

THE CURE FOR LACK OF MOTIVATION

by Rev. C. Hanko

In our previous discussion we came to the conclusion that the lack of motivation among school children is a spiritual-ethical problem. To lack motivation in accomplishing one's school work is to be guilty of sin on that score. For a Christian, who is steward over the time, health, strength, gifts and talents entrusted to him, to be lax in fulfilling his calling is nothing less than unfaithfulness to his God. Therefore this sin is much more obvious and pronounced in the junior high school than in the lower grades, and even more pronounced and serious in the high school. And since sin breeds sin this is very, very poor preparation for equipping a child for his life calling. The student who lacks motivation sins against himself, against his parents, against his classmates, but especially against his teacher, and worst of all, against his God. Our problem is a serious one.

In this paper we shall seek out a solution to our problem and a cure for this lack of motivation as evidenced among the covenant seed of the church. I plan to discuss with you:

First, the principles involved in seeking a solution.

Second, the specific approach to this situation.

I. The General Principles Involved.

We approach our subject from the point of view that we are dealing with children from covenant homes, and therefore children who are the covenant seed of the church. We are well aware of the fact that even in the church God has His elect and His reprobate, that it is not all Israel that is called Israel, that there is chaff among the wheat. Yet as long as the two grow up together we deal with them all as wheat, as covenant seed. We make no effort to ferret out the Esaus, as if they deserved a different treatment.

We are also aware that what applies to adults also applies to

our children, that although we are sanctified in Christ, yet we have but a small beginning of the new obedience. There is in children, as well as in us, the struggle between the new man in Christ and the old man of sin that wars in their members. Children are holy in principle, even as God is holy, yet there is the daily demand to crucify the flesh and to grow in sanctification. Therefore there is still a lack of a clear understanding of their Christian calling to be stewards of the gifts entrusted to them, there is still present in their nature a sinful pride that causes them to defy authority, and there is the sinful inclination to follow the evil example set by their peers and that for various reasons.

With that in mind we readily reject the many solutions that have been sought and proposed apart from the Word of God. To mention a few:

There is the pragmatic philosophy that "makes the result the test of the truth." Anything is permissible which seeks the greatest good for the greatest number. The standard of right and wrong is ultimately nothing more than public opinion, for man wants to be a law unto himself. The old sin of paradise, the desire to be as God, to determine for ourselves what is right and what is wrong, is still deeply rooted in the depraved human nature. This pragmatic philosophy is based on the evolution theory, but also on the age old Pelagianism that teaches that man is innately good. The result of this philosophy is that man digs his own grave, works his own destruction. In the sight of God he fills the cup of iniquity, justifying God in His condemnation.

The Neo-pentecostals have sought a solution to this problem by speaking of a special gift of the Holy Spirit, whereby Pentecostals live in a higher sphere. "A Pentecostal is different from other church members," so it is often said. He maintains that he is capable of not sinning. Whatever happens, even to the worst catastrophes, he finds an escape from evil by shouting, "Praise the Lord!" This often makes such a powerful impression upon others, that they highly esteem these Pentecostals for their holy lives. Children of Pentecostals, too, are taught that they can live holy lives, living in a higher sphere than the average Christian by the power of their special gift of the Spirit. Apart from the fact that this view is entirely contrary to Scripture, which never teaches a special gift of the Spirit to certain elite persons, this error makes for artificiality in religion, classifying certain acts and deeds as sinful, yet condoning many others. The

extreme is found possibly in Jamaica, where these "holiness people" often go into ecstasy, become very proud of their special gifts and condone sins that Scripture plainly forbids.

From the Arminian camp arises the emphasis on the love of God, particularly on the love of a compassionate Jesus. The emphasis in the classroom is, that after a child has accepted Jesus Christ, he also must go out to win others for Christ. What makes this Arminian error so doubly serious is the fact, that it stresses the love of God at the expense of God's justice. God's justice that requires due punishment upon the sins committed against His most high majesty is rarely, if ever, mentioned. The goal in life centers in man, rather than in the glory of God.

We must proceed from the principle that it is our calling to be friend-servants of God, with but one purpose in life as expressed by the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 10:31, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God." As stewards in God's house we are motivated by the awareness that we *may*, we *will*, we *can*, and we *must* fulfill our God-given calling here on earth.

We may. The regenerated child of God, whether a grown-up or a child, realizes that he is spiritually different from the world. Very small children, even before school age, know that they are different from their non-Christian, worldly, neighbors. Without inhibitions or other reservations they will often talk to their non-Christian playmates about their convictions. Approaching school age they not only have strong desire to go to school, but they also realize that their place is in a Christian school. This becomes quite evident to us now that we have our own Protestant Reformed schools. Our children find themselves right at home with their peers who attend the same church. Covenant parents who are conscious of their obligation to their children transfer, sometimes unconsciously, their gratitude to God for the privilege of sending their children to a school founded on the Scriptures. Children do tend to talk as if they do not like school, yet almost without exception they are eager to return after their summer vacation. That *may*, that privilege, is ingrained in their consciousness.

Therefore a child is also *willing* to go to school. Actually nothing suits him better than the daily routine of school work. He may enjoy the attention he receives in going to school, both from parents who send him off to school and from the teachers. He may enjoy the companionship of the other pupils. But there is

also a natural curiosity that must be satisfied, and that is best satisfied in the schoolroom. Moreover, there is a pleasure in knowing. A child wants to expand his knowledge of the world round about him, of his own place in that world, and of his purpose in life. There is even a growing desire to prepare for his future task and calling. Especially as a child of God he begins to ask, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me do?" All of which stimulates his willingness, his desire to learn.

In the third place, a child *can* learn. We believe that no person is created by God without a purpose in life. We believe also that God gives a rich variety of gifts, to each child according to his place in the body of Christ, and according to his function in that body. In Ephesians 2:10 we read, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." That this applies to every boy and girl in the schoolroom is evident from I Corinthians 12:20-25, "But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honorable, upon those we bestow more abundant honor; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another." A few remarks in passing. The head and the eye are very essential parts of the body, yet Scripture reminds us that also the hands and the feet have their own important function, and even the most insignificant part of the body is *needed*. Pupils who learn readily and absorb like sponges are a joy to any teacher. Children with a high IQ usually have no great problem in school. Those who are enriched with an accompanying pleasant personality are a joy to the teacher. But there are also those who are not 'A' students, who possibly have a struggle to keep up with their class. These never see their names on the honor roll. They may sorely miss a much needed encouragement. Yet they may have other gifts that become evident during their school years and afterward. The 'A' student does not always prove to be the most efficient husband and father, or the best wife and mother, or a good provider for his family. A slow learner, even a

mentally handicapped child is placed upon our way by God Himself, and we are responsible to God to help that child to develop his gifts, few as they may be, in a manner that is pleasing to God. One mother introduced her child to strangers by saying, "God privileged us to be parents of a severely handicapped child." We may not neglect these little lambs, possibly "the least of these My (Christ's) brethren."

Finally, there is a *must* in the consciousness of every child; in the covenant child there is a *must* to do his best for God's sake. God has implanted in every child a consciousness of good and evil, right and wrong. A small child knows that sin is sin, that transgressing God's law results in a sense of guilt. Romans 2:14,15 teaches us, "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another." In this passage the expression 'which have not the law' refers to the law of the ten commandments, which the Gentiles, or heathen, have never heard. Yet 'the work of the law' is present. They have the testimony in their hearts that God is God, that God must be loved and served as the only true God, and that sinning against the neighbor is sin against the most high majesty of God. If the pagan knows this by the testimony of the Holy Spirit in his unregenerate heart, how much more is the small child of the covenant aware of this through his christian training.

All these elements referred to above, the may, the will, the can, and the must need not be inculcated in the child. They are there. Yet it is evident that these various elements are corrupted and suppressed through sin. Our children have but a small beginning of the new obedience. With Paul they, too, must confess, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: For to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." Romans 7:18,19. The child of God is not driven by two wills, torn between two forces that pull equally strongly in opposite directions, even though that may often seem so. Paul says, "I will the good," for from the heart are the issues of life, and that heart is renewed. Yet there is the old sinful nature with sin warring in our members, so that the old man of sin fights a furious battle against the new man in Christ.

The result is, that any act of sin always results in an agonizingly guilty conscience, a consciousness of having sinned against God. Also the covenant child must realize that any lack of motivation is sin.

Again we should bear in mind that even the conscience can be perverted and hardened. The head-hunter who claims the head of a missionary to appease his gods, which he feels he had offended on an earlier occasion, may soothe his conscience with his noble deed, yet by doing so he is still busily engaged in suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. (Romans 1:18ff). The child who makes himself guilty of stealing from the classroom may admit that he has pangs of conscience because he has offended his teachers, his parents and his family. He may try to soothe his pangs of conscience by seeking a good reason for his theft. Yet in reality he knows what makes his sin so grievous is the fact that he has sinned against his God. Again, he may try to condone all this with various excuses, but his conscience testifies against him. He can have no real peace of heart and mind until he confesses his sin before God and seeks God's pardon.

Here lies the solution to the problem for the Christian teacher when confronted with lack of motivation in the classroom. The child must be directed to his calling as steward in God's house. He must be reminded that it is his privilege to have a place in God's church as a member of the Body of Christ, and that the way is opened for him to obtain covenant instruction. He must be encouraged in the fact that he has the God-given ability to use the gifts entrusted to him. He must be spurred on to greater zeal, to putting forth his best efforts. If the child is lazy, indifferent, there may be some underlying reason for this. Is the work too difficult? Is the child not well physically? Are there reasons in the classroom, or possibly at home, or outside of the school which bring about this unhappy situation? Communication between teacher and child is important. Yet always the best of his ability must be brought out under the conviction that he must do this for God's sake. God requires it of him. To God he is accountable for every hour of his day, for the use of his God-given talents. With the Holy Scriptures as the basis for all our instruction the man of God must be thoroughly equipped unto every good work.

II. The Specific Approach to This Situation.

When I say that a teacher must *teach*, it likely sounds like a

platitude which is as obvious as the nose of one's face. Yet it deserves emphasis; a teacher must teach in every situation, and especially under adverse circumstances. Paul urges his spiritual son Timothy, "Preach the word, be instant (on your toes) in season and out of season ("whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear") reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." This applies equally to teachers in their own sphere. Teach! Teach by reproof, that is, by pointing out sin whenever necessary. Teach by rebuking, that is, by convicting of sin, so that there is no other refuge but the cross of Christ. Teach by exhorting, admonishing the sinner to forsake his sin and to seek forgiveness in Christ's blood. This must be done, we are told, with endless patience, realizing our own weaknesses. And as a climax is added, in all 'doctrine', that is, in all instructing and admonishing on the basis of God's Word, with that always positive, "So saith our God!" (II Timothy 4:2). I do not mean to say that a teacher tries to talk over the bedlam in the classroom, or is content to talk to dreamy-eyed youngsters. But I do wish to stress that the work may be difficult, the hours long, the events of the day taxing of one's strength, so that at five o'clock in the afternoon, looking out of the window, one may envy the excavator who shuts off his engine, knocks the ashes from his pipe, adjusts his hat on his head, picks up his dinner bucket, and merrily calls it a day. The motive must always be, to be faithful to one's calling.

Modern psychology has tried to solve the problem of lack of motivation apart from God, and apart from His Word. All kinds of concoctions, gadgets, lesson aids are introduced to create and stimulate interest. As important and effective as these may be, they are always only secondary, and must ultimately fail, for they do not reach down to the source of the difficulty. An attempt is made to paint the pump handle in order to purify the water from the well. Actually only you as Christian teachers, who found your instruction upon the Scriptures, will ever have the solution to the problem before us. Especially those who have turned the class into a discussion group, to solve their problems by a mutual exchange of ideas, with the teacher serving only as supervisor, are steering the pupils headlong into disaster.

In speaking of teaching, Prof. Dr. J. Waterink writes in his "Opvoeding tot Persoonlijkheid", (Training Toward Personality), that it is the calling of the pedagogue to "integrate the personality". He defines a person as "a human being who has an

individual existence and takes his own place in life." (page10). He speaks of an unstable person, who is cast about by various influences as a person who lacks personality. Again, one who is governed purely by sentiment, or allows himself to be completely led or misled by other also lacks personality. A person who is well integrated, so that there is harmony between his thinking and willing, his words and his actions, functions harmoniously in his community as God's friend servant, fulfilling the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king, and reveals a good personality. Therefore Prof. Waterink emphasizes that it is the calling of the teacher to strive for an integrated personality. The child must be taught his reading and writing, his mathematics and science, but always as an individual with an individual calling and place in life.

To bring his point home to us, Prof. Waterink refers to a girl who is a talented musician, of which the school and the home are very proud. In school she is given special privileges because of her unique ability in the field of music, at home she need not wash the dishes along with her sister, because soap water is bad for her hands. A girl like that will grow up with a warped personality, and will often be ruined for her place in society. Scripture says, that the man of God must mature, complete, thoroughly furnished unto *all* good works.

In this connection we must also say something about discipline. Discipline means literally, to disciple, to train. The child must be trained to be a good disciple of Jesus Christ. He must be impressed with his obligation to work hard, to use his God-given talents without allowing them to be wasted, in order to attain his unique purpose in life, in living to the glory of God. He must learn early in life that God's Word is a lamp before his feet, a light upon his pathway, his only sure guide. Not the carnal element, not sinful flesh must dominate the classroom, but the love of God in Christ Jesus. Not the troublemaker, the disturber must be the hero in the eyes of his peers, but there must be a common agreement that the class meets, not to sin, but to fulfill its mandate in the office of believers on that particular day. Not those who want to disrupt the peace and harmony of the class must be allowed to gang together, but the entire class must be united to oppose and rebuke those who in any way disturb the harmony and unity of the class.

This may sound a bit idealistic, yet as a general rule, this makes for a happy, contented spirit in the classroom.

Actually everyone is much more at ease where peace and quiet reign. Nevertheless, we are well aware of the fact, that there are those who resent discipline and are eager to kick the traces. There is also the depraved nature that delights in evil — some parents have not yet learned how wrong it is to boast of their early escapades in the presence of their children — which comes to manifestation in the classroom. When this happens discipline is demanded, even in the sense of punishment. Evil must be nipped in the bud and exposed as evil. God demands of us that we admonish, warn, and, when necessary, inflict punishment in love, according to God's justice.

SPURRING ON TO GREATER MOTIVATION

by Rev. C. Hanko

I want to begin this paper with the reading of Psalm 1. At the moment our attention is directed particularly toward the last verse, "For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

It can be said without boasting that we, and only we have the solution to the problem of lack of motivation in the student. Not only that, but we only have the *only* solution to the problem, because we have the Holy Scriptures, which are our guide as Christian teachers in a Christian School.

I wish to discuss our material under three headings:

- I. True Spiritual Devotion
- II. True Christian Teaching.
- III. True Christian Discipline.

True Spiritual Devotion.

The apostle Paul writes in I Corinthians 9:16, "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: For necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" This is equally true of a real teacher. A real teacher has the necessity