

SUNDAY SCHOOLS: THEIR NATURE AND IMPORTANCE.

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The wise ancients were wont to say, "rightly to know anything, you must know it through its causes; namely, its efficient, its material, its formal, and its final causes;" or, in more modern terms, its author, its elements, its laws, and its design or chief end. These four are called causes, because they constitute everything; for everything must have its constitutor, its constituents, its constitution, and its consummation.

In studying the nature and importance of Sunday Schools, we can hardly do better than apply this well tried rule of the ancients, and we shall begin with their chief end, as the first thought in planning, though last in completion. Of Sunday Schools, therefore, what are, (1) the chief end or design, (2) the material or constituents, (3) the laws or constitution, and (4) the author or constitutor?

1ST: THE CHIEF END OF SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

For what end or design do Sunday Schools exist? Please think well. Can you tell?

One writer says, "they are intended for the conversion of the scholars, and for nothing else." Is that correct? "For nothing else?" Can Sunday Schools do *nothing else* for their scholars after they are converted? "Oh yes!" you say, "they can help to edify and sanctify and perfect them more and more!" Very true. And can they do nothing for those scholars who seem *inconvertible*? "Yes; they may restrain and mitigate their evil habits and influences." Truly. And further, can they not benefit others besides the scholars? "Certainly: they are a blessing to the teachers and the parents, the church and the world." Now then you have a more correct idea of the chief end of Sabbath Schools. Let us analyze it.

1. Conversion, or the winning of souls to CHRIST, is certainly their first aim, and of supreme importance. It is easy with the young and docile, whose parents are doing their duty of home teaching and training. To such, the lessons of their teachers and pastor come with

heavenly efficiency. It is a most blessed privilege to ask such hearts for Jesus, to pledge them often to be His, to study and obey his word, and to watch and pray against all temptations.

2. But sanctification and edification are not less important or difficult. It is easier to plant than to water and protect. It is easier to sow the good seed, than to weed away the tares and thorns and thistles and cockle. Judge by your own gardens and farms! Revivalists too often forget this, fatally. "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." "The last end is worse than the beginning," to those who receive the good seed with joy and afterwards fall away.

3. But restraining grace itself is precious, even where the hearers refuse to accept of converting and sanctifying grace. It is good even for the irreclaimably impenitent themselves, as well as for the Church and the world around them. It keeps their cup from filling full with villainy, for a distressful eternity. Sabbath Schools may do this sadly—sweet service even for the hardened and the hopeless. As when a faithful physician shakes his head, tearful, amid weeping friends, and says, "I can ease him a little, but cannot cure!" Or as when a house is flaming far and furiously, the firemen rush to it and deluge it with many streams of water, saying, "this house cannot be saved! But we must keep down these rising flames, or our whole city will soon be a blazing furnace!" So Sabbath Schools may save the impenitent from ruining many other souls. And who knows but this restraining grace may prevail, and increase even to conversion and satisfaction? Toil on in hope! God only knows if the seed is deeply sown, and the root of the matter found in many an unlikely form!

4. And further, the end of Sabbath Schools is not merely to benefit the pupils who attend them, but also the teachers and the parents; the church and the world at large. This will appear under its proper head, as we go on in the study. At present we may sum up **what** is the chief end of Sunday Schools, viz:

1. Conversion; to win all souls to Christ, who come.

2. Sanctification; to instruct and perfect His converts.