

Children's Talk and Sermon Notes  
for Sunday, 25 April

## Children's Talk: Compelling

What can you make other people do? It's frustrating when other people, especially young people, don't do what you want them to do. Sometimes they just don't want to, other times they don't know how. It is tempting to then make them do things your way. But that doesn't really work. You cannot go into someone's mind and make them understand things the way you understand them, even if it seems like a really good thing for them to do.

The Lord described something similar in the Old Testament. There was a law that if someone owed you what is called a pledge, you could not barge into their house to take it:

When you lend your brother anything, you shall not go into his house to get his pledge. <sup>11</sup> You shall stand outside, and the man to whom you lend shall bring the pledge out to you. <sup>12</sup> And if the man *is* poor, you shall not keep his pledge overnight. <sup>13</sup> You shall in any case return the pledge to him again when the sun goes down, that he may sleep in his own garment and bless you; and it shall be righteousness to you before the LORD your God.  
(Deuteronomy 24:10-13)

Imagine how frustrating and unfair that would feel! You would have to stand outside, demanding to be given what you were owed, but you were not allowed to force your way in to take it. I imagine that sometimes people would get so angry they would break this rule and do it anyway.

We sometimes feel the same way about other people's minds. We think they need to think a certain way, and we have to go in and force them to think that way. But the Lord is saying we cannot do that. No matter how frustrating it is, you need to remember that you cannot control anyone else.

So what can you do? Well, in the Old Testament law, the person would have to stand outside the house and call to the person within, and try to convince them to come out to give them what they were owed. This is a good picture for us to remember: we cannot force anyone to think a certain way: what we can do is talk to them, reason with them, encourage them, and try to teach them. Sometimes, many times, they will not listen to us. It takes time for people to change their mind.

But if we are patient, and remember not to cross that boundary, people will start to hear us. People mature, and become more thoughtful, and if given time, will change on their own. It can take time, even years! But that is the only way that a change means something. If we let people come to that change on their own.

# Education, Part 3: Learning the Lord's Way

A Sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn

25 April, 2021

This is part 3 of a series on Education. Now Malcolm and I did a fair amount of planning, but I noticed after the second sermon that a pattern had developed that we had not quite intended: I talked about the why of education, and Malcolm talked about the what of education: Why do kids need education, and why is New Church education so important? Because without it we would rapidly degenerate and fall away from the Lord. And what actually is education? Malcolm answered that it is an opening of a path from somewhere deep within, in spite of the appearance that we start with superficial things and work our way deeper. This pattern of first why, and then what, got me thinking about the how of education, which will be the topic today. How do you get another person to know the things that you want that person to know? In short how do people learn?

This is a massive question. I cannot possibly answer it in a single sermon. Nor am I going to go right down to the level of strategies for teaching. But it is worthwhile to spend time thinking about how learning takes place. These principles apply not only to children but to anyone and everyone. If you want to learn, or you want to get someone else to learn, this is how you need to do it.

I think most of us are past the idea that we can just force people to learn at gunpoint, but maybe not as much as we would like to think. Many internet debates are not too far off from what takes place on the playground, as one side tries to yell the other side into submission. How do you not get something so obvious?! Let me say it again but in ALL CAPS this time!! We get that this tactic does not actually work, but why not? If learning is just about getting information into someone's head that it does kind of seem like just shouting it at them would do the trick. And to an extent, it actually does: the problem is that it comes out again just as fast. If learning is to have any significance it has to be able to stick.

This is where we go deeper, past just rote memorization, to the part of a person that actually enables learning. Learning, true learning, has its origin in the heart, not the mind. The Teachings of the New Church use the example of preachers to show this:

[Preachers] say that they speak not of themselves but by the spirit of God, and that every truth, like every good, comes from God. They can, indeed, speak the Word, and convey it to the understanding of many; but they cannot introduce it into anyone's heart, and what is not in the heart perishes in the intellect. (By the heart we mean a person's love) (*Divine Providence* §172)

Here, right now, I am, trying to teach you something. And hopefully my words are going into your ears, and maybe even you get what I'm saying. But if there is no affection of the heart in response, it will just go in one ear and out the other. The mind cannot learn if the heart doesn't want to. And you cannot control someone else's heart.

The Word shows a wonderful example of this in the contrast between how learning happens in the Old and New Testament. In the Old Testament, God's laws were proclaimed under threat of death and destruction, given from Mt. Sinai in the midst of miraculous thundering and clouds. And within a month of such miracles, the people were already worshipping a golden idol. In the New Testament, on the other

hand, Jesus did not compel or threaten. He told stories; He gave hope; He touched hearts; and yes, at times, He was blunt and clear and fiery in declaiming against the Pharisees; but even then, He did not threaten them. He stirred people's affections, and taught them not just from the mind but from the heart.

The application to children learning is clear: if you want children to learn, so that they can grow and succeed, and open that pathway up to the Lord, the learning has to stir some affection within them, some desire to learn. This truth is obvious when you think about it. There are some kids who hate school and do abysmally on tests; and yet can memorize the names and statistics of all the Pokémon. In my own case, I remember at one point in my childhood knowing an immense amount about history, not because of history class, but because of Age of Empires II, a computer game. When the desire is there, the learning follows. This is also what makes the job of a teacher so hard: she cannot just spout off facts to a captive audience: she must find ways to engage her students, to inspire them, to motivate them, to tap into their innate curiosity and draw it out. It's more of an art than a science.

To some people this kind of education sounds like entertainment, and at times it can be. Having fun is a great way to stir a child's desire to learn. But it can just as easily come in other types of affection: inspiring pride in one's work, for example, pride in a job well done. Being given a difficult but doable challenge can elicit excellent learning. Some people need to be pushed to do things they don't think they can or don't think they want to, and there is pleasure in discovering that in fact they can do it, or even enjoy doing it. Affection doesn't just mean enjoyment. It means that the child, from some inner feeling, is choosing to engage.

This does not just apply to children: it applies to you and me just as much. And what started as a way of learning facts in childhood becomes a way of learning truth as an adult. I'm sure that there are people in your life you think are wrong about something important. They do not accept some spiritual truth, and you can see that it is hurting them. The temptation is to rationally explain your points, or else badger them into believing as you do, which in turn makes them defensive. But what if you recognized they will only accept the truth from you if there is some inner desire for it? Without that affection, no amount of reasoning on your part will budge them. So consider, what is it that they want? What is motivating them to hold on to their beliefs? What would motivate them to let go of it? What would stir them into action or inspire a change of heart? You cannot guarantee that you will change their mind even then; but it is the only chance you have of possibly having that impact.

The flip side of using affection to teach and to learn is that compulsion cannot be used: freedom is an essential element of affection and ownership of what is learned. The Teachings of the New Church explain that in spite of appearances to the contrary, we simply cannot force someone to think a certain way:

Everyone knows, moreover, that no one can be compelled to think what he is not willing to think, or to will what he decides not to will, thus to believe what he does not believe, and absolutely what he is not willing to believe, or to love what he does not love, and absolutely what he is not willing to love. For a person's spirit or mind has complete freedom in thinking, willing, believing and loving. It has this freedom owing to influx from the spiritual world, which does not compel (for a person's spirit or mind is in that world), and not to influx from the natural world, which is not admitted unless the two are in harmony.

[2] A person may be forced to say that he thinks and wills this or that, or that he believes and loves this or that; but if these are not or do not become

matters of his affection and so of his reason, he still does not think, will, believe or love them. A person may also be compelled to speak in favour of religion, and to behave in accordance with it, but he cannot be compelled to think in favour of it out of any faith in it, or to will in favour of it out of any love for it. (*Divine Providence* §129)

The modern day saying that sums this truth up nicely is that you can bring a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. Even if you do force a person to say that they believe or want something, it does not change what they actually believe or want. The only way into another person's mind is if they welcome what you have to offer freely.

Anything that comes in through compulsion is in fact lost:

What is sown in freedom remains, because it is implanted deeply in the person's actual will, which is the indispensable element of his life. But what is sown under compulsion does not remain, because the compulsion is not an impulse originating in the person's own will but belongs to the one who compels him. (*Secrets of Heaven* §9588)

Given that this is the case, we need as much as possible to teach in a spirit of freedom if we want others to actually learn. Now this is not always clear cut: I'm sure that you had certain facts rammed into your head as a child that have stuck with you even until today. I think that with children there is probably often some mix of freedom and compulsion when they learn: they don't have the freedom to simply avoid school for example. But even if they are compelled to attend and study under threat of failure, there still must be something of freedom in their learning. There must be an opportunity for them to choose to take in what is being offered so that it can actually take root, and grow, and lead to usefulness.

I'm not saying that there needs to be a complete free-for-all if we're ever going to learn anything. At times, people absolutely must be given rules. This is true of adults: we put criminals in jail for a reason. And children need guidelines of behaviour with real consequences. But we shouldn't mistake these means of outward control for inward change of heart: a child can be forced to apologize quite easily; but that does not mean they really mean it. It takes real work to help them learn how to mean it. Likewise, a criminal can quite easily be removed from the street; but that by no means that he is no longer a criminal, simply because he is behind bars and unable to commit further crime. The real work is in having him learn how to sincerely repent.

There is always more that could be said about learning and education. We will never stop learning and growing even into eternity. But some of the core truths about learning are simple and straightforward: as we have seen over this series, learning is necessary; learning is the opening of a path to something deeper; and learning happens when some affection is stirred within us that desires to learn. Whether we are in the position of teaching or we are the one learning, these are the truths that will enable us to take part in the growth and spread of the Lord's truth on Earth.  
*Amen.*