

THE "LITTLE FLOCK" AND THE "GREAT COMPANY."

Two distinct companies of spiritual children of God have been developing side by side throughout the Christian Age. One class is designated a "little flock," and the other "a great multitude." (Luke 12:32; Rev. 7:9.) Not that one is called to be a member of the little flock, and another a member of the great company, but all are called to be of the little flock to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom, and to be joined in heirship with Jesus Christ, as his Bride. As Paul declares, "Ye are all called in one hope of your calling." Eph. 4:4.

All these start on the same narrow way, and being fully consecrated to God are begotten of the Spirit through the word of truth. Hence all are "new creatures" – spiritual – their old nature (the human) being doomed to certain destruction by their own free will and covenant. Therefore if these ever develop it must be as spiritual beings. The human perfection, physical, mental, and moral, to which the world may attain in the next age, is now out of the question to these consecrated ones; that having been presented by them and accepted by God as their sacrifice. If these fail to develop as "new creatures" – spiritual – there is no other hope for them: Death is the only alternative.

To be developed as new creatures, the old nature with all its hopes, ambitions, etc., *must* die. But to *steadily* put it to death, of our own continuous free will, is no light task, and this becomes more and more difficult, as the way narrows down to its end. Only a minority of all who in good faith make the consecration, run with patience to the end – in all only a "little flock." With many, courage begins to fail, and they need to be spurred onward by the chastening rod of him who has become our surety (Heb. 7:22) to guarantee that we fulfill our covenant, though our own efforts should fail; otherwise, the end of such must be death. In

love, therefore, special afflictions are sent upon the consecrated, when needed, to wean the affections from earthly things, and to draw the heart again into closer sympathy and communion with God in fulfillment of its covenant of sacrifice. A few only run patiently in the way of sacrifice, rejoicing at the privilege of winning so great a prize at such small comparative cost. The great company, we read, come up through great tribulation, which the "little flock" escapes (Rev. 7:14; Luke 21:36), and yet some in each company may have come through the very same experiences. To one it is great tribulation because he looks at the things that are behind, and weighs their value in the scales of this world; to the other it is but a light and easy yoke, because forgetting the things that are behind, he presses toward the prize of our high calling.

"To him that overcometh," rendering a cheerful and willing sacrifice, even unto death, our Lord says, "will I grant to sit with me *in my throne*" (Rev. 3:21). And of the "great company" also beloved of the Lord, and rightly exercised by his chastening rod, it is said, "Therefore are they *before the throne* of God, and serve him day and night in his temple."

Both companies are developed as spiritual beings, but the little flock to the highest order of spiritual being – the divine nature. Let us, therefore, seek to render unto the Lord that which is well pleasing to him, a cheerful, constant, willing sacrifice. "God loveth a cheerful giver." "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Would the bridegroom want for his bride one who would come with any other spirit? No, faithfulness under difficulties is the test of her love and devotedness.

At first sight Heb. 12:5,8, may appear to be out of harmony with this thought, but the Greek words "paideuo" and "paideias" in the King James translation rendered chastened and chastening, signify, to discipline, to instruct, to teach, to chasten. But chastening becomes a part of discipline only when the subject is an unwilling one. The Diaglott very clearly expresses the Apostle's thought. It reads, "My son,

slight not the discipline of the Lord, neither be discouraged when reproved by him; for [R772 : page 12] whom the Lord loves he disciplines, and he scourges every son whom he receives. If you endure discipline, God deals with you as with sons; for is there any son whom a father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline of which all have become partakers, then truly you are spurious and not sons. Have we then received discipline from our natural father, and we revered them; shall we not much rather be submissive to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days disciplined us according as it seemed right to them; but he for our advantage in order that we may partake of his holiness.

Yes, we all need the disciplining, training and scourgings to which our heavenly Father is now subjecting all his spiritual sons, that we may be prepared for the responsible positions to which we shall shortly be assigned. If we never have received, and know nothing of, this discipline, this training, then we may be sure we are not sons. Even Jesus, the perfect man, received it, shall we then hope to escape it? Not unless we despise it, refuse to receive it, and turn our backs upon it, ignoring our covenant entirely, which open rebellion verse 9 implies and Heb. 10:26,27, clearly states, must end in death.

The discipline which all the spiritual sons receive is the same which Jesus received – the buffetings of the world, the neglect, the cold indifference, the misunderstanding, the unbelief, being despised, persecuted, and cast out as evil, even by some or all of those of our own household; Lawful and proper human desires which conflict with our covenant, as well as all sinful besetments which must be constantly curbed and crucified, however they may clamor with our new nature for their rights, are all elements of our *discipline*. Then again the peculiar and subtle temptations of the Adversary which must be met and overcome through faith in the divine promises, which must be diligently searched for, and stored in mind, as the defense against sudden and unlooked-for attacks. Such trials of faithfulness Jesus endured, and overcame, and we, by his aid, "in every time of need," may also

overcome; though not like him, perfect, yet his grace is sufficient for us, and we can overcome as he overcame the world and its spirit (influence); yea, we can do all things through Christ's strength freely given unto us for the seeking. Phil. 4:13.

All discipline is severe and painful, yet necessary, both as training for our future office as Priests unto God, and as filling up the measure of the afflictions of Christ now. It was experienced by our Head unto the bitter end – death, and that without a murmur. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. Isa. 53:7.

He was led, *not driven* to death. He willingly permitted the sick and afflicted to partake of his vitality, his strength, and himself bore their infirmities to the extent necessary for their healing. In Gethsemane, knowing that his hour was come, he gave himself into the hands of his betrayers. He willingly endured the disapproval of men and denied himself the blessing of men that he might spend his time and talents according to his Father's will, esteeming it his meat and drink to do that will at any cost. All his sacrifice from the beginning to the end was rendered cheerfully, without a murmur, and even with delight. Why? Because he looked not at the things behind, which he had given up, but to the things before. He never even mentioned the things behind, but he had much to say of the things to come.

To follow in his footsteps then is to sacrifice ourselves as he did, with the same uncomplaining cheerful submission, delighting to do the Father's will. To obey grudgingly, reluctantly, with slow and halting step, with much complaining and frequent lookings back to lament over the loss of the things behind, holding back, loving the world, its ways and its things, and driven forward mainly by the scourge of tribulation and fear, are marks of those developing for the "great company," and to such there is danger of not only being "cast away" from the anointed body, but also of not even gaining a position in the "great company."

To gain a position in the latter even, they must give heed to the discipline, and in it, must wash their robes and *make them white*. The robe given to each saint is at first pure and spotless – Christ's righteousness is imputed to them. Those who fail to overcome and to keep their garments unspotted from the world *must* have the tribulation of washing them, and must rightly appreciate and use it, else they are unfit for either company.

In the case of Jesus and all who joyfully surrender themselves, it is called "SACRIFICE" of the flesh or human nature, and such are called "OVERCOMERS." In the case of those who hold back and wait for tribulation before rendering obedience, it is called "DESTRUCTION of the flesh" or human nature. The one class of which Jesus is the head, overcome the world; the other is overcome by the world, but finally delivered by the Lord through tribulations. And the rewards of these two classes, as stated by the Lord, will differ. The "overcomers," a "little flock," as members of His body, will sit with him in the throne, and be members of the spiritual temple, and wear the crown. The others – a "great company" will serve God in or **[R773 : page 12]** *through* his temple (the Body of Christ) and praise him *before* his throne and have "palms" of victory at last, though they failed to win the crowns.

In what a precarious situation we stand. O that all may be fully awake to the solemn responsibilities and issues of this, the Judgment Day of the Church – of all who have put on the name of Christ. All discipline indeed, as it respects the present, seems not to be of joy, but of grief; yet afterwards it returns the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Hold fast. Let no man take thy crown. Do not let the gratification of the present moment rob you of the great prize of our high calling which God desires to bestow upon you. Lay aside every weight and hindrance and count present sacrifices all joy, and by cheerful, prompt sacrifice, work out, make your calling and election sure; work out your salvation while God by his truth and his providence shall work in you.

"Therefore brace up the wearied hands and the enfeebled knees," make a desperate and continuous effort to render such a sacrifice as will be acceptable and well pleasing to God through Jesus; and "Make level paths for your feet" – i.e., arrange your circumstances, etc., as far as possible, so as to help and not hinder you, "lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed" (Heb. 12:13.) – lameness or *likings* for certain things which as consecrated ones we have no right to. Make your circumstances favor self-denial in this way as much as possible, that you may not be severely tempted on this weak or lame point of your character.

What great advantage accrues to the willing sacrificers – the little flock? They run with joy, realizing the Father's approval, and inspired by the glory of the prize kept constantly in view, while the great company of consecrated ones limp painfully along, many of them through the very same outward experiences, harassed by fears, worried by doubts, saddened by the loss of the things behind which they cannot now enjoy, yet failing to clearly discern the glory before, and driven by circumstances, fear, etc., to the fulfillment of their covenant.

And then this great company shall not be esteemed worthy to be of the Bride of Christ. That intimate relationship and communion is reserved only for those who have proved their devotedness by prompt, cheerful, willing sacrifices, even unto death. But the great company chastened, refined, purified shall be beloved and honored also with the next most favored position, because they were rightly exercised by the chastening rod.

In view of the momentous issues of this time of trial, let our efforts be constantly supplemented by our prayers that the Lord may give us grace to let him work in us, to will and to do his good pleasure, for unaided by divine grace none of us can make our election sure.

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