# Disciples in the School of Christ, Not Merely Religious People

Let us think about what it means to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus. This word, disciple, is rather hard to understand today, even though it stands at the very heart of the command the Lord left to His disciples.

A disciple is a person who takes up the teachings of a master, lives them and then passes them on to other people. But before someone can become the disciple of a teacher, something must first happen to him. You cannot be the disciple of a teacher without being captivated by him. This is a very important point.

It is from this perspective that we understand the Lord's command. When He says 'make disciples', what He is really saying is: 'Go and show them the Master, that is, Me. Speak to them about Me, so that they may be captivated by Me and become My disciples.' This was the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

In Matthew 28:19, the Lord Jesus says to the disciples: 'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'

When we think of a disciple, we think of a school. To be a disciple means to be in school. So the Lord Jesus is saying: 'Put people into a school of discipleship, so that they go through it and become like Me.'

The aim of a pupil in a school is to be trained there, to go through it in full, to finish it and to obtain a diploma, so that he can practise his calling. We too enrol in this school of discipleship. Our diploma is described in Galatians 5. It is what the teachers have decided we should do and attain: the fruit of the One who is our teacher, the fruit of the Spirit.

The Lord Jesus said beautifully that, after He had gone to the Father, He would send a Comforter. Let us hold on to this word, 'Comforter'. Someone who comforts does not come to scold us, but to comfort us. And the purpose of this Comforter, the Holy Spirit, is that we should come to the fruit of the Spirit and have the image of Christ in us.

## Nine subjects to study

This is the purpose for which we enrol in the school, and yet so often we lose sight of the essential thing: why we are in school and what we have to do there. We stray from the subjects being taught, we busy ourselves with all sorts of things, and we do not follow God's plan for us, the plan of the school.

The plan of the school is that we complete the nine subjects. We can name them like this, following Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness

and temperance.

A pupil or a student is occupied day by day with studying his subjects. The apprentice disciple, unlike someone in a purely theoretical school, also has a laboratory or a practical workshop, where he puts into practice what he learns in each subject.

These subjects can also be seen as school years: the first year, the second year, and so on. Love comes at the end. It is not learnt in the first year, where we pick up small, minor things. Perfect love casts out fear, writes the apostle John in 1 John 4:18, and the Word of God tells us that the goal of all teaching is love.

## He went through the school before us

The One who calls us into this school and is our Teacher is the Lord Jesus. Before calling us, He Himself went through this school. It may sound strange, but Hebrews 2 explains this: “For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.” (Hebrews 2:16-18)

The Lord Jesus comes to our aid; He is a help. In John 14, where the Holy Spirit is spoken of, the word for Comforter can also be rendered Advocate and Helper: the Holy Spirit defends us and helps us. In Hebrews 2, however, it is said of the Lord Jesus that He does not come to the aid of angels, but to the aid of the seed of Abraham.

In verse 17 we read that 'in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren'. He had to become like us, that is, to go through this school. Not because He necessarily needed it Himself, but so that He might be a forerunner for us: someone who has travelled this road and who was Himself tempted in what He suffered. That is why He is able to come to our aid, because He was tempted in all things, just as we are.

The same chapter, in verses 11 and 12, adds: 'For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.' We are the brethren of the Lord Jesus, the Firstborn. He went through the school to which He calls us too, but not so that we should get through it any old how.

We like to believe that we are in school, but we so quickly forget the subjects we have to study and let ourselves be carried away by other thoughts. And it is right for us to notice that no work appears in the list of the fruit of the Spirit.

The list speaks of love, goodness and longsuffering. It does not tell us what great works this person or that person has done, as though these were part of the fruit of the Spirit. These are the subjects we have to study. But the attitude with which we study them also matters: that of the principal Pupil, the way He went through this school.

## With the attitude of the principal Pupil

It is written of the Lord Jesus in Acts 8:33: “In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.” How do we enter this school? With self-denial, with humility, with the attitude of a servant, with the fear of the Lord? That is how the Lord Jesus went through it. He went before us and showed us the road we too must walk, in the same way.

This is not about the way state schooling is done today. There we are in a hurry and keep looking at the clock to see how soon we can leave, because we do not like any of the subjects. The subjects of the school of Christ must captivate us and occupy us every day. At school we have maths in the first lesson, then English, then history, then geography. In the same way we too must keep up our own study: how to grow and see these subjects through to the end.

At the end of the school we must reach maturity, the diploma. The Word of God calls us to be perfect, to come to the stature of a full-grown man.

## We have no other purpose

We cannot speak here about each subject. I would simply like us to picture the school of Christ as a school with nine subjects, which we can divide into school years. We do not have love from the first day; we pass through many stages before we get there.

To be able to reach the end, we must make use of the teachings of the Lord Jesus. They are the seed of God from which life springs. With their help we grow, until we reach maturity.

We have no other purpose on earth. The purpose is not evangelism, nor billboards, nor other works within God's plan of salvation, however great we may consider them. All these come second. If God counts us worthy of a work, that does not belong to His plan of perfecting us. It is a work He gives to the person He finds worthy, but it is not the main subject of my life as a believer. I can hand out leaflets, go to the park, do everything I do, and still not grow at all in longsuffering. The main purpose is the fruit of the Spirit.

## Captivated by our Teacher

Each of us must understand what we are called to and begin this school captivated by our Teacher and by these extraordinary subjects. In this way we will be able to go through them with joy.

I know a schoolgirl whose school does not have very many subjects. One of them is very dear to her, and it is called Social Studies. The others appeal to her less. But I have noticed that in this subject she gets through the lesson easily and quickly. Often, after the lesson is over, she finds herself reading on, sometimes even on another day, because she finds interesting things in that book. In the same way, we too must find interesting things in the subjects of our school.

Our teacher is the Spirit of God, the One who makes us grow. We read about His work in 2 Corinthians 3:16-18: “Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away.

Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

This is God's plan. That is why I would like each of us to concentrate daily on the nine subjects: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. Joy too is a fruit of the Spirit. Let us work at them, because, in the end, these are what will remain with us.

It is nothing especially remarkable, nor is it a theory for us to learn by heart. God teaches us how to live in the practical situations of every day. He brings events and circumstances into our lives for us to pass through, so that we may grow in these qualities of the Spirit, which are the qualities of Christ.

May the Lord help each one of you to understand and to take heed.

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