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HOW TO LOCATE OURSELVES

ADMITTING that we might not be able to locate others in relationship to the Divine Plan, should we not be able to locate ourselves? If so, how?

We should be able to locate ourselves in respect to God's grace. If we know the various steps to be taken and corners to be turned, we should know just how many of these we have taken and just where we are. Perhaps the following notation of the steps of a righteous man called of God to joint-heirship with His Son will help us: –

(1) A longing for righteousness, truth, purity, implies a drawing from the Lord along the lines of the less depraved parts of our fallen nature. Our first response to this drawing is to seek righteousness and seek meekness. To such the Lord says, "Draw near unto Me and I will draw near unto you." Numerous steps may be taken after the first one of turning our back upon wilful sin. Each step will bring us a little nearer to the Lord and to righteousness, and should show us more clearly than before that "in our flesh dwelleth no perfection," that we cannot live up to even our own estimate and interpretation of the Divine Law – that we need grace and [R4872 : page 342] help from on high. This entire course is one of justification in the sense that it tends to harmony with God and His righteous requirements.

The soul that thus has reached the place where it cries out to the loving God by this time sees clearly the need of the Savior and that Jesus is the Redeemer. It hears the message, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." It responds, "Lord, gladly will I go to the Father through You."

(2) The reply of Jesus as to what are the terms of [R4872 : page 343] discipleship point out the next step in the way to God and, accepted, brings the blessing. Our Lord's words are, "If any man will

be My disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." The Master does not urge haste in decision. The haste is left to the suppliant, whose love of righteousness and desire for fellowship with God will be measured by his haste in accepting the terms of discipleship. To one and all the Master says, "Sit down first and count the cost." Do not put your hand to the plow and then draw back. Those who take years to count the cost will very rarely win the prize, we may feel sure. The reasonable course is to weigh the proposition – the giving up of self with earthly hopes, aims, prospects, joys, entirely into the Father's hands as living sacrifices, with the prospect of suffering, trials, testing, proving in the present life, and, if faithful, glory, honor and immortality on the heavenly plane. It should not require long for a mature person of loyal heart to realize that the Lord's service is a desirable one and that the price, our little all, is insignificant. The zealous and faithful will speedily say, "Here, Lord, I give myself away; it is all that I can do."

Then comes the Redeemer's part. In harmony with the Father's Plan He now stands as Advocate for all such as have come unto the Father through Him. He advocates their cause as their representative in the heavenly court, approving of them and of their consecration, having, additionally, by the imputation of the merit of His own sacrifice, made up for their deficiencies, that they may be made the righteousness of God through Him. We see that the Advocate thus presents our name and covers our blemishes, and our sacrifices are accepted of the Father – up to the time when the last member shall have been received – up to the time when the door to this high calling shall have been closed, when the last of the wise virgins shall have entered beyond the veil.

The Father's acceptance of us is indicated by our adoption and begetting of the Holy Spirit and the commencement of the sealing – the impressing upon us, as New Creatures, of the Divine likeness, disposition or spirit. We should all know very positively whether or not

we have taken these two steps. If we have not, it is useless for us to look further.

EVIDENCES OF OUR ACCEPTANCE BY THE FATHER

(3) The begetting of the Holy Spirit in the early Church was indicated by certain miraculous gifts, but this was for a special purpose in connection with the establishment of the Church. As Paul pointed out, those gifts were intended to pass away. (I Cor. 13:8.) They were given by the "laying on of the hands of the Apostles." (Acts 8:18.) Hence after the death of the Apostles these gifts were not bestowed upon any. And when those who had received the gifts died, the gifts themselves ceased – thus passed away. But instead of the gifts came the fruits of the Spirit as evidences or proofs of acceptance by the Lord and induction as members or branches of the Vine. The fruit buds are small at first. They need and have the Husbandman's care. He prunes us – he cuts away the earthly things to which we are prone to cling. He leaves us without much earthly support except that which is connected directly with the Root, the Vine. Thus cut off from earthly ambition in harmony with our consecration unto death the Spirit of the Lord comes into us more and more, producing fruits of the Spirit, even as the juices of the vine go to the branches and its clusters. Such prunings are an evidence of our membership in the Vine and our fellowship in the sufferings of Christ; for the Heavenly Husbandman thus treats all true branches of the True Vine. We should begin to see fruits and graces. Our energy should be manifested in a variety of ways towards the Lord, towards His brethren and toward all mankind, in proportion as we have contact with them.

Amongst other indications of Divine favor would be fellowship with the Lord in prayer and through His Word – a love of the Divine Plan, a delight in everything that is righteous, just, true, noble – a desire to promote all such interests to the extent of our opportunities. Another evidence of faithfulness would be our being accounted worthy to suffer

reproaches and persecutions for the Lord's sake and the Truth's sake – and our acceptance of these as of Divine providence.

A further indication of our harmony with the Lord would be in our increased appreciation of His Word, a deeper insight into its precious teachings and an increasing pleasure in serving it out to others – not for vainglory, not that they might think something of us, but for the Lord's glory and for the good of those who desire to know His will.

EVIDENCES OF BACKWARD LEANINGS

But some may fail to attain to these depths and heights and lengths and breadths of blessing, of privilege. They may content themselves with little of the Lord's Truth and grace, little of the fellowship of the brethren, and, proportionately, more of the world's. These are failing to perform their Covenant and obligations of zealous sacrifice. They may be good and honorable and kind. They may be loyal to the Lord to the degree of not wishing to do anything contrary to His will; but they are failing of the extreme of loyalty, namely, of the anxiety to know and to do. These are in danger of being counted unworthy to be in the Bride Class and of being consigned to the larger company of the loyal but less faithful. Even to attain this honor and position they will need to be put through trials, sufferings, difficulties, the destruction of their flesh. But they will not have the high reward because of failure to run the race with zeal. Some may even have attained to all the glorious privileges of consecration, service, knowledge, etc., and then become cold, careless, overcharged with the cares of this life, and thus bring forth less fruit and not be counted worthy of membership in the Bride Class. Nevertheless the Lord will deal with them, if they are truly His, to chasten them and, if possible, to prepare them for the "great company" class, even though this may necessitate great tribulations.

Evidences in our day of a condition of unfitness for the "little flock" and danger of missing it would be a worldly spirit, a careless spirit, a love of the world, a slackness of zeal for God, for righteousness, for the brethren, and a failure to use opportunities and

to seek for others for the furtherance of the praises of "Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light" – a failure to go on to a greater development in the fruits and graces of the Spirit. A loss of love and zeal for God and His cause and the brethren follows and an increasing dimness of the Divine Plan already seen and recognized. The extreme of this condition is "outer darkness" – a blindness to heavenly things of the Divine Plan such as covers the world of mankind in general – without the illumination of the Lord's Word and Spirit.

As for those who commit "the sin unto death": It is scarcely necessary to discuss these, because persons who reach this hopeless condition rarely, we believe, realize it or are able to comprehend their own situation. So long [R4872 : page 344] as there is a fear of the Second Death and a desire for eternal life and a desire for harmony with God, there is hope. Two classes are described as being "twice dead, plucked up by the roots." One is a class which, after having received the holy things of God as New Creatures, turn back to the world, to its aims, its pleasures, its desires, its ambitions, its sins. These, completely repudiating the covenant of sacrifice, are in a hopeless condition as respects the future life. But we may perhaps say, fortunately, they do not realize their position, but rather feel the contentment of the dead world; or, perhaps, worse than the world, they are acrimonious and bitter against the members of The Christ and against the Truth, which they once appreciated but have left. Another class who go into the Second Death are pointed out as guilty of doctrinal deflection – the renouncing of the Redeemer, the loss of appreciation of the merit of His sacrifice and of the opportunities which that sacrifice secured to us in the way of sacrificing.

We are also asked respecting our Lord's statement, There shall arise false Prophets and false Messiahs who shall show great signs and wonders, in so much that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. We are asked whether these very elect refer to the "little flock" or include the "great company." We reply that evidently "the very elect" means the faithful. All of the Spirit-begotten ones are counted in

as of the elect, for, so long as they are faithful, they are the very elect. It would appear that these words of our Lord did not refer to something specially of our day, but rather to something that has applied for centuries, just as wars and tumults have progressed for centuries. One entire chapter in STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES, Vol. IV., is devoted to the examination of this great prophecy and we refer our readers to a fresh study. The false teachers and false Messiahs who have deceived many are represented today, we believe, by some very large and very prosperous denominations which are deceiving themselves and millions [R4873 : page 344] of others into supposing that they are the True Church, the True Messiah, the True Vine of the Heavenly Father's right-hand planting. On the contrary, branches of the True Vine may be in these different denominations, but the earthly institutions themselves belong to what the Scriptures designate "the vine of the earth," the fruitage of which will soon be gathered into the wine-press of the wrath of God. (Rev. 14:19.) God's saintly ones down through the Age have been more or less in contact with these great systems, anti-Christ systems, deceived and deceiving systems. But "the very elect," the saintly, as members of the true Body of Christ, will not now be allowed to mistake these systems for the true Church. The Lord guides them that they are not ensnared.

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