

What Is Moralizing In Bible Story Teaching And How To Avoid It

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DIRECTIONS: Please read each statement carefully and then place an A in the blank if you agree with the statement, place a D in the blank if you disagree with the statement.

- ___ 1. The most important section in the Catechism is the Ten Commandments.
- ___ 2. There are good and bad people all over the world.
- ___ 3. If you teach the children all of the commands of God, they will be good Christians.
- ___ 4. Your Sunday School teaching should center on the love that man should have for God.
- ___ 5. To encourage the children to trust in Christ for the complete forgiveness of their sins is a demand of the law.
- ___ 6. All people must do something for their salvation, namely believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior.
- ___ 7. Children learn to trust in God through the Law, which shows them the need for a Savior.
- ___ 8. Christ has redeemed all men, believer as well as unbeliever.
- ___ 9. God has seen something in us which prompts Him to love us, to forgive us, to save us.
- ___ 10. Good works are necessary for faith in Christ.
- ___ 11. If you are bad Jesus won't love you.
- ___ 12. Jesus died for your sins, but you still must be good to get to heaven.
- ___ 13. If you are sorry for your sins, then God will forgive you.
- ___ 14. When teaching a lesson we should just stress the "truths" of the lesson.
- ___ 15. If you believe in Jesus as your Savior, then your sins are forgiven.

When I was asked to do this paper on moralizing I was honored by this privilege. I soon found that to moralize is very easy. I moralized on how I could demonstrate moralizing and finally I saw a moral in my moralizing. The moral being that whoever puts off till tomorrow what he can do today finds himself staying up nights.

When we talk about moralizing the first thing that pops into my head is the idea that all people should have morals or standards by which to lead their lives. In Sunday Schools we rightly teach morals. The policeman writing out a speeding ticket also teaches morals. The judge who hands down a decision in a criminal case also has the duty of teaching morals. And yes, our children are taught morals in every public institution which they attend or will attend in the future. One can not escape morals. They show everytime we open our mouths to speak, or everytime we make a decision calling for an action. One of the tasks which we as teachers are called to do is to the children in our care the morals commanded by God. Very commonly we refer to those morals as being the Ten Commandments, The Lord has even made it easy for us to apply those morals in that He saw fit to give us only ten of them. Hence, one may think we can cover the aspect of morals in ten very easy and short simple lessons.

Because of our "Old Adam" dwelling within us it becomes very easy to teach the do's and don'ts of God's Word. He so plainly sets them forth in easy-to-understand terms. Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness. Jesus Himself even gave a brief summary of all ten when he replied to the lawyer, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all

thy heart, and with all thine soul and with all thy mind, and the second is like unto the first, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. (Matthew 22:37, 39)

When we as teachers only have the above goal (do's and don't's) in mind, then we are guilty of moralizing. We are guilty of hindering the work of the Holy Spirit to let the love of Christ shine in the hearts of our children.

Everyone in the whole world can teach morals. We know that even unbelievers can do that as well as the Christian. However, the difference between the two is the motivation that is used. The policeman writing out the ticket is giving us a lesson in the moral of obeying the speed laws of our nation. The judge is trying to teach the criminal that such action results in punishment of one form or another. Even the teacher in a public institution is teaching morals when good citizenship is stressed for the purpose of making one's life productive and fruitful so he or she can be a benefit to society. God tells us that man has the natural law written in his heart. "For when the Gentiles which have not the law, are a law unto themselves; which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another." (Romans 2:14-15).

Even though man is privileged to have the law written within his heart, it will not get him to heaven. The natural law, to be sure, assures us of some degree of safety as we walk the streets, live in our homes, and go about our daily business. But it can never reform someone or change him into something else. This can only be accomplished by the Gospel of Jesus Christ which converts us from enemies of God into his believing servants. To be sure the Christian needs the law, but he needs it to remind him to seek the shelter of God's grace. The fountain of living water which springs daily from the truths of God's Word is there to heal the troubled soul of the sinner and to grant him peace and forgiveness which only Christ has made possible through the redemption of sins.

In order for man to do good works and to obey the Moral Law of God man must be motivated by the Gospel of Christ. Man can not contribute one iota to his salvation. Man can not stand before God and say, "I have helped my fellow man in everyway possible; therefore, for being such a good guy, you must open the gates of heaven." In the Bible Jesus told of such a man who wanted to rely upon his good works which he had kept from his youth. The young man thought that he was blameless and could merit heaven on his own account. It just so happened that he was also very rich and Christ asked him to sell all he had and follow him. We all know that the man hung his head and returned to his own home. (Matthew 19:16-22). He had been convicted of his work righteousness, and yet during this lesson he did not heed the call to faith. Let us be aware that we do not teach our children the same ideas this young man had, when we are to be pointing them to the cross of forgiveness and the resultant fruits of faith produced by the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life.

Now that I have spoken about moralizing it is time to give a definition. I believe that a very simple definition of moralizing is teaching anyone to do good, or to be good, solely by the threats of the law.

Such threats are shown us by the-statements numbered 11, 12, and 13 of our opening exercise. Because the Christian is a sinner, he needs the Law to guide him. Our old Adam is very much like the cowboy who has lost his horse and is far out on the prairie, all alone without so much as a match for light. It is pitch dark. If he would try to walk back to the ranch house I am sure he would stray from the path which would lead him there. In our sinful nature we also are like that cowboy. We do not have the light before us to guide our way. We must rely upon the

law to show us the right path to take in our daily living. We will always need this guidance from God.

Some people however, feel that “love” is the guide for a decent life. In other words man is able to rely upon himself, he doesn’t need God’s counsel in making decisions, so long as man’s love is what guides him. Therefore, when teaching children we should avoid such statements as, “It seems to me,” or “I feel this is wrong,” or perhaps “God would be pleased if we did this.” They all leave the child with the important question “Have I really followed the Lord or is there more that I must do?”

Another way in which we can moralize is by failure to properly distinguish between the Law and the Gospel in our teaching. This is shown us by statements 2, 3, 4, 5, Some people think and believe that the Bible is the rule book of God for us on earth. They speak and emphasize the love of man toward God and the love of man toward his neighbor. Those who constantly center their teaching on the love that man should have for God and his neighbor are, in effect, making the Law another Gospel (*Teaching Law and Gospel*, William Fisher).

We can also improperly teach the Law and Gospel when we leave the idea or impression with the children that the Gospel is something in which God makes demands on us, and therefore something that must be obeyed. Refer to statements 1, 12, and 13. However, obeying the law is not the same as obeying the Gospel. Obeying the Gospel is simply believing it. ‘Whosoever believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned’ (Mark. 16:16). We should encourage our children to trust in Christ for the complete forgiveness of sins. Lead them to realize there is nothing that they can contribute to salvation, it is all a free gift. “For by grace are ye saved through faith, and not of yourselves it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Another aid for us to help us avoid moralizing is to always remember that what we teach the children will determine where they will spend eternity. God has called us to teach His Word so that those who hear will believe in Him and be saved. “Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God!” (Romans 10: 17). For this reason we will strive to avoid doing anything which will cause one of these children to fall into sin or become an unbeliever. Therefore, we must be on guard by what we say and do. We must beware that we do not offend them. We can be a stumbling block for them by setting a bad example, using sarcastic tones with them, or by being careless in our teaching. Children are very impressionable and are willing to accept almost anything we tell them. Let us ever be on our guard that we properly teach them the Law and the Gospel of God’s Word which shows itself by what we say and do.

We can also be guilty of moralizing by failing to teach the whole Bible Lesson. Many people can become confused and have as their priority just talking about the aim and the truth of each lesson. God did not see fit to give us just aims and truths in the Bible, but He also included facts. Such facts also need to be taught for a proper understanding of the Scriptures. When Jesus commissioned His disciples He told them to go and, teach all nations. He also told them what to preach and teach. “Teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19). God gave all Scripture to us and “It all is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (II Timothy 3:16). Again Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians that he had preached not “Words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit” (I Corinthians 2:13). In the Bible Lesson of Mary and Martha one could explain the story in such a way that the rebuke of the Law is absent; “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things” (Luke 10:41). With this rebuke being absent in the lesson,

the lesson can become one of seeing how happy the home was in which Jesus was a guest. No mention could be made of the “One thing Needful,” the Gospel of Salvation.

Care must also be exercised in the words we use when teaching the Bible Lesson. It is very simple to let moralizing slip into the lesson, perhaps without us even knowing it. Take for example the story of the Flood. It would be very easy for the children to gain the impression that Noah and his family were the only ones saved because they were “good” in the sight of the Lord. If the word good is not explained further and embellished this could leave the following impression. Noah and his family were good people and all the others were evil. Noah choose to be good while the others preferred to remain with their evil ways even during the 120 year grace period. If that is all that is taught in the lesson the child may go home with the feeling that he wants to be just like Noah and also good in the sight of the Lord so nothing bad will happen to him. One could also use the examples of Cain and Abel, the Rich man and Poor Lazarus, and other lessons. I believe that any Bible lesson we teach could leave the children with this kind of impression. It needs to be clearly stated that in each case they were saved and showed favor by God, not because of what they had done themselves, but rather by what God had done for them and to them, which they through faith, worked by God, treasured as their own. It was the Love of God toward man which these people realized and understood. Not the love of man toward God. (Statements 6, 9, and 15).

When we have proper understanding of our role as called teachers, then we can avoid moralizing. When we understand that we, are not the authors of God’s Word but the purveyors thereof, it becomes easy to teach. God furnishes us with the message, we are simply to proclaim it. We are forbidden, to doctor it up or change it in any way. When we begin to change a few things here and there then moralizing has taken place. We should beware that we do not try to water down His Word not make it say something which God does not say. It is simple to make statements which are not clearly taught in Scripture. Especially when we deal with those “what if” questions. Another instance could be the statement that all divorce is contrary to God’s will or that all killing is against God’s Word.

Another aspect to help us avoid moralizing is to be aware that we are not responsible for producing the results. In other words, when we correctly teach the Law and the Gospel in our lessons, it is God who will produce the fruits of faith or the sanctified life within the hearts of our children. Paul correctly reminded the Corinthians of this fact when he said, “And I brethren, when I came to you came not with the excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” (I Corinthians 2:1-5).

Another comfort for Christian teachers is found in God’s Word as recorded in I Corinthians 2:9ff. In these words God is telling us that He sends to us the Holy Spirit which opens the Word for our understanding. Not an understanding as the world would call it, but understanding according to the Spirit of God. In other words we have the assurance that the Holy Spirit will also be with us, guiding us to teach our charges in the Wisdom of the Lord. Verses 12 and 13 tell us “Now we have received not the spirit of the World but the Spirit of God; that we might know the things that are freely given us of God, which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” What a wonderful blessing we have, in that God Himself has told us He

will give us the Spirit to light our way, to teach others the truths of God. We need not rely upon ourselves but put all our confidence in Him for which nothing is impossible. In His own time and way the Holy Spirit will produce the results. All that God requires of us is that we faithfully continue to preach His Word in season and out of season.

Another aid for us in preparing and teaching our lessons is our faithful attendance at the Sunday School preparation meetings. It is here that the Pastor leads the teachers through the various lessons for the month or weeks ahead. It is here also where we have the opportunity to question and clarify the lesson in our minds. If in doubt, do not be afraid to seek answers to questions. The Pastor is the called servant of Christ to the entire flock. You are included in this flock. He also will instruct and help whenever and however he is able. Both of you are called workers in the Kingdom of Christ, you are to sustain and uplift one another and be edifiers of the Word to the Congregation within your respective spheres of work.

God would also have us be prepared for the lesson we are to teach. We can not go into a lesson “cold” and expect warm results. I know that time is an important factor to all of us. But there is nothing more important in our life than the calling of Christ. As God’s servants we must be willing to give of our time for His witnessing to others. We need to schedule our lives and prioritize them. Put first things first. If we can not do this ourselves how can we ever expect to set the example for the children in our care. I like to think about this fact as I teach the children during the day. Suppose this was the last time they would ever hear the Word of God in their lives. Just suppose that it was God’s will that He end their time of grace as they are walking home from school and are involved in a fatal accident. We would have had the last opportunity to present to them the Law of God and the sweet message of forgiveness of sins through Christ. Let this thought also move us to teach our lessons in such a way that we may never doubt that we have presented the true Word of God to our children for their souls’ salvation. May they ever answer with a firmness of faith “I know that heaven is my home through the blood bought redemption of Christ my Savior.”

Let us also bear in mind that the children placed in our care for that hour on Sunday or Saturday are God’s, chosen people. They are not ordinary individuals. They are a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, the people of God,” (I Peter 2:9-10). Let us not turn them into slaves, but let us treat them as God’s children and hold them in the highest regard and respect.

Another point which will help us to avoid moralizing is to remember that every lesson we teach must contain the Gospel message. A lesson without Christ is like a sandwich without bread. It is no lesson at all. It can only lead the child to see the condemnation of the Law without any knowledge of his redemption paid by Christ. Let us not leave the child “hanging” with the nagging question of what must I do to be saved? Rather let us use every means at our disposal to assure the child that forgiveness has been won for him through Christ. Then only can the child go home with a heart of happiness and proclaim to his parents, “I know that my Redeemer lives what comfort this sweet sentence gives, he lives, he lives who once was dead, he lives my ever living head.”

One final note on moralizing in our Bible Lessons. I said previously that we as teachers need to be thoroughly furnished unto all good works. We need to know the Bible which we are teaching to our children. This presupposes that we also need to search the Scriptures to see if those things are so. We need to daily increase in wisdom as we study the Lord’s plan of salvation. We can not do this if we do not set aside some portion of our day for meditation, on His Word. We first need to seek after the one thing needful ourselves so our teaching has the

approval of God. We need the time to let the Holy Spirit talk to us through God's Word. For just as our children need to grow in Christ, it is also imperative that the teachers grow. Let not your study of the lesson be restricted to the Pastor's Sunday School meeting, but continue to seek His Word for they are they which testify of God.

I pray that this paper have been of use to you in your weekly teaching. I would like to take this opportunity to let you know that it is a pleasure and joy for me to be considered a laborer together with you in the Kingdom of God. God truly has called us to a very special and responsible position. He alone breaks the evil will of the "Old Adam" and the work of Satan which would hinder the spread of His saving message. May you find joy and peace in the words of our Lord when He proclaims to us, "Well done thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." (Matthew 25:21)