sense dealt with in the word of truth. This information must be received as absolute truth. It is this information that provides a framework for Christian education. Within this framework the superstructure of human knowledge can rise. When human discoveries fit into this pattern, they may be received as genuine and reliable. When human discoveries do not fit into this framework, they should be viewed with suspicion, held in abeyance until there is further light, or discarded as in some sense falling short of that which is absolute truth.

III. THE FUNCTIONING OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION CENTERS IN THE WORKMAN WITH TRUTH

The important elements of this text have already been dealt with, though they comprise the small part of the text. This should teach us one thing, namely, that size does not always determine value or importance. Actually the greater part of this text concerns itself with the workman: the man himself, the motive impelling him, and the method he employs. But this word of direction is worthless until one has a sense of direction. The matters already discussed give the sense of direction. The workman is now ready for the word of direction.

The man himself is of course the matter of first concern. He is exhorted "to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman." This suggests three things. The personal element stands foremost in the sentence. This was addressed to Timothy first of all. But it was not intended to rest with him, for it was also addressed to the Church. In this respect it comes to all those within the Church who in any way are responsible for the education of the Church. The productive factor is next in importance. Such a person is called a workman. This means one who expends energy in constructive enterprise. The enterprise of fitting education to the framework of the word of God is of the highest order. It requires abundance of energy and everlasting application of it in this high endeavor. The process through which one must pass will result in approval. The word "approved" points to the fact that the workman has gone through a period of severe testing; this testing has been the cutting of a straight course through the word of God; the result is the refinement of the workman and the able educational production. This is not only pleasing to God but will ultimately bring His divine approval.

The motive impelling the workman is twofold. On the one hand, "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed" is one whose motive looks toward God. This workman desires the highest approval of His master. If that is not stated in these words, then it is strongly implied. At least this must underlie the meaning of these words. Unless the workman, the educator, seeks the highest approval of God, he will never succeed in the all-important task of Christian education. But if this is his highest incentive, then on the other hand, he will exhibit toward the world a high degree of defiance. This clause is actually the translation of one Greek word. It is a rare formation, found only here in the New Testament. In its simpler form it denotes one who is shameless. In this context it could not refer to a shamelessness toward God; but if Paul has the world in mind, this is an admirable way to picture it. Pleasing God expresses itself by a shamelessness toward the attitude of the world. Strict adherence to the teaching of the Word of God on holiness and truth has ever produced contempt on the part of the world. Men who have sought to serve in the capacity of Christian educators have felt the sting of its sarcasm. Being sensitive, they have slanted, trimmed, and pressed the truth of the Word of God to fit the mold of the world. This has done irreparable harm to the truth. It is therefore necessary for the true workman to develop a "rhinoceros" hide toward the contempt of the world, a shamelessness that keeps him ever steadfast in the faith, an insensitiveness to the scorn of the world. The need lies in the fact that there is no point where educators are more sensitive than the level of their intelligence and the extent of their knowledge.

The method of the workman is expressed in the word "study" and in the clause "rightly dividing the word of truth." The first has to do with application to the task, while the second has to do with the occupation with the task.

The application is expressed by the verb "study" or as the ASV reads, "give diligence." This refers to a ceaseless, serious zeal. There is something of hastening in it, for time is at a premium; there is something of endeavor in it, for the value of the task requires it; there is something of faithfulness in it, for the person one serves is worthy. Since the workman is a treasurer of the word of God, it is required in a steward that a man be found faithful (1 Cor. 4:2). Brilliance, eloquence, logic are commendable qualities, but they must all be made subservient to faithfulness in the task of conserving and preserving the essential truth of the Word of God. This may exclude one from the admiration and affection of those whom he would most like to influence. It may even exclude him from the measure of success recognized by the world or even of the Church. It may arouse his friends and even incur the contempt of the world toward him. But whatever the issues, he is called to faithfulness of application to duty.

The occupation in which he is engaged is "rightly dividing the word of truth." Literally the word means cutting straight. The figure has been variously derived: from a priest dividing the animal victim for the altar; from the steward distributing the stores among the needy; from the ploughman running a furrow across the field; from the road builder pushing a new road through the countryside; from a stone mason chiseling a stone for its place in the building; from the carpenter sawing the board to fit the structure; even the work of the surgeon as he operates upon the human body has been suggested. In any event, the meaning seems to be clear in this context. It has to do with a consistent interpretation and application of the Word of God. Anything short of absolute consistency in the unfolding and application of the Word of God will produce confusion and difficulty eventually. If one steps off the narrow path of truth ever so little, and this is projected to its fulness, it will produce confusion of thought and difficulty of life. The educator is therefore more than ever responsible to prosecute his task with extreme precision. This means that he

must not fight over words merely for the sake of fighting, but to do so for the purpose of personal profit to those who hear them. This will mean that he must shun worldly and empty voices that work to the overthrow of human souls by leading them deeper into ungodliness. On the positive side, it is his business to extend the boundaries of the intellectual and spiritual horizon of the Christian.

Is it a thankless task? It seems so sometimes, if one looks at things from the near view. But it must always be remembered that the near view is based on the erroneous assumption that the present is the sum total of reality. But there is also a far view, the experience of which may be nearer at hand than we dream. There is a judgment seat of Christ. At that place the tried and tested will be approved. That is at the end of the way when the period of testing is over. Until then any final pronouncement on value apart from the Word of God is premature, for the test is not yet finished. It therefore behooves the Christian educator to keep his eye upon the goal, seeking the approval of the Master, ever cutting a straight course through the Word of God, with utter defiance for the contempt of the world.

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