

How to Hold the Respect of a Pupil

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After the recent death of Vince Lombardi one of the stalwarts in the line during the glory years of the Green Bay Packers repeated a statement he had made earlier. Henry Jordan wanted to give expression to the respect that the players had for this famous coach. He stated, "When Vince said, 'Sit down,' we didn't look for a chair." There may have been times when his players "hated" him; there may have been other times when they loved him; but always they respected him. They respected him as one of the greatest coaches of all time. The respect of the players for Vince Lombardi is the type of respect about which we speak in this paper. Would that every teacher could gain and hold this type of respect on the part of his pupils.

With this we already are led into the definition of terms in our assigned topic. The key term, of course, is "respect." In describing what respect is, perhaps it is well to underscore what it is not. Respect is not slavish dread or fear. Rather, respect, as used here, is the type of fear which the believer has of God. When Luther began his explanation of each of the Ten Commandments with the words, "We should fear and love God," he was using the word "fear" in the sense of respect. Webster defines it as "a feeling of deference, honor, or esteem." Webster also describes respect as "consideration, courteous regard." The word respect is used here in the same way that it is used so often currently in the phrase: "respect for law and order." The idea is that law and order be maintained not in slavish fear but out of deference and esteem for order, peace, tranquility, and the rights of others.

Respect defined in this way is to be found subjectively in a "pupil" toward his teacher—the second significant term in the title. What the given title of the essay calls for, then, is an exposition of respect in the pupil-teacher relationship in a teaching situation. We could describe respect in a more general relationship, that of a citizen for the law and order of his country, of the man on the street for the policeman, of a junior for an elder, of a son for his father, of an employee for an employer, but we shall confine ourselves generally to the pupil-teacher relationship, and this will become evident particularly in our application of the subject matter.

The third significant term in the assigned topic is the word "hold." One cannot hold anything he has not first gained; he cannot retain anything he has not previously won; he cannot enlarge anything he has not previously begun. Holding respect, therefore, assumes that one has first gained respect. Even definition of the term "respect"—as esteem—already implies that it is not something which can be gained by demanding it or insisting upon it. Were it possible to gain respect simply by demanding it, we would be concerned not with respect and esteem but rather with a slavish dread. To use a cliché, we gain and hold respect not by demanding it but by commanding it, or by following certain commandments.

To convey our bias and our perspective concerning the assigned topic, we should like to present it under the theme:

Commandments for Commanding Respect

Without trying to imply that we can be complete and exhaustive in covering our subject, as was our Lord through Moses in covering all human relationships with ten commandments, we present the theme in ten specific commandments.

I - Be Knowledgeable—Knowing What

To gain and hold respect of his pupils a teacher must above all else be knowledgeable, knowing that which he would teach. A teacher is one whose basic task involves communication. To accomplish this task, to communicate, he must be one who knows the lesson or truth or art to be taught. A respected teacher always is one who "knows his stuff."

Knowing what one is to teach, knowing it thoroughly, implies a mastery of the subject. Imperfect knowing leads to imperfect teaching, and imperfect teaching leads to the disrespect of pupils for the teacher. A thorough mastery of the subject, of course, implies much more than just a knowledge of the textbook. The teacher who merely coughs up what the students can read in their textbooks may be insulting their intelligence and inviting their disrespect.

To know thoroughly what one is to teach, to be knowledgeable in his subject matter whatever it may be, demands that a teacher prepare faithfully. There is no substitute for hard work, for thorough preparation, even after a subject has been taught repeatedly. In fact, the more frequently subject matter is taught, the more thorough preparation it demands. There may be many reading problems in the United States, there may be long and heated debate about the ways in which reading ought to be taught, but one reading lesson which students do not need is in reading their teacher. They read their teacher much more thoroughly than they read a book. They recognize immediately when a teacher is knowledgeable, when he knows what he would teach, when he has prepared faithfully. The opposite also is true.

Not every phase of knowledge can be known or should be known by experience. One doesn't promote adultery in order to gain thorough knowledge of it by experience. Nor does the teacher involved in sex education encourage knowledge by experience. Yet, a basic teaching maxim is that wherever and whenever possible knowledge ought to be gained by experience, and so also will a teacher gain respect as he becomes more knowledgeable by experience.

This is particularly important in our situation as Christian teachers. You are involved in teaching Christian principles, in fostering the Christian life, and in building the Christian hope. One who tries to teach these principles and the Christian truths as being "out there" will not be nearly as successful, at least as we measure success, as the person in whom these truths are deep, personal convictions. In one of the recent issues of *The Lutheran Educator* I recall reading an article in which the author pointed out the differences between two men in reading the 23rd Psalm. The one knew the Psalm, the other knew the Shepherd. The one who knew the Shepherd by experience gained by far the greater respect of his audience. This applies not only to Scriptural truths, but to every area of knowledge and human experience. A general rule might be: that will be most clearly understood which is very vividly felt. We have agreed for some time that the planet Earth is in the shape of a ball or sphere. We have repeated this fact and heard it repeated betimes. Yet, the roundness of the earth took on real significance and meaning for us when for the first time we saw it from a distance through the eye of the astronaut's camera. One will explain more vividly and vibrantly the breath-taking beauty that one sees and the overwhelming awe that one experiences after actually standing on a mountain and looking off into the distance and into the valleys far below.

Permit me to enlarge upon this fact by recalling a personal experience. Thirteen years ago I had one of the most treasured experiences of my life. Strange as it may sound, that experience was undergoing the thought of certain death and planning with my wife my funeral, which seemingly was imminent. Life-saving surgery postponed that experience, but I remember clearly even today after all these years the tremendous thirst suffered after surgery. I remember dreaming about water. I recall the nurse touching the tip of my tongue with three drops of water every three hours. And then I remember delivering a sermon based on the fifth word of Christ on the cross, "I thirst." I recall what a joy it was to deliver that sermon and to try to describe the physical thirst which Christ experienced on the cross in our stead and in our behalf. People still talk to me about that particular sermon, usually commenting, "You were speaking from experience."

Teachers who are knowledgeable and experienced will gain and hold the respect of their pupils. If you look back upon all your formal education and try to recall the different teachers you had on every level of education, you undoubtedly respect those teachers today and recall those teachers most favorably who were knowledgeable, who were prepared, who "knew their stuff." I am of the opinion that Vince Lombardi was respected by his players and by fans alike because he was knowledgeable in the game of football and in the handling of men, because he always was prepared thoroughly and had the mastery also by experience of his subject.

Hand in hand with knowing what one is teaching goes knowing why one is teaching and why he is teaching what he is teaching. Hand in hand with knowledge goes enthusiasm, and so the second of our commandments for commanding respect is

II - Be Enthusiastic—Knowing Why

If a teacher has command of a great body of knowledge and is extremely well educated but at the same time is lazy and generates no enthusiasm, he may be called an educated sluggard. The educated sluggard may be admired for his knowledge, but he will not be respected as a teacher. On the other hand, a person may be bubbling with enthusiasm except when it comes to acquiring knowledge, and he may be called an ignorant enthusiast. An ignorant enthusiast also will not generate or hold the respect of his pupils. The ignorant enthusiast is in the public scene in our country today. He does a lot of protesting and yelling and shouting, but he doesn't know what he is shouting about, much less does he have any intelligent solutions to problems. His stereotype reminds me of a pastor who also demonstrated his ignorant enthusiasm when in the manuscript of his sermon he penciled the note, "Argument weak, shout like hell."

What a teacher needs to be in order to command respect of his pupils is neither an educated sluggard nor an ignorant enthusiast but rather an educated enthusiast. When these two qualities are joined in one, when one knows what he is teaching and knows why he is teaching it, he will be an enthusiastic teacher and a respected teacher.

A basic ingredient of enthusiasm in a teacher is love for his work. Love for one's work generally goes with the ability to do it well. And make no mistake about it, you as teachers are involved in the greatest work on earth. You are shaping and molding our world of tomorrow. Tomorrow, yes, and what is even more important, you are molding and shaping the generations after us for eternity. If you don't have the strongest motivation for your work, I don't know who could. The more you are mindful of your great privilege as Christian teachers, the more deeply you are motivated, the more enthusiastic will you be, the better will you do it, the more respect will you have.

If a teacher loves his work and is enthusiastic about it, he will be zealous and industrious, for these characteristics grow out of love for one's work. Again, it is the zealous and industrious teacher who will gain and hold respect.

The enthusiasm of a teacher becomes evident as he transforms that which may be a well known fact into a living truth. The enthusiasm of his teaching will be evident as he pours out the Water of Life and treats it not as cold ice or evasive steam but as something to be drunk in so that his pupils never thirst. The enthusiastic teacher makes of history a living panorama of God's love. For him, geography swells out into great continents, stretches of peopled nations, all of them the object of God's love. This teacher, the enthusiastic teacher, gains and holds respect.

The opposite of enthusiasm is formalism, going through the motions, following all the forms, rather indifferently and lifelessly enduring each day. Needless to say, such teachers neither gain nor hold respect. It is necessary to repeat, however, that we all can easily fall prey to formalism and become victims of indifference. To make matters worse, oftentimes the indifferent teacher will complain that today's children are different, that they "no longer have any respect for their teachers."

Respected teachers "know their stuff," they know why they are teachers and why they are teaching what they are, and then they also know how to teach it. The enthusiasm of a teacher will grow when it is born of skill, when it is guided by intelligence and armed with skill. Our third commandment for commanding respect it

III - Be Skillful—Knowing How

There is the age-old argument between those who insist that teachers are made and not born and those who claim that teachers are born and not made. Personally, I feel that there are some desired characteristics necessary in teachers which some people never seem to be able to acquire, and in that sense I agree that teachers

are born and not made. And yet, I also agree that the gifts with which we have been endowed by our Creator need to be developed and sharpened and trained, and in that sense teachers are made and not born. To be skillful teachers, thorough training is necessary in the methodology of teaching skills. To be skillful teachers we also need to know how pupils learn, to be sure not only of our learning theories, but also to be consistent in what we do in line with our theories of learning.

As we develop our teaching skills, both through formal education and through experience, we learn to use various tools. The skillful teacher will use the tools, rather than permitting the tools to use the teacher. The skillful teacher will use the text but will not permit the text to use the teacher. Knowing how to teach and knowing how to employ the skills of teaching contribute greatly toward commanding the respect of students. Since this commandment involves the area in which the author feels least qualified, and since most of you who are teachers by training and experience are perhaps better qualified, we shall give less attention to this commandment. The minimal attention given to it in this paper, however, ought not be construed as an indication of relative unimportance of knowing how to teach or of being skillful.

What a tragedy for a teacher to be very knowledgeable, to be highly motivated, to be eager and enthusiastic, to be well versed in employing the skills of teaching, and then to have difficulty in communicating. Following the three commandments presented to this point will be of no value if one has no regard for the fourth, which may be regarded as a skill, namely, to

IV - Be Communicative

One communicates in many different ways. There are various media of communication, but we should like to focus our attention on communication by voice, by movement, and by expression.

In discussing communication by voice we could spend a great deal of time on pitch, tone, volume, distinction, and variation. All of these things are important. One can hardly respect a teacher that cannot be heard, or a teacher that drones on and on, or a teacher that is a monotone. With his voice one speaks a language. Two extremes in the language one uses must be avoided; both of them contribute to the loss of respect. The language used in teaching must be common both to the teacher and the learner. Pompous language definitely will turn students off. Pompous language, furthermore, generally betrays ignorance rather than indicates intelligence. He who communicates in simple, clear language communicates most effectively.

The other extreme to be avoided is to use language inferior to the vernacular. Sometimes there is a tendency to "speak the language of the students." This tendency can be overdone; when overdone, it contributes to a loss of respect.

The most effective communicative voice is the one which is natural and friendly and speaks in a lively manner, with clarity and distinction.

Teachers communicate also by movement. By movement we are not only concerned with natural and meaningful gestures but also with movement within the community. What do our actions tell others about us., about our profession, about our confession? Actions do speak louder than words. By our movements within and about a community we do communicate, and by our actions we can both gain respect and lose respect.

The third phase of communication which we would consider briefly is communication by expression. The most expressive part of our anatomy is the eye. The eyes of the teacher can express concern and love, and they can also reveal boredom and lovelessness. Is our work just the perfunctory performance of a duty? Is teaching just a job to be done? Or is it a precious privilege and a delightful opportunity?

Still another way in which we express ourselves to others is through dress and grooming. By the way in which we dress we can gain respect or lose respect. No more need be said.

Speaking of communication, the Bible says, "Let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." God's Word here insists that our communication be honest. This we present as the fifth commandment for commanding respect.

V - Be Honest

The opposite of honesty, of course, is dishonesty or hypocrisy. I submit that it is easier for teachers to be hypocritical than they sometimes think. Surely, we would suspect or accuse no one of hypocrisy with respect to his Christian faith, and yet there are so many little ways in which teachers can convey hypocrisy. There is always the matter of double standards, with the one standard for the teacher and the other for the pupil. If I am a “bear” on punctuality and insist that my students be on time without exception, then I ought to make the same demand of myself. If I demand that my students be thoroughly prepared and fail to make that same demand of myself, I become guilty of hypocrisy. If I as a teacher insist that my students dress neatly and have their hair and fingernails well groomed, then I ought to make that same demand of myself. In their adoption of double standards, I am of the opinion that teachers often are more hypocritical than they like to think. Basically, such hypocrisy is dishonesty. I know of no better way to gain the disrespect of students.

Honesty, then, involves practicing what one teaches. It implies recognizing one’s own fallibility; it leaves room for no haughtiness or arrogance. Honesty demands that we stand on the same level with our students rather than a step higher. Honesty is a prerequisite, a commandment for commanding respect not only among students but also outside of our classroom, before all those with whom we come into contact, before parents, members, and those outside of the congregation. Our Lord requires that we “must have a good report of them which are without.”

Closely related to honesty is truthfulness. The sixth commandment we choose to present for commanding respect is

VI - Be Truthful

The truthful man is a person of integrity, a person who knows positive values and then abides by them. A truthful person is truthful in both word and deed. We referred at the outset to the respect that Vince Lombardi enjoyed both as a person and as a football coach. We stated that he was respected for his knowledge of the game and his handling of men. In his handling of men I think there were many evidences of his basic integrity and his positive set of values. Obviously, we could not agree with many of his personal convictions, and yet his integrity, his truthfulness, and his obvious set of values were like a refreshing breeze in the world today.

A truthful teacher is a man of his word, a man who keeps his promises. You and I have respect for God and for His Word because He not only is truthful, but He is Truth. He is a God who invites our trust and our respect by keeping His Word and fulfilling His promises. As teachers we ought to do no less. I promise my daughter, “Tomorrow I’ll take you shopping, and I’ll buy you a new doll.” Tomorrow comes, and Carolyn says, “Today you are going to buy me my new doll.” If I’m a man of my word, if I’m truthful, if I want to gain and hold the respect of my daughter, if I value her trust, I should keep that promise. Maybe I should not have given the promise, but that I should have considered prior to making it. To gain and hold the respect of their pupils teachers ought not become guilty of broken promises.

As teachers we ought to refrain also from handing our students a “line.” Again, even young students are quick to read the teacher. While one may fool some of them some of the time, you can’t fool all of them all of the time. Truthfulness may at times involve an embarrassing confession, the confession of ignorance. If a student asks me a question and I don’t know the answer, I had better be truthful and not try to feign or fake an answer. It is better that I confess my ignorance and promise to provide the answer later than to get around a question by handing out a “line.” I remember particularly one professor that I had in my college days who was never caught without answers, but the truth of his answers often was questionable at best. He is not remembered today as one of my most respected professors.

The seventh commandment which we submit may sound facetious, but it isn’t. To gain and hold respect

VII - Be Respectful

Under this commandment one could present a long, long list of “don’ts,” but we choose to submit only three. Don’t humiliate or embarrass a student. A student doesn’t deserve to be humiliated and embarrassed before his peers. Admonished—yes; rebuked—yes; but humiliated—no. The simple application of the Golden Rule is involved here.

The second “don’t” is: don’t insult your pupils. Neither their person nor their intelligence is deserving of insults.

The third “don’t” is: don’t destroy self-respect. If we truly believe that we are created in the image of God and that God’s image is restored through Christ, if we truly believe that every child is a creature and a gift of God, if we are convinced that every child is a special object of God’s love, then we ought not be found guilty of losing their respect by destroying their self-respect. I am of the strong conviction that respect is reciprocal. When I deeply respect others, I undoubtedly will be respected by others. When a teacher respects his pupils, his pupils will respect him.

The eighth commandment for commanding respect is a basic principle of discipline.

VIII - Be Consistent

To be consistent means to proceed in the same manner under the same circumstances. The problem, of course, is complicated as circumstances vary; we rarely find the same set of circumstances. As much as humanly possible, however, we want to be consistent with everyone, showing no favoritism. Here again we put our finger upon a very common weakness among teachers as well as among parents. Some children, to put it bluntly, just are more loveable than others, and we are inclined to show that type of child favoritism and become inconsistent. I remember a particular teacher who was by no stretch of the imagination a Casanova, and yet he had an inclination to give A’s to all the girls in his class. The teacher might be inclined to be more lenient, or more demanding, with the pastor’s child, with the colleague’s child, with the child of the congregational president. Again, favoritism and inconsistency contribute toward the loss of respect.

Consistency not only demands equal treatment, it requires following through on discipline. You have heard teachers say, “If you don’t do this, I’ll do this.” “If you don’t come to order, there will be no recess.” The students don’t come to order, and still there is a recess. Consistency and following through on discipline are basic to administering it successfully.

Under this commandment teachers ought to be reminded to be consistent in the demands which they make also upon themselves, lest the demands upon the students as opposed to the demands upon themselves represent an inconsistency and a double standard.

Also basic to administering discipline effectively is our ninth commandment.

IX - Be Fair

Let the rules be limited, and let them be reasonable. If we are unreasonable in our demands, and if we are obstinate just for the sake of the rules, we ought not be alarmed when our students become disrespectful and unreasonable. Rules, incidentally, just for the sake of rules are unnecessary.

Consistency along with fairness also must be evident in our testing and grading procedures. Testing and grading are marks not only of pupil progress; they offer an evaluation also of teacher fairness.

Our tenth and final commandment is simply

X - Be Patient

Sometimes patience may be mistakenly regarded as a weakness. We suggest, however, that it is a characteristic of saints. When Peter asked the Lord, “How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?” the Lord responded with the parable of the unmerciful servant and with the admonition, “I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.” Obviously this admonition of our Lord

has to do with forgiving an erring brother, but I believe that the principle also can be applied to the relationship between teacher and student. Weakness will neither win respect nor hold respect. True patience will.

Conclusion

By this time it should have become quite obvious that all of these commandments for commanding respect must be motivated by one basic ingredient—by love. Out of love to God we respect Him; we honor and esteem Him; we heed His Word. Out of such love to God grows our love for one another and our respect for one another. Teachers who work in a Christian atmosphere, where such love is found, enjoy the greatest advantage of gaining and holding respect of their pupils.

As stated at the outset; the Commandments—ten in number—cover beautifully all divine and human relationships. Thus ten has become a number representing completeness. All that we have said in this essay deals basically with only one of the divine Commandments, the Fourth. But even though our ten commandments for commanding respect have to do with but one of God's, we would like to think that our ten commandments also are exhaustive. We know they aren't; yet, it is our fond hope that by following these commandments which we have enunciated again you will always command the lasting respect of those whom you are privileged to lead in the paths of God.