

# Teaching-Learning Methods for Ministry in the Church

## Faith and Works: Principles for Church Leaders to Help People Glorify God

Pastor Edward D. Seely, Ph.D.

“Well, he did it again!” Jim complained to his friend, Jill, another youth minister. “I just met with my supervisor, and he didn’t mention any of the good things I’ve been doing; all he could talk about was how my youth group isn’t growing like he wants to see. All he’s interested in are numbers!”

If you haven’t already had your supervisor, or others, place pressure on you to produce numbers of attendees in your ministry, whether to children, young people, or adults, you very likely will. Youth ministers especially receive that pressure and usually react negatively to such a material orientation, with some justification; however, we must keep in mind that numbers are not unimportant. They can indicate, for example, whether a staff member should continue to place the amount of time and other resources he or she is expending in a certain area of his or her program. From a stewardship perspective his or her time and other resources may serve more effectively in another part of, or beginning a new program in, e.g., the church’s youth ministry.

Yet, much more, when this pressure is forthcoming, it gives those of us in ministry a valuable teaching opportunity. We should sit down with our supervisor and others, and explain that attendance numbers, as useful as they are (a point that we need to acknowledge and implement, such as in the suggestions below), are only a start in the evaluation of our program, and that those numbers are not the most important measure for evaluating the program’s effectiveness. To make that point, we need to look at the Bible in order to clarify the criteria the Lord has established for evaluating his people’s performance.<sup>1</sup>

The subject of evaluation is one that has many facets. This essay focuses on essential principles that are the basis for engaging in the process most accurately and effectively, without which the method and results will be incomplete, misleading, and counterproductive. The principles are frequently related to youth ministry, but they also apply to all areas of ministry that involve teaching, including adult education.

### **Good works over time demonstrate genuineness of faith in Christ.**

Many programs are built on attendance numbers. But do they produce *the fruit* that is required to demonstrate development in Christ-likeness?

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<sup>1</sup> All evaluation is conducted by comparing and contrasting something with a preset value, a standard that serves as the criterion for determining whether what is *valued* (the basis of *evaluation*) has been accomplished. For the most accurate conclusion pertaining to personnel and program performance, the standard should be established prior to data collection. The Biblical texts provide our ultimate criterion and the guidelines for listing the other criteria a person or program should meet.

In my work as a professor of church education and youth ministry at Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary, I received many position descriptions from churches in a variety of denominations looking for youth ministers. All of them mentioned wanting their youth leader to build and maintain several programs. Good so far, depending on the nature and quality of the programs. Yet, ironically, churches typically make the unwarranted assumption that if the leader can bring out large numbers of young people to attend these programs, then the desired growth is occurring.

Good programs can help, but they are only one component in the process of facilitating the lifestyle Christ requires of those who profess faith in him.<sup>2</sup> One of the main reasons, among several others, for this reality is that sanctification (growth in holiness and Christ-likeness) occurs over time, much time.<sup>3</sup> Further, in this age of sin, sanctification is not as much a smooth onward and upward progression as a two steps forward and one step backward development that also has periods of stagnation that occasionally occur. Many strategies can be implemented to bring out large numbers of youth or any others as well. Nevertheless, a large youth group or adult Sunday school class does not automatically mean sanctification is being facilitated.

Two key questions to ask in evaluating a program are these: First, “What indicators exist that what we’re doing in this ministry is actually facilitating *behavior change*, i.e., actions in obedience to Christ in the students’ daily lives that contrast with the way they’ve previously functioned?” Second, “Can we observe these actions recurring *over time* as part of a lifestyle emulating Christ?”<sup>4</sup>

Throughout this essay the emphasis is going to be on what the teacher and minister do that produce observable behavior change. However, we need to preface this approach within the Biblically based and historic framework of Christian teaching that the faithful proclamation of God’s Word is primary, basic, and fruitful. God himself says that his Word will not return to him void, and it will achieve its purpose. (Isaiah 55:11) Also Paul teaches that ultimately as teachers and preachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ we are part of a team, and we don’t always see the fruit of our labor, much less its maturity. We do our part, another teacher adds to it, *and it is God who makes what we’ve done effective*. (1 Corinthians 3:6-11) Nevertheless, “each one should be careful how he builds” (1 Corinthians 3:10) and that is the focus of this discussion. By using the tools advocated in this essay we can maximize the likelihood of our work producing the desired effects, and with God’s help we can observe some of those results.

<sup>2</sup> For the other key components see my essay, “Where Reformed Theology Meets and Shapes Youth Ministry: Facilitating Answers to Adolescents’ Great Questions of Life,” an abridged version of which is in the November 2006 issue of the *Calvin Theological Journal*.

<sup>3</sup> This time factor is one reason why it is essential for youth and other ministers to employ a long-range perspective and plan on staying a lengthy time in the place where they are serving in order to nurture that sanctification within an ongoing relationship.

<sup>4</sup> This need for observation over time is another reason for planning a ministry with a long tenure in the same congregation or parachurch ministry.

In the West, and especially in North America, church leaders, especially supervisors, have allowed the culture to shape in their minds a mental structure that values bigness (which is more easily observable) over much more important, and harder to observe, internal values. Recall the commercial, “The bigger the burger the better the burger.” This cultural characteristic is an illustration of a key Biblical teaching expressed by the prophet Samuel, “The LORD does not look at the things human beings look at. People look at the outward appearance [e.g., in this case attendance numbers], but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7 TNIV)<sup>5</sup> When the students who’ve been in our youth groups and other classes meet God in the final judgment, his first question is not likely to be “How many times did you attend?” He is more likely to say (already knowing the answer), “How well did you do putting my Word into action in your daily life?” Similarly, he is probably not going to ask us, “How large was your group?” but more likely “How well did you do in helping my children know me, trust me, and please me, obeying my will?”

How, then, do we identify those matters in accord with God’s will and facilitate their development in ways that will please him (and your supervisor)? These matters of the mind and heart are soul-shaping characteristics that drive decisions to act in certain ways. These actions are observable and, Scripture teaches on virtually every page, must be done in obedience to God’s Word and will.

It’s not enough to only teach that we should just believe in God. Even Satan and the demons believe who God is. As we read in James (2:19-26)

<sup>19</sup> You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

<sup>20</sup> You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

<sup>21</sup> Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

<sup>22</sup> You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

<sup>23</sup> And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend.

<sup>24</sup> You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

<sup>25</sup> In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?

<sup>26</sup> As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

A key part of those deeds is obedience. The demonic beings believe in God, but they don’t obey. In fact throughout God’s Word we see that he calls and requires us to obey. (Exodus 12:24; Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 15; Matthew 28:20; John 14:15-23, 15:1-17; Revelation 14:12)

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<sup>5</sup> Compare Luke 16:15; John 7:24; Galatians 2:6.

In Protestant circles we've long had the understanding that the content of our faith is essential, and it is. In fact Jesus even called our faith the essential work of God that we are to do. "The work [Greek *ergon*] of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:29) But Holy Scripture does not say that our work ends with believing.

One of our basic problems today is that we've emphasized the role of faith so much that we've sometimes inadvertently communicated that works, in the sense of actions, are either insignificant or unnecessary, a very unbiblical conclusion. In fact, where we've done so, we've neglected a key dimension of the content of the Bible's teaching about the saving faith God requires. Jesus also emphasized that "by their fruit you will know them." (Matthew 7:15-23; cf. Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Peter 1:8 and the context 1:1-11)

In accord with what Jesus said, the Holy Spirit through James revealed the following: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like." (1:22-24) What does this statement also have to say for those who are searching to "find themselves?" Remember, James also added that "faith without works [*ergon*] is dead." (2:26)

The apostle Paul brought together both concepts, faith and concomitant actions, this way as he writes in the second chapter of Ephesians: [8] "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—[9] not by works [*ergon*], so that no one can boast. [10] For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works [*ergon*], which God prepared in advance for us to do."<sup>6</sup> (Ephesians 2:8-10 TNIV) Thus, we are saved *by* faith *for* good works. Many focus on verses 8-9 and forget verse 10. Notice the vital balance Paul indicates in this passage: faith (vss. 8-9) is to be operationalized in works (v. 10). *Balancing faith and works is the basis for providing (and supporting the rationale of) programs and teaching that will facilitate development of the fruit Jesus commands his followers to produce.*

Notice also that Paul prioritizes faith and works, which have different though complementary purposes. Parsimoniously, we can say that faith saves and works confirms. Of course the purpose of the works is more for serving and glorifying God and

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<sup>6</sup> Notice also how this passage clearly shows that there is no conflict between the teaching of Paul and James as some think. While Paul emphasized the importance of grace (a prerequisite of faith), he definitely agreed with James on the need for works as an expression and validation of true faith. (James 2:17-26) Both apostles and the other Bible writers agree that the works believers in Christ are to do are to be done as expressions of thanksgiving and not for obtaining salvific merit; i.e., our works are done in gratitude for God's grace and not as a means of earning his favor. A helpful tool for teaching these concepts is *The Heidelberg Catechism*, as is Martin Luther's catechism which in answer to Question 276, "What is the necessary result of repentance?" quotes Matthew 3:8 and John 8:11 followed by the Augsburg Confession (XII 6), "Then good works, which are the fruits of repentance, are bound to follow." This is a very significant statement, for Luther's major emphasis on salvation by grace as the great need for reformation in the church was so strong that it is still keenly observed in the congregations following in his tradition to this day. The issue, as the Bible clearly teaches, is not grace or works but grace and works, yet in that order, where works follows grace in eternal thanksgiving to God.

accomplishing his purposes, but doing so confirms the genuineness of one's faith. A helpful analogy is to think of faith and works as being two parts of the same coin. The key is to keep in mind which is heads and which is tails. If we lose the priority and view works as heads and faith as tails, we have works righteousness, an unbiblical cart before the horse. However, if we have faith as heads and works as tails, we have a Biblical understanding of works as the grateful fruit of faith, fruit which demonstrates and strengthens union with and maturation in Christ and glorifies God. (Ephesians 4:11-16) As Jesus taught, it is not words that God is looking for but obedient deeds. "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:8; Matthew 5:16, 7:21) Contrary to what many think, words alone are not enough. God is glorified by his people obediently acting in accord with his will as taught in the Bible.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, *maintain both the Biblical priority and the balance of faith and works for the most effective teaching ministry. Faith in Christ comes first, but a balance in the emphasis on both is necessary to facilitate the obedient and holy maturity to which the Lord calls us for effective service.* (See, e.g., John 13:34-25; 14:21; 15:9-17; Ephesians 4:11-16.) By "balance" I do NOT mean that both faith and works are equal means of being saved. By balance I mean spending an equal amount of time explaining and emphasizing the importance of both. In my ministry and personal experience I find that emphasizing the faith the Bible teaches fosters works pleasing to God, and as these works are done in gratitude to God for saving faith, we want to learn more and grow in our understanding of our faith in Christ, which motivates greater works in his service.

Further, both faith and works have visible manifestations, which mean that they can be evaluated. This evaluation occurs by comparing and contrasting the manifestations with a standard. Nevertheless, before we look at some ways to evaluate our teaching and our students' learning, we need to reflect on some key works to include in our teaching of God's Word.

### **Teach the uniqueness of Christianity regarding faith and good works.**

One of the works to which believers are called is preparation for giving testimony regarding the hope we have in Christ. (1 Peter 3:15) In historic Christian theology this witness is part of our vocation, our calling, and it has significant implications for church teaching ministries today, which are charged with helping children, youth, and adults equip themselves to witness effectively for Christ in increasingly pluralistic circumstances in our own culture and for doing so globally as more and more engage in international travel and cross-cultural interactions of many other kinds.

Thus, be sure to teach your students that the relationship of faith and works is one of the key differences between Christianity and every other religion. All other religions are autosoteristic (> Greek: *auto*, self + *soter*, to save). Every other religion prescribes a

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<sup>7</sup> This is why it is essential to teach the Bible in all our classes and youth groups, even when the focus of the session is on such subjects as church history, contemporary issues, or relationships. We have such relatively few occasions to teach God's Word that we cannot pass up any opportunity to do so.

particular protocol people must follow to achieve, earn, merit their own salvation, i.e., a way to save themselves. Only Christianity, the religion of the Old and New Testaments, proclaims that God in his unfathomable love, which being perfect is also just and righteous, has provided for the salvation of human beings solely through his grace (unmerited blessing) in Jesus Christ. Christ alone has lived the perfect obedient life, fulfilling all the requirements of God's Law. God credits Jesus' perfect righteousness to those who have faith in Christ as their only Savior and Lord. (Romans 4:5-12, 22-24) In *gratitude* we do good works to show our thanksgiving to God for his grace, our unmerited acceptance in Jesus Christ, not to earn God's acceptance. The Bible teaches that human beings cannot earn their salvation; in fact, we daily increase our debt to God who is most holy. (Leviticus 19:2; Job 9:3; Romans 2:4-5; Matthew 6:12)

In the other religions, where human beings have the responsibility to earn their salvation, they carry a huge burden. In the education program I administered at one church, I offered courses on the Bible and world religions in each of which the teaching of the Bible was contrasted with the particular religion of focus in that course. I usually taught these courses with another person, who was either a former adherent of that religion or had expertise or special familiarity with it. At one point in the course on "The Bible and Buddhism" I asked my colleague, "When you came to Christ, and realized you no longer had to bear the burden of achieving your own salvation, you must have felt like the world was lifted off your shoulders." She replied, "Oh, I did!"<sup>8</sup>

Buddhism is often portrayed by Hollywood actors, sports personalities, educators, and other media as an idyllic and peaceful religion, but a closer look at its literature and teaching clearly shows that it is not so. In the first place, as we've seen, its adherents have to earn their salvation by following specific rules. Also, since Buddhism teaches that people don't live perfect lives, they therefore have to keep trying through many lifetimes to "get it right." Of course, *this also means many deaths*, which these adherents typically don't mention, along with the implications. It's bad enough to have to die once, but Buddhists, and those in other religions that hold to the doctrine of reincarnation, believe they have to die as many as hundreds of times or more before being able to break the cycle of karma and enter Nirvana.<sup>9</sup> And what is Nirvana? It is nothing like the Biblical view of heaven; it is diffusion into a cosmic consciousness, where one loses his or her individual identity, as a drop of water entering an ocean.<sup>10</sup>

In Western society today, those who actually do look into the teaching of these world religions, where they do see these unpleasant features, simply reject the parts they don't like. They adopt a "cafeteria approach," technically called syncretism, which is now vogue, and wind up making their own syncretistic religion. To help your students grow in their ability to avoid doing the same and to witness to these people more effectively for

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<sup>8</sup> As one learns much about English grammar from studying another language, a unit or a series of courses contrasting the Bible with other world religions helps students learn more about Christian doctrine and how to better explain it in conversations with inquirers. Teens and adults have considerable interest in other religions, which provides a built-in motivation for such instruction.

<sup>9</sup> Thanks be to God the Bible reveals that we only have to die once (Hebrews 9:27). Here and in other texts the Bible refutes the doctrine of reincarnation.

<sup>10</sup> Contrast, e.g., Revelation 21-22.

Christ it is good to raise what philosophers call the epistemological (> Greek: *pistis*, belief, faith + *logos*, word, statement, teaching) question: “How do you know this is true?” Also ask, “On what authority do you make such changes?” Probing in love with prayer produces results: some sooner, some later, depending on how the Holy Spirit works with that person, including using what we’ve said and done.

The epistemological question should be raised with the adherents of all religions. Raise, and teach your students to raise, the tough questions. The religious concepts in conflict with God’s Word as revealed in the Bible will collapse under their own weight. The epistemological question exposes the weak foundation on which a false religion’s house of cards ultimately crumbles. It may occur while you are in conversation with a person, or it may occur in his or her mind later. That is one of the values of questions. People can blow off didactic statements, but questions linger long in their minds, well after you have left them.<sup>11</sup> For a helpful exercise in this regard, read through the four accounts of the Gospel (Matthew—John) and identify Jesus’ use of questions to teach.<sup>12</sup>

Of course when asked, it’s necessary that we’re prepared to answer the epistemological question ourselves, as we’re commanded to do. (1 Peter 3:15) In all likelihood your students have already been raising this question, at least within their own minds. We must provide this help for them, specifically enabling them to understand why we believe the Bible is the only Word of God and is trustworthy. There are very sound reasons for this belief that have held up under the most intense scrutiny for more than 4000 years, ever since the writing of the Bible began.<sup>13</sup> Raising the epistemological question regarding what we believe must be done in love with the goal of strengthening our students’ faith in Christ and with the answers supplied in the same session as when the question is raised.

The most important question in life and eternity is, “Who is God, what is he like, and what is his will?” The three parts of this question are integrally linked, and the answer

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<sup>11</sup> The cognitive, structural, developmental school of the psychology of human learning explains why questions produce such results in its explanation of the root of motivation. Consider, e.g., the research of Jean Piaget and his description of mental functioning, in particular the equilibration process. Jean Piaget, *Structuralism*, trans. Chaninah Maschler (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970), pp. 62-90. Barry J. Wadsworth, *Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development: An Introduction for Students of Psychology and Education* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1971), pp. 10-32. John S. Stewart, “Toward a Theory for Values Development Education” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, School of Education, Michigan State University, 1974), pp. 277-280, 308-312.

<sup>12</sup> Regarding Jesus’ use of questions, see also Roy B. Zuck, *Teaching as Jesus Taught* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), esp. Chapter 14, “How Did Jesus Use Questions in His Teaching?” pp. 235-276.

<sup>13</sup> Many excellent resources exist to help young and older people learn why Christians maintain that it is most reasonable to believe the Bible is God’s Word. Such resources, which are annotated, can be found on the web site of the Calvin Ministry Resource Center (<http://library.calvin.edu/collections/mrc>). Use the Keyword apologetics.

distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. In his Word he reveals himself as being triune.<sup>14</sup> One of God's key characteristics is that he is holy.

God's holiness, which is taught throughout the Bible, is the key to understanding the need for obedient faith in Christ. In fact, without conceptualizing God as holy, holy, holy (the Hebrew way of saying most holy, e.g., Isaiah 6:3), people do not sense the need for Christ; they conclude they have the right to walk into God's presence whenever and however they desire. When the Bible says that God is holy, it means that he is set apart from all that is wicked, sinful, and evil, from all that is common. He will neither accept nor coexist or fellowship with that which is evil. Since, as we've seen above, we daily increase our debt to God, we have to have his help in order to be cleansed from all that contaminates us in order to be acceptable to him. The Bible clearly teaches that God has provided only one way to enter his most holy presence, and that is through a genuine, authentic, faith in Jesus Christ, a faith that is verified by producing works in obedience. God credits Christ's righteousness to those who believe in him; true faith then motivates an increasing desire to obey him.<sup>15</sup> (John 14:6; Hebrews 7:24-28; 10:1-11:1) But how do we know with certainty that our students have this faith that issues in obedience that glorifies God?

### **How can we teach and evaluate the balance of faith and works?**

As leaders called (i.e., with the vocation) to help God's children of all ages develop saving *faith* in Christ, we need to teach in and administrate church education ministries that not only facilitate students' learning these basics of Biblical teaching but also produce the fruit, the *works*, that give evidence of a genuine and maturing faith in Christ. How can we develop such a ministry?

First of all we must model and verbally teach these basics, not only to our students themselves but also to our leadership team and for the rest of the church and the broader

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<sup>14</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 61:1; Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 2:18. For other Bible passages see my essay, "Who is God, and what is he like? Part 1: What is the Trinity" on my Web site at [www.fromacorntoak12.com/](http://www.fromacorntoak12.com/)

<sup>15</sup> Of course we must avoid two extremes. Scripture does not support the concept of perfectionism, the teaching of some that once one truly believes, he or she no longer sins, and that unless one obeys perfectly his or her salvation is in jeopardy. Christ's forgiveness is clearly taught in Scripture. In theological terms, a believer's track record of obedience expresses evidence of his or her regeneration, faith, justification (James 2:22, 24), and sanctification. Regeneration is the new birth from the Holy Spirit that makes faith possible. (John 3:3; 1 Corinthians 12:3) In that faith God justifies the believer, i.e., declares him or her righteous by being credited with Christ's righteousness. (Romans 1:17; 4:22-25) Then the believer begins the life-long process of development in sanctification, in which the Holy Spirit together with the believer's cooperation and work (Philippians 2:12-13) and the help of the church (other believers), produces characteristics of Christ-likeness. (See, e.g., Hebrews 3:12-14; 10:25-26.) Another extreme to be avoided is the concept alluded to above, that works are totally unnecessary, an outgrowth of antinomianism. (Contrast Romans 6:1-2.) I've seen some claiming to be Christians who apparently have no trouble lying, and sinning in other ways, and who simply believe that they'll ask God for forgiveness, say they're sorry to the other person(s), and everything will be all right. Some have even gone so far as to ask forgiveness for sins they were planning to commit! Those espousing this concept who are Christians are functioning in a very immature stage of sanctification. It is faith which justifies, but a genuine and maturing faith truly tries to please and glorify God in works of obedience to his will taught in his Word.



community as well. Models manifest demonstrations and applications of Biblical truths. Further, leaders living what they proclaim is paramount to people of all ages who closely observe what their teachers do, i.e., whether they live by what they teach. Many do what they see their leaders do.

Christ commanded his followers to love (John 13:34-35), and that love, *agape* in the original Greek, was to be even for our enemies (Matthew 5:44). Contrary to much contemporary thinking, this love is much more than a romanticized emotion. Such love was defined by the apostle Paul in behavioral terms as being “patient...kind...not arrogant or rude...” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7) John explains that *agape* is not done “with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” (1 John 3:18) The apostle cites an application of *agape* in giving material possessions to brothers in need. (1 John 3:17)

God holds those of us who are teachers of his people more highly accountable than others. (James 3:1; cf Matthew 7:15-23; John 3:10) When leaders in the church fall into especially serious sins that become public knowledge, the church and its mission is gravely hurt and harmed.<sup>16</sup> (1 Samuel 1:22-26; 8:1-5)

In addition to remaining faithful and obedient ourselves, we must monitor the ministry of our leadership team and be prepared to admonish when necessary. (2 Timothy 3:16-17) One implication of this Biblical responsibility is to be careful with regard to our social friendships, and those of our spouse. This is the reason why some in the administration literature advise leaders not to develop close friendships within their congregation, especially with those whom one oversees. There is wisdom in such an approach, for it is difficult to discipline someone who is a close friend or the close friend of one’s spouse. Nevertheless, if you have the strength and courage to confront (or “carefront” as David Augsburger prefers), even a colleague who is a friend, that is the key. Our responsibilities for the care of God’s Kingdom come before friendships. If you or your spouse have a friend in the church, even one on your leadership team, and he or she steps out of line, you must for the sake of the Kingdom, including for the leader’s own sake, admonish him or her. I’ve had to do this, and it’s not easy. I’m grateful my wife was understanding and supportive. Friendships have changed as a result, but we could sleep at night. Doing so, you will too.

In one church I served, a popular leader in our youth program decided to move in and cohabit with her boyfriend. The youth minister, whom I supervised, discussed this matter with me and the rest of our team, and the decision was not whether to remove this leader from her position but how to do so in order to preserve the relationship with, and to facilitate the growth of, all involved. This undesirable development was used as a teaching opportunity. The youth minister met one-to-one with her team member and discussed the Biblical problem (e.g., Ephesians 5:3) that had arisen due to her decision. They then decided the leader would explain to the youth group what had occurred and express her repentance for doing so (including moving out), but that it would be

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<sup>16</sup> For just one contemporary example see Tal Brooke & Jonathan Rice, “Falling from Grace: Warnings of What’s to Come?” *SCP Newsletter*, Winter 2007, Volume 31:2, p. 4. SCP is the acronym of the Spiritual Counterfeits Project, Inc., headquartered in Berkeley, CA.

necessary for her to take some time off from her leadership in the group in order to process what had occurred and to continue (with regular contact with the minister) in her growth in Christ. Handling such matters in this way enables not only the leader who has compromised his or her ministry with such actions to learn much, but also the students, as the Scriptural and leadership implications are explained (together with relevant research, in this case on the dangers of cohabitation), and they experience how the church exercises disciplinary actions in loving faithfulness.<sup>17</sup>

Second, we must also continually emphasize to parents God's command that they teach the Bible at home. Help them and grandparents understand their Biblical responsibility to do so (e.g., Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:4-7; Psalm 78:1-8; Ephesians 6:4) and ensure that they have Biblically, theologically, and pedagogically sound resources available to help them function accordingly. For such resources, ask them if they have a good modern *translation* (not just a paraphrase) of God's Word (e.g., the NIV Study Bible or the New American Standard Bible).<sup>18</sup> We must neither usurp nor try to improve on God's plan that parents are to be the primary teachers of his Word, even in this age where many families have great challenges. Our calling is to help them do what God has commanded.<sup>19</sup>

Third, implement a strong strategy of support for the church's children, young people, and adults. As they seek to behave in accord with the Word of God, they will encounter fierce opposition at school, at work, on dates, and elsewhere tempting them to disregard and disobey God's will. This opposition is from human sources, e.g., peers, some teachers, and many in the media, and always from the demonic sector. (Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12-20) Believers have direct support from God (Romans 8:38-39; Revelation 7:3-4), but he also works indirectly through other people in his covenant, the church. Such support typically takes the form of informal and nonformal teaching, e.g., small group Bible studies, one-to-one meetings regularly with youth group leaders, other caring adult Christians,<sup>20</sup> and increasingly popular mentoring programs.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> As in all matters of church discipline, the elders and the rest of the staff were informed and their approval obtained in the process of working with the youth leader who erred publicly. When leaders in the church commit Biblical and moral infractions that become public knowledge and compromise their ministry, the matter is most effectively resolved by speaking the truth in love and addressing it in the presence, and for the sake, of all involved. Leader behaviors have far reaching effects on the church, the broader community, and the accomplishment of God's purposes.

<sup>18</sup> For other materials log on to Calvin's Ministry Resource Center and use the Keyword, parenting, as well as related terms.

<sup>19</sup> For more on this subject and how to provide this help for parents, see Edward D. Seely, "Where Reformed Theology Meets and Shapes Youth Ministry: Facilitating Answers to Adolescents' Great Questions of Life," *Calvin Theological Journal*, Volume 41, Number 2 (November 2006), pp. 334-336.

<sup>20</sup> See Mark DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), *passim*; Carol E. Lytch, *Choosing Church: What Makes a Difference for Teens* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), pp. 187-88; Malan Nel, *Youth Ministry: An Inclusive Congregational Approach* (Pretoria, South Africa: Design Books, 2000), *passim*; Malan Nel, "The Inclusive Congregational Approach to Youth Ministry" in *Four Views of Youth Ministry in the Church*, Mark H. Senter III, General Editor (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), pp. 2-19; Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 115-116; and others cited in Edward D. Seely, "Where Reformed Theology Meets and Shapes Youth Ministry: Facilitating Answers to Adolescents' Great Questions of Life."

Include as well a plan of memorizing carefully selected Scripture passages, the meaning and application of which in their daily lives you've explained. In this regard memorize with them such texts as Matthew 5:11-12 and 2 Timothy 3:12 to prepare them for the rejection they will encounter, including bullying, by trying to live Godly lives in obedience to Christ.<sup>22</sup> Include the young people in the selection of Bible passages to memorize that apply especially to needs they regularly experience.

Fourth, carefully monitor how *each* child, youth, and adult in the church is progressing. Elders are key resources for such oversight; volunteer and professional church staff should also attend to this vital task. For example, I urge all youth ministers to develop and implement a system of periodic contact with the church young people who are not involved in any part of the youth program but whom God, their parents, and the church love. When numbers are considered, the tally should include contacts on these who are part of God's covenant community who don't attend anything, but who can grow in the Lord in other ways. Through such contacts, some of these students occasionally attend at least a special one-session program, all of which facilitates their sanctification and fosters future interactions. Reaching out to those who do not now believe provides a good opportunity for verbal and nonverbal teaching, including a witness for Christ that the Holy Spirit can use in their lives, directly and through others. (1 Corinthians 3:6-9)

Fifth, select a good curriculum, if one is not already in place, which provides objectives for each Bible lesson.<sup>23</sup> You will likely have to modify those that are there and add to them. Since it takes much time to write a good curriculum, which time your church probably has not included in your position or job description, choose the curriculum that will best meet your requirements, and then supplement it with the objectives and learning activities that will help the students learn what they need to know and be able to do.

*What should such objectives include?*

Educators identify three main types of student-performance objectives in three learning domains: cognitive, affective, and behavioral.<sup>24</sup> **Cognitive** objectives measure mental

<sup>21</sup> See my essay, "Mentoring in Ministry" at [www.fromacorntoak.com](http://www.fromacorntoak.com).

<sup>22</sup> In children's and youth ministries all memory work is most effectively accomplished when the leaders and parents memorize the passages as well. Young people look to their parents and leaders as "having arrived" at what they want to be. If they see these adults as not knowing verbatim such passages, they conclude, "Why do I need to memorize them?" This admonition is just one application of the principle that a teacher should do as appropriate whatever he or she is asking his or her students to do to provide a model and to avoid hypocrisy.

<sup>23</sup> The Ministry Resource Center (MRC) also contains excellent curricula from which to choose that which will meet your church's needs. These curricula are listed and annotated on the MRC's web site.

<sup>24</sup> Behavioral objectives are sometimes referred to as psychomotor objectives, the emphasis being on doing. The educational literature distinguishes between objectives and goals, the latter being broader statements of teacher/leader intentions and aims. Objectives usually refer to what the students will learn in terms of the specific actions they will perform to demonstrate that the desired learning has occurred. Objectives are typically written in words describing student performance. David Krathwohl includes both teacher and student performance by distinguishing several levels of objectives, the first level being the general teacher-oriented goal statements, and the remaining levels being student-oriented performance in increasing

capabilities, *factual knowledge* (HEAD). Cognitive objectives indicate the knowledge level and degree of the students' ability to do God's will in a particular matter being taught. **Affective** objectives measure feelings about and *attitude toward the subject* (HEART). Affective objectives indicate the students' feelings, attitude, and motivation, or lack thereof, and the likelihood of their doing or not doing what is being taught. This domain is crucial, for if the students' have no interest in and desire for the subject, they will not be motivated to acquire the knowledge (cognition) or apply (behave in life) what the teacher is trying to teach. **Behavioral** objectives measure application of the subject to life, *action on the subject in life settings*. How do you want your students to *behave* (cf. *ergon*, works) as a result of your teaching? (HANDS) Behavioral objectives yield evidence as to whether the subject matter that has been learned is actually being put into practice in daily life.<sup>25</sup>

In the literature on objectives the terms behavioral and performance are sometimes used interchangeably and in somewhat different ways by different authors. In my teaching and writing and that of others, *performance* refers to observable and measurable student actions in all three types of objectives and learning domains (cognitive, affective, and behavioral), that assure the teacher the student has developed and is implementing the desired learning. The word *behavioral* refers to those skills and other competencies that are done in daily life over time in observable deeds (*ergon*, works) that assure the teacher the student has learned and is now living and behaving accordingly, having incorporated those competencies in his or her lifestyle in grateful obedience to Christ. Learning has been transferred from the classroom to the life settings of the youth—from text to turf. The teacher's hard work has made a difference!

Behavioral objectives are essential, for they include the works (*ergon*), in particular the obedience, the holy living the Lord commands that his people do. They should be expressed in terms of *actions* the *students* will *do* in order to demonstrate to the teacher's satisfaction that they have learned and are applying the subject matter as the teacher intended. These statements should indicate concomitant behaviors that are demonstrated over time, which will assure you, other leaders in your program, and your supervisor, of the students' comprehension of, ability to apply, and compliance with the Biblical text in their daily life circumstances.

You don't need a long list of objectives. At least to begin, write one behavioral objective that applies to the main point of the lesson. Do so not only for Sunday school, catechism, and confirmation classes but for youth group messages, retreats, trips, small group ministries, adult education, and other programs as well.

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degrees of detail and specificity. David R. Krathwohl, "Stating Appropriate Educational Objectives" in *Curriculum Evaluation: Commentaries on Purpose, Process, Product*, David A. Payne, Editor (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1974), pp. 69-73.

<sup>25</sup> For additional information on the three domains of learning and the three types of objectives and applications in church education see, "Teaching-Learning Methods in Christian Ministry: Using Level III Objectives," and my other essays on this subject at [www.fromacorntoak12.com](http://www.fromacorntoak12.com).

Curricula typically lack such objectives. When they do list any, most include objectives (usually expressed as lesson aims or goals) that are statements as to what the teacher (not the student) intends to do (Level I objectives).<sup>26</sup> They sometimes indicate certain student actions but usually not in any way that can be observed or measured for evaluation. An example of a Level I objective on witnessing is the following:

- “This course will teach the students how to be an effective witness for the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Objectives that just identify what the teacher intends are necessary first steps for lesson planning, but by themselves they are insufficient, especially in church education, for they only specify teacher plans and do not reveal student understanding, capability, attitude, or behavior change that is linked to the lesson. An objective that only states a teacher’s aim cannot give any assurance that the student has learned or that he or she is incorporating that learning in daily actions...over time.

The next level of objectives is referred to as Level II objectives.<sup>27</sup> They are expressed in terms of what the students will do with the subject matter, but without sufficient detail to provide the teacher with certainty that the students have developed the desired knowledge and attitude and are actually doing in their daily lives what the teacher taught them to do. Curriculum materials typically focus on Level I objectives and sometimes include a few Level II objectives, the latter of which are helpful indicators as to what is desired in the lesson, but they’re insufficient, as in this example, to give the teacher any assurance that his or her lessons have produced the hoped for results. An example of a Level II objective is this one:

- “At the end of this course each student will be able to witness for Jesus Christ.”

It is helpful especially for the teacher, for the students, for the students’ parents, for the teacher’s supervisor, the pastor, and the board of elders to know that the students are going to be doing something with what they are learning in this Sunday school class or course. However, as expressed in this statement of intention, we have no indication in this objective that by the end of the time with their teacher the students will indeed know the main facts of the Gospel of Christ and how to explain the Gospel to an unbeliever, really desires to do so, and/or is truly and effectively doing so.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See “Teaching-Learning Methods in Christian Ministry: Using Level III Objectives,” and my other essays on teaching-learning objectives, at [www.fromacorntoak12.com](http://www.fromacorntoak12.com).

<sup>27</sup> Krathwohl, “Stating Appropriate Educational Objectives,” p. 69 ff.

<sup>28</sup> In writing objectives and evaluating students’ performance with objectives on the subject of witnessing, we must be sure to distinguish between evaluating their knowledge of, attitude toward, and engaging in a well-informed presentation of the Gospel of Christ **and** expecting a person, as a result of a student’s presentation, to become a believer in and follower of Jesus Christ as his or her Savior and Lord. Regarding the former (evaluating knowledge, attitude, and behavior) the teacher and the student can be evaluated and are accountable. Regarding the latter, the coming to faith of an unbeliever, the student and teacher have no control; coming to faith is a work of the Holy Spirit. (John 3:3,5-6; 1 Corinthians 12:3) See below, “A Caveat.” Here is a key intersection of theology and pedagogy that is vital to keep in mind for teaching and evaluation. God requires the teacher and student to simply be faithful and to leave the conversion of an unbeliever to the Holy Spirit.

*Many good intentions and plans never materialize. We want to know whether our plans actually produce what we intend. A well written performance objective, especially a behavioral objective, can confirm the accomplishment of what we've planned to teach. The objective that can yield that confirmation is a Level III objective.*

Level III objectives in all three learning domains (cognitive, affective, and behavioral), possess three components which are (1) the desired (called by some terminal) behavior that is observable and measurable, (2) the conditions in which that behavior is to occur, and (3) how well it is to be done in order to satisfy the teacher that the students have not only learned God's Word but are living (behaving, working [*ergon*], obeying) accordingly.<sup>29</sup> Behavioral objectives are statements of what the *students* will *do* to demonstrate that they've incorporated into their daily lives the main points the teacher or youth leader is trying to make in a particular lesson.

What would such a Level III **behavioral** objective look like? A couple of examples, for a lesson on forgiveness/Matthew 18:15-35, could be as follows:

- Given a stamped, self-addressed envelope, each student will send me a note within the next month telling me he or she has forgiven at least one person who has sinned against him or her.
- After six months each student will send me an e-mail stating that he or she has forgiven someone and no longer carries a grudge.

Do these two objectives satisfy the three criteria for a behavioral objective? Let's see. (1) Do they have an *observable behavior*? (Sending a note and an e-mail; telling and stating that he or she has forgiven someone) (2) Do they contain a statement of the *condition* in which the behavior is to occur? (The note and the e-mail; within the next month and within six months) (3) Do they state *how well* the behavior is to occur? (Forgiveness of at least one person and the absence of a grudge)

Of course since both of these objectives use self-report as the means of evaluation, you are assuming your student is telling you the truth. Such an assumption may be unwarranted, but not necessarily.<sup>30</sup> As teachers our responsibility is not to make sure students never sin again but to do all we can to facilitate comprehension of God's Word and the acts of working it into daily behavior. It is commonly held that behaviors

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<sup>29</sup> For further information on writing objectives see, Norman E. Gronlund, *Stating Behavioral Objectives for Classroom Instruction* (London: The Macmillan Company, 1970), pp. 1-17, 24. Robert F. Mager, *Preparing Instructional Objectives* (Palo Alto, CA: Fearon Publishers, 1962), p. 12. Edward D. Seely, *Teaching Early Adolescents Creatively: A Manual for Church School Teachers* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), especially Chapter 5 "The Importance of Establishing Objectives," pp. 76-84.

<sup>30</sup> Social scientists refer to the response set for social desirability, the orientation of people to say what they think will make them acceptable to others whose opinions they value. However, there are established ways to mitigate the counterproductive effects of this phenomenon. The experience of a teacher's unconditional love is one way. In addition to the above see Walter R. Borg and Meredith D. Gall, *Educational Research: An Introduction* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1974), pp. 178, 237 and other texts in the field.

regularly recurring in one's lifestyle (track record) are reliable indicators of what is real, authentic, genuine, and valued by that person. Well written objectives both teach and provide reliable indicators of such faith and concomitant works. Is what the student reported confirmed by what you and/or others on your leadership team observe? You can also construct objectives that would include your own and others' observations, another reason why it is most desirable for youth leaders and other church teachers to plan on a long tenure in their position. The above are reasons why church administrative leaders should do all they can to influence staff members who are functioning well in their positions to desire to stay for many years.

*These objectives, which measure and evaluate the implementation of actual behavior in life settings, indicate the likelihood that a teacher's lesson has affected the desired shaping of behavior over time. That is, the lesson has facilitated the Holy Spirit's work in the student's sanctification, his or her growth in holy living. (Cf. Ephesians 4:11-6:18)*

The accomplishment of such objectives provides hard data, evidence, of a teaching ministry's effectiveness, as well as valuable and reliable information for evaluation, much more so than attendance numbers which tell nothing about transfer of what was learned (if anything) by simply showing up at a program. This observation does not impugn the often significant effects of the spoken word, especially when the Holy Spirit guides the minds and hearts of the speaker and the listeners. (Isaiah 52:7; 55:11; Romans 10:14-15) Yet, the measurable results produced by the objectives, showing that the students have taken observable steps forward in Christ-likeness, are greatly encouraging to ministers, teachers, supervisors, parents, and many others in the church, not the least of whom being the students themselves!<sup>31</sup>

### **Can this method be used to evaluate the effectiveness of worship planning, including sermons?**

The short answer is yes. In worship, including the sermon, one of the main objectives is to facilitate improvement, primarily behavior change, in the participants' lives as a result of entering God's holy and gracious presence and engaging in and responding to the dialogue with him that constitutes Christian corporate worship.<sup>32</sup> God reveals in his

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<sup>31</sup> Your leadership team, fellow staff members, church board, and others in the congregation including even a considerable number of the young people, will not find strange the need for measurable results of their work. Workplace consultants in the United States, especially those giving advice in resume writing, are urging those seeking employment to make any changes necessary on their resumes to respond to the current emphasis by employers who now require specific statements, preferably in bullet points, as to what positive results an applicant's previous work has produced for the company, rather than as in the past simply listing on the resume the tasks to which he or she were assigned. Employers want to know how the company benefitted, especially (in business) how the bottom line was improved, the more significantly the better. As believers in and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has called us to his service, how could we do less?! We must do all we can to facilitate our students' development in holiness to God, who is Most Holy, and who requires his people to be holy, including producing good fruit, good works, that can be observed and measured.

<sup>32</sup> For more on the dialogue with God in worship, including the Biblical basis for such worship, see especially Units 1 and 3 in "Worship: A Course on Worship in the Christian Church" by Edward D. Seely.

Word very clearly, and throughout the Bible, that what he speaks to his people when they assemble for worship he expects them to put what he has said into practice in their lives. We need look no farther than Micah 6:6-8 for just one example:

<sup>6</sup> With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

<sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

<sup>8</sup> He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Of course it remains for the worship leader to evaluate the elements of the worship service, and the pastor to evaluate the effectiveness of the sermon, to define precisely what behaviors would be demonstrated in order to “act justly,” “love mercy,” and “walk humbly with...God,” and particularly regarding the sermon, the main point to be taken home and put into practice. The above principles of evaluation will help the pastor to know whether those who heard are understanding the message and applying it in ways that are intended.

Many ways can be constructed to evaluate whether the sermon’s objectives have been accomplished. One way a pastor in Loveland, Colorado did so follows in the text box below.

Rev. Glen Schlecht, Senior Pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Loveland, Colorado, U. S. A., delivered a sermon entitled “Live Love.” As he always does, he wrote an accompanying devotional guide for each day of that week entitled, “Bring It Home.” The front page of the devotional contains a practical application section, “WHAT NOW?” suggesting how to apply the main point of the sermon in daily life. In that section he wrote “This week, look for one way to tangibly express Jesus’ love to someone in your life—whether through an act of service, through sacrifice, through words spoken or time given. Live love!” A few days later he received an unsolicited e-mail from a teen-ager who told him how she and her family made a place in their home that week for a single mom and her children who were being abused. They also began storing many of their guests’ most important possessions in their garage. The writer of the e-mail told how grateful the guests were for these acts of love for them and what joy the host family was experiencing as a result of acting according to God’s will as they heard in the sermon.



### A Caveat

At this point a caveat is in order. The caveat contains at least two very important realities for us that we must keep in mind as church teachers.

First and foremost is the fact that we must *distinguish* and always remember the difference between *what only God can do* and *what we can do* regarding our faith in and walk with Christ Jesus. Again, Ephesians 2:8-10 is a key text to keep in the forefront of our minds; be sure to memorize it if you haven't already. As verses 8-9 emphasize, faith only comes through the work of God in us by his grace: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." Compare what Jesus told Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again...the Spirit gives birth to spirit." (John 3:3,6 TNIV)

Thus, we cannot write cognitive, affective, or behavioral objectives which state that at the end of our time with them all our students will profess faith in Christ as their Savior and Lord. Only the Holy Spirit can cause that faith response to occur. (1 Corinthians 12:3) Surely in our teaching our fervent desire is that all our students will believe in and follow Christ, and we should do all we can to facilitate the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, as we do in our families and with others, but we cannot do anything to make anyone believe. We can write cognitive and affective objectives that will assure the students and us as their teachers that they know what they need to know for a faith response and that the conditions are present that will facilitate a tendency to approach rather than avoid the Lord, but we cannot cause them to believe. (This reality is also a key explanation to non-believers who criticize us for "imposing" and "forcing" our faith on people; we have strong evidence from God's Word that such imposition and force is impossible for us to do. We cannot make anyone believe who doesn't want to believe.) Nevertheless, we are called by God to do all we can to help all people believe in and follow Christ Jesus as their Savior and Lord, and then, having done all we can, leave the rest to God.

Secondly, as with some church administrators who have incorporated a secular approach to management by objectives (MBO), it is possible for some leaders to go overboard with the use of objectives in teaching and in the other ministries of the congregation. As indicated at the beginning of this essay, remember that throughout church history Christian growth and development (in theology called progressive sanctification) has been seen to be a result of the believer's regular (optimally weekly) engagement in corporate worship including prayer, reflection on the Bible (both in listening to the Word proclaimed and in personal reading and meditation), the operation of the Holy Spirit, participation in the sacraments, and the encouragement (including admonition) of the church. Performance objectives have likely not been used, at least in the manner described here, and giants in the faith have emerged and produced outstanding works as a result of their mature and maturing faith in Christ. (Ephesians 4:13-16) With the apostle Paul, we can be sure that when we sow, another Apollos will water, and God will make it grow, (1 Corinthians 3:6) for truly "neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything,

but only God who makes things grow.” (1 Corinthians 3:7) Nevertheless, this reality is not a reason to avoid effective teaching tools.

Employing a careful listing of their intended outcomes as here presented, teachers, pastors, and other leaders increase their ability to know if their instruction has had the desired effect (within the limits of what they can do). As the old saying expresses it well, “If you don’t know where you are going, any road will get you there.” The problem is, some roads lead to where you don’t want to be. Further, not only do you not want to wind up there, you don’t want to take your students and other followers there with you.

God has indicated clearly in his Word what he wants his people to do and not do. As their teachers, our calling is to proclaim and explain his Word and its application so they can and are more inclined to obey his Word and his will. A careful use of especially performance objectives offers more tools for the Holy Spirit to use and provides indicators to you, to your students, and to others that those you’ve taught are maturing in the faith and producing the works that please and glorify God.

### **Summary**

Prioritize and balance the proper emphasis on faith and works to produce the most effective teaching ministry and other services that involve edification. Faith in Christ comes first and is the only way to the Father, the only way for salvation, but balancing the emphasis on both is essential to facilitate the obedient and holy maturity to which the Lord calls us for effective service which glorifies God. (John 15:8) A person can be born again and saved but remain in a very elementary stage of sanctification with the result that the believer does not glorify God as he or she should.

Throughout God’s Word we read that his will is that his people obey his teaching. Maturing faith produces fruit. We need to look no farther than what we saw above, that the Lord said we should bear fruit; the apostle Paul and James both said good works are an essential part of the Christian’s holy life. (See Leviticus 19:2, 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8; 5:23-24) Peter added, “As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” (1 Peter 1:14-16)

This holiness is seen both in the bearing of fruit and in avoiding evil. (Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 4:17-5:20.) In facilitating the development of the core of their identity, we need to teach our students that they “are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that [they] may declare the praises of him who called [them] out of darkness into his wonderful light...[Urge them], as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against [their] soul. [Admonish them] to live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse [them] of doing wrong, they may see [their] good deeds [*ergon*] and glorify God on the day he visits us.” (1 Peter 2:9-12) Significantly, the original Greek word translated “see,” means a careful watching over an extended period of time. The evaluation of the pagans is not a snap

judgment.<sup>33</sup> We believers in and followers of Christ are being carefully observed to see if we live out what we preach and teach, so we must have a good track record. A prerequisite to an effective witness for Christ is a lifestyle that is essentially different from the world. Christ's people "march to a different drummer."

Thus, though numbers are not insignificant, far more important than numbers is the sanctification, the growth in holiness to God, which is observable in church members young and old. If a church's youth group and other groups are small, but the students are demonstrating holy obedience to the Lord in their lifestyles, those ministries are successful according to the Biblical standard, regardless of their size. Further, the numbers question will most likely become moot. Children, young people, and adults who are maturing in Christ will be engaging in an enthusiastic and effective witness in deeds (*ergon*, works) as well as with words that will attract a significant number in the available population, contagiously drawing others who want these blessings for themselves as well.

### **For Further Reflection**

1. How can you teach to most effectively help your students see the importance of daily doing works that demonstrate their faith in Jesus Christ is genuine and growing?
2. How is Christianity different from all other religions with respect to doing good works? What is one way to help students effectively witness for Christ to adherents of other religions?
3. Some people say the Bible contradicts itself, e.g., pitting the apostles Paul and James against each other regarding the role of faith and works. What do you say to them to correct that misunderstanding?
4. How can we, who are leaders in the church, help ourselves and others avoid the especially serious sins that hurt and harm the church and its mission? (See, e.g., Ephesians 4:17-5:20.)
5. How can you help your supervisor and others to understand a more effective way of evaluating your performance and the effectiveness of your ministry than only by comparing and contrasting attendance numbers?
6. Cite at least one example as to how these principles can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the sermon?
7. Write an objective that could be used to evaluate how well a selected element in the worship service is being acted upon in daily life and/or what could be done to improve the way it is employed in the worship service. To help develop this objective, consider the following: Did the worshipers sense that they met God in the

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<sup>33</sup> Donald W. Burdick and John H. Skilton, note on 1 Peter 2:12 in *The NIV Study Bible: New International Version*, General Editor Kenneth Barker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), p. 1891.

sanctuary? If so, can they describe how they saw him today? Did any mention that they sensed being in a holy context? Did anyone mention being in a dialogue with God? If so, were there any distractions that took their focus off their communion with God? Do the worshipers understand why we have the offering in the sanctuary and at a certain point in the worship service? Can they tell you why the offering is always to be called an offering and never a collection? (The answer is that the people are cheerfully and voluntarily giving their tithes and offerings to God as a grateful response in worship of him for his constant and all-sufficient grace and goodness to them/us. Thus, our money is not being “collected” from us; we are offering it to God.)

**KEY WORDS/TAGS:** Adult Education, Attendance, Behavior, Buddhism, Calling, Christianity, Church Education, Cohabitation, Culture, Curriculum, Epistemological Question, Evaluation, Faith, Grace, Gratitude, Holy, Jesus Christ, Leadership, Learning Transfer, Long-term Tenure, Love, Memorization, Mentoring, Ministry, Numbers, Obedience, Objectives, Preaching, Questions, Religion, Righteousness, Salvation, Sanctification, Sermons, Service, Teaching, Thanksgiving, Theology, Vocation, Youth Ministry, Witness, Works, Worship

### About the Author

Edward D. Seely, is a retired pastor and Adjunct Professor Emeritus in Educational Ministries at Calvin Theological Seminary, where he taught and was the founder and Manager of the Ministry Resource Center in his work with the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and the Lilly Vocation Project prior to his retirement in 2007. He also taught as Adjunct Professor of Education at Calvin College. The Ministry Resource Center is a permanent special collection of The Hekman Library and is jointly sponsored by Calvin College and Calvin Seminary.

He served churches for 37 years, specializing in the educational aspect of the ministry, before joining the faculty at Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary in 2002. During his years in church ministry he worked as a minister to youth, as a supervisor and mentor of youth ministers, in adult education, and as a worship leader. His integration of historic Christian systematic theology with church ministry was, and continues to be, a hallmark of his work.

His current main activities are spending more time with his family and continuing to write. His writing includes aspects of church education ministry and a manual for teaching Christian worship in and for the church, as part of his continued relationship with the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship as a research associate. Based on a version he wrote for use in Africa, Mexico, and other countries in the two-thirds world, the new edition is a Biblical study of worship related to the West.

He was born and raised in New York State and ordained in the Reformed Church in America in 1966. He has traveled widely, including trips to teach at pastors conferences in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Mexico, as well as in the U.S., and conducting tours to the lands of the Bible and church history as part of his work as Minister of Education at Christ Church of Oak Brook in Oak Brook, Illinois for 24 years, which has conferred upon him the honor Pastor of Education Emeritus. His published books include *Teaching Early Adolescents Creatively* (Westminster Press). He has written chapters in several other books and many articles in both the popular and scholarly literature, including a two-year column, "Tips for Teachers," in *The Church Herald* and an ongoing column in other church publications. He is adding many of his writings to his Web site, the URL for which is [www.fromacorntoak12.com](http://www.fromacorntoak12.com). He has been active in civic, classis, and interdenominational church work. He was elected to membership in the scientific honor society of Phi Kappa Phi and the educational honor society of Phi Delta Kappa.

He and his only wife, Carol, were married for 48 ½ years until she died in 2013. They are the parents of two adult children, Janet (Mrs. Robert) Sandberg and Jonathan Seely; Carol and Edward have two grandchildren.

Hope College—Graduated June 1963, English  
 Western Theological Seminary—Graduated May 1966, B.D. (M.Div.), Theology; May 1970, Th.M., Religious Education, Theology  
 Michigan State University—Graduated May 1980, Ph.D., Curriculum Research