The School of Nine Subjects

Imagine a school in which you enrol for life. It has a Teacher, it has classes, it has a workshop for practical training and, at the end, a diploma. In it they do not teach mathematics or history, but nine subjects: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance.

This is the school of Christ. Whoever enters it becomes a disciple, and the disciple has a single aim: to work through its subjects to the end and to reach the fruit of the Spirit, that is, the image of Christ in him. His diploma is not great works, but the qualities of Christ. This school shows how the citizens of the Kingdom of God live even now: they are not born ready-made, but learn day by day to live according to the law of their King.

The Lord Jesus opened this school when He left His disciples the command: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:” (Matthew 28:19). To be a disciple means to be in school. Through this command the Lord was telling His disciples: put people into a school of discipleship, so that they may work through it and become like Me.

Every pupil prepares in order to finish school and receive the diploma, so that afterwards he can practise his trade. The diploma of Christ's school is written in the Bible: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23) This is what the teachers have decided we should obtain: the fruit of the One who is our teacher.

This school, however, has something an ordinary school does not have. A pupil learns mostly theory. The disciple has, in addition, a workshop where he puts into practice what he has learned in each subject. Christ's subjects are not a theory to be learned by heart. God teaches us how to live in the practical situations of every day. He brings us events and circumstances to go through, so that we may grow in these qualities of the Spirit, which are the qualities of Christ.

The subjects can also be seen as year groups. In the first year we learn small, minor things. Love comes at the end, because it is the goal of all the teachings. We do not have love from the first day; we pass through many stages before we get there. This is how the Kingdom is lived now: here, on earth, step by step, year by year.

In this school there is a danger. We enrol with a clear purpose, and yet so often we lose sight of the main thing: why we are in school and what we have to do there. We stray from the subjects being taught, we do all sorts of things, and we no longer follow the plan God has for us. We like to think we are in school, but we quickly forget the subjects and let ourselves be carried away by other thoughts.

Look once more at the list of the fruit of the Spirit. No work appears in it. The list speaks of love, gentleness and longsuffering. It does not say what great works this person or that person has

done, as though they were part of the fruit of the Spirit.

That is why the believer has no other purpose on earth than the fruit of the Spirit. Evangelism, billboards and the other works in God's plan of salvation, however great we may consider them, are secondary. When God counts someone worthy of a work, He gives it to him because He has found him worthy, but the work is not the main subject of the believer's life. You can hand out leaflets, go to the park, do everything you do, and still not grow at all in longsuffering.

Then it also matters how we work through the subjects. The school has a principal Pupil: the Lord Jesus, who Himself went through it before us. He brought the Kingdom and Himself lived its laws, to show us the way. The attitude with which we work through the subjects must be His, the way in which He went through this school.

It is not about the way we often go through ordinary school, in a hurry and with our eyes on the clock, to see how quickly we can leave. The subjects of Christ's school must occupy us daily. At school we have maths in the first lesson, then English, then history, then geography. In the same way we too need our daily study: how to grow and to complete these subjects.

To reach the end, we use the teachings of the Lord Jesus. They are the seed of God from which life springs. With their help we grow to maturity, to ripeness and to the diploma. The Word of God calls us to be perfect, to reach the stature of a full-grown man.

So the school of nine subjects is not one activity among others, but the very purpose of the disciple's life. Works are secondary; love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance are what we will be left with in the end.

At the end of the day, ask yourself not only what you have done, but in which subject you have grown. Receive the events of the day as a workshop in which the Teacher makes you like Himself. May the Lord help us to remain in His school, in the footsteps of the principal Pupil, until the diploma.

Source: *The School of Nine Subjects* — Unmodified Word
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