

THE MARK OF CRYSTALLIZATION OF CHARACTER

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." – Phil. 3:13,14.

IN THE EPISTLE to the Philippians, St. Paul expresses his full appreciation of his opportunity to gain a prize, something worthy of laying hold upon, of grasping fully, of getting possession of. What was that for which the great Apostle was striving and which he had not yet attained? He spoke of this thing as a prize, which he was pressing along to win.

We may view "the mark for the prize of the high calling" from two standpoints, both of which are correct. From one standpoint, this mark is that of *heart-likeness* to God's dear Son, of perfection of intention, of love for righteousness, for God, for the brethren of Christ, and for the world, even our enemies. This degree of character-development should be attained as early as possible in our Christian experience, and should be such that, were we to die at any time after its attainment, God would count us worthy of a share in the First Resurrection.

From the other standpoint, this "mark for the prize of the high calling" is that of crystallization of character in the likeness of our Lord. After having attained a heart-likeness to Christ, we must *hold it fast*, and see that in all the testings which the Lord permits to come upon us, we are counted by Him as overcomers, not in our own strength, but in that of our Redeemer. This mark of *crystallized* character is not attained so early in our Christian experience as is the mark of character-development. But by fighting the good fight until the end of our course, we *crystallize* our characters in love for the principles of righteousness, for God, for the brethren

and even for our enemies. If thus faithful, we shall win the prize of glory, honor and immortality.

PERFECTION, NOT CONSECRATION, THE MARK

There is no reason to think that our *consecration* is the mark; for our testing, our proving comes *after* our consecration, and not *before* it. No one would be at the mark merely because he is consecrated, but because he had endured the testing, thus proving that his consecration was from the heart and that he was sincere in the devotion of his every power to the service of God. We cannot suppose that the mark is reached the next moment after consecration. Some degree of character-development must be possessed; there must be some mark of character, in order that God may count that person worthy of everlasting life.

God's standard of character is perfection, which must be manifested by loyalty and obedience under whatever tests He permits to come to individuals upon *any plane* of life. No one will get the prize of everlasting life unless he successfully passes those tests. We realize that the Church has been under trial throughout the Gospel Age, as to her worthiness to obtain "glory, honor and immortality" – joint-heirship with her Lord. – Rom. 8:17.

From the Scriptures we learn that throughout the Messianic Age the world will be tried by The Christ, and that even after passing that test they will not receive the reward of everlasting life until God shall have proved them at the end of Christ's reign by loosing Satan for a "little season." (I Cor. 15:24; Rev. 20:7-10.) The fact that the world is thus to be tried by both The Christ and God confirms the thought that God has a standard, or mark, of character to be attained by all those who are loyal and obedient to Him – on any plane of existence.

While this mark of character to be attained by the world during Messiah's reign is not the one to which St. Paul refers in our text, nevertheless there is such a character-mark to be reached by mankind.

Those who then attain the mark will have everlasting life on the human plane. But those who attain the mark to which the Apostle refers will be given eternal life on the divine plane.

THE MARK OF CHARACTER-CRYSTALLIZATION

The Apostle was a noble example of one who had reached the mark. So far as we know, he was ready to die at any time; hence it was not this mark of character-development to which he had not attained. He had not yet attained to the *prize itself*, and could not do so until his change should come. He was constantly pressing along, trusting that God would give him all the things that are in reservation for "them that love him." (I Cor. 2:9.) We could not think the Apostle to mean that he would reach this mark of character-development *just at the moment before death*. This would be an absurdity of thought.

Our Lord Jesus was at the mark of perfect character at the time of His consecration; and He maintained Himself at the mark. As a sacrifice He would have **[R5080 : page 256]** been acceptable at any time. It was His part to consecrate His life and not to hold it back. It was the Father's part so to arrange matters that the Jews might not take our Lord until the Father's hour for Him had come. In everything that He did He submitted Himself to the Father's will. Our Lord spoke of His "cup" as the one which the Father had prepared for Him. – John 18:11.

If our Lord had determined for Himself the time and the manner of His death, then *He* was pouring the cup. If the Jews had determined these points, then *they* were pouring the cup. But neither our Lord nor the Jews did so, for both time and manner were foretold by the Prophets. Our Lord took the cup and accepted it *as the Father's providence for Him*. If the Father's providence had led to His death a year sooner or two years sooner, if the Father's will had been expressed in our Lord's crucifixion at an earlier time, even then it would have been well with Him. But He "learned obedience by the things which He suffered." – Heb. 5:8; 2:10.

At Jordan our Lord was shown to be perfect and to have made a perfect consecration, both by the descent of the Holy Spirit and by the voice of Jehovah. (Matt. 3:16,17.) He had also a perfect body – though it was earthly – in which the New Creature operated. But His *obedience* must be *tested* – His *loyalty even unto death*. Whatever the degree of testing to which our Lord might have been subjected, it was just the *right amount*, according to the Father's wisdom. Our Lord would have been just as much an overcomer had He died at any time after His consecration. But if He had died sooner than He did, it would merely have proved that the Father did not require as much *evidence* of our Lord's faithfulness and loyalty as He did require.

OUR LORD AN OVERCOMER AT CONSECRATION

Here some one may ask, "Is it proper to say that our Lord was an overcomer as a New Creature at the time when He made His consecration?"

Our answer is, Yes. An *overcomer* is a *victor*. The word does not imply that a man has completed the victory, however; for we sometimes say, He will lead them from victory to victory. So with our Lord. He continued faithful as an overcomer down unto death; but He was not counted as an overcomer unto death. Between the Father and our Lord as a human being there was no Mediator, and as a New Creature there was neither Robe to cover nor Advocate to represent in case of any deviation from the will of God; and the slightest deflection therefrom would have meant the Second Death.

The Scriptures give us two pictures of our Lord as an overcomer at His consecration, where He gained the first great victory over His flesh. The first of these pictures (Lev. 16:11), the killing of the bullock on the Day of Atonement, represents the death of our Lord's humanity at the moment when He consecrated Himself at Jordan. There He gained a victory and continued victorious until the end of His course.

The second picture is found in Rev. 5:2-7. Here our Lord is represented by a newly slain lamb. He was not this newly slain lamb at His death when He had finished His course, but at His consecration, when He began His course. The proclamation which the Revelator heard was, "Who is worthy to open the Book, and to loose the seals thereof?" We read that John wept much. "And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the Book and to loose the seven seals thereof...And He came and took the Book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the Throne." Our Lord alone was worthy of the honor of receiving the Divine Plan into His care. We also read that John looked and saw the newly slain Lamb open the Book. – Rev. 6.

After our Lord had entered upon His consecration He was the newly slain Lamb. Then the Father gave into His hand the scroll of the great Divine Plan of the Ages – the scroll written on both inside and outside. The outside He was already able to read. But the inside, which contained information on spiritual things, remained sealed.

As soon as our Lord came up out of the water after His baptism, He was begotten of the Holy Spirit and began to understand spiritual things. "The heavens [higher things] were opened unto Him." The time when He began to be considered the slain Lamb, the time when the scroll was delivered to Him, was the time of His consecration. **[R5081 : page 256]**

SUBMISSION THE FIRST REQUISITE – PATIENT ENDURANCE THE SECOND

A good illustration of the process of character-development and crystallization is afforded by the work of a potter. First, he must select the right kind of clay, for some clays would produce very coarse ware, others would crack or warp in the drying, and still others would not stand the intense heat. Having selected the proper clay the potter subjects it to very many processes of grinding, mixing and wetting until it comes from the mill a soft, plastic mass of the consistency of

tough dough, ready for the potter's use. Then comes the moulding into the article desired. The dish is formed, or shaped, with care and dried. Next it is placed in the kiln and fired with an intense heat for two or three days and nights. Then it requires a long time to cool before it can be removed from the kiln. But even then it is only a porous, leaky vessel, altogether unfit for use until it has been dipped into a liquid glaze, or slip, which it readily absorbs.

Again it is subjected to the heat of the glaze kiln, which not only melts the glaze, but converts it into a perfectly transparent glaze all over the surface, making the article beautifully smooth and comely. But if the vessel is of very choice porcelain, to be made still more attractive to the eye by decorations, the ornamentation and gilding must be done at this stage, and the vessel must again be placed in the kiln for a third firing. Some vessels which have stood all the other tests, fail at this point and are cast into the waste heap. But if the vessel passes successfully the last test, it is ready for the service for which it was designed.

So in our Lord's case. Not only was He perfect as a man, but His own *will* was in complete subjection to the *Father's will*. When trials came, there was no swerving, no twisting, no bending. He was of the proper material. His heart (applying this word to the mind) was of the proper character. So must it be with us. Those who will be accepted and found worthy of the great reward will be of His character-likeness in this respect; they will be *loyal* to *God's will*. Not only will they endeavor both to ascertain and to do the Father's will, but they will be in heart submission to that will *in every degree*. The "cup" they will be required to drink is the same that our Lord drank – and "*all of it!*"

To follow in His steps, we must first reach this mark of character-development; and having done all, we must *stand* there. It is well to repeat the thought that it will not do for us to think that one reaches the mark of proper character-development just at the *moment of [R5081 : page 257] death*. Character should be attained as soon as

possible. But having reached this character-development called the "mark," it is for us to *stand faithful*, and not be thrust away from it by the opposition of the world, the flesh and the Devil. All such opposition must be endured before we can win the prize. Some of the noblest characters, who have been in an acceptable condition, and used of the Lord, did not get to the *mark* until they had passed through certain severe experiences.

"WE HAVE THE MIND OF CHRIST"

The thought of the Apostle seems to be, Here is a certain line of conduct and character-development which God has marked out; and it is the same for all who are in the race. The life of Christ is the rule. If we would attain the mark, obtain the prize, we must follow this line, or rule, or mark.

The Apostle Paul had but one mind or will. "This *one thing* I do," he said. He was not a double-minded man, at one time thinking he would like to serve the Lord, at another time himself, and then again the Adversary, etc. He had accepted the Divine proposition to give *all* his talents to the service of the Lord. He had before his mind the great promise that God had made. For him there was but *one thing* in life.

The Scriptures tell us that during the Gospel Age God has sent out a special call, or invitation, and that those who have accepted that call have "exceeding great and precious promises" of wonderful things to look forward to. All who accept the call should practically forget all the trifling things of life in order to attain these promises. There is but one way to win the prize – by manifesting to God faithfulness, obedience and loyalty. *Character*, not *talent*, makes us acceptable. God could give any one intellectual powers as good as ours or better. He will not grant any one a place in the Kingdom on account of physical strength or endurance. He will not admit any one to the Kingdom because of worldly prosperity or honor of men, or because of riches.

CONDITIONS REQUIRED IN THE RACE

What then is God seeking? To what has He called us? The Apostle Peter says that God has "called us to glory and virtue." (2 Peter 1:3.) Certain conditions God requires of those who will run in the race. He requires that none be proud, but that they possess humility. And He will have no one in the Kingdom of His Elect who is weak, vacillating, so far as his *mind* is concerned. He may not have a strong *intellect*; but he must manifest to God that he has a strong *will* and *firm determination*, and that he has cut off everything in life in order to win the prize. He must also demonstrate his *loyalty* to God. He must not merely seek glory, but he must recognize and appreciate his responsibilities to God.

Loyalty is one of the great tests of character – loyalty to *God*, to His *Word*, loyalty to *principle*. Whatever follows, the Christian must be submissive to God, trustful and faithful. To such alone could we expect God to give the great blessings promised to overcomers. Hence we see that the Apostle was quite right in giving up *all* that he might serve God, that he might please the Father, and thus attain to this glorious reward of joint-heirship with His Son.

"EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVETH"

Not necessarily all who *make* a *consecration*, but all whose consecration God *accepts*, all whom He begets of His Holy Spirit to become New Creatures, will have the opportunity of reaching this mark of *crystallization* of character before they die. These will have full testing – "Every son *whom He receiveth.*" (Heb. 12:6.) This promise guarantees that they shall have trials and difficulties to develop them in the proper character-likeness of our Lord; and that none of their experiences will be cut short of this attainment. God will see to it that they have the full opportunity to develop character-likeness to Christ. Those who turn to sin wilfully, deliberately, will fall into the Second Death. Others may fall from the priestly class into

the Great Company. But even these must have sufficient time to manifest their loyalty to God.

At the time of His consecration, our Lord was at the mark by virtue of His *perfection*. We are not at the mark at the time of our consecration; for we are *imperfect*. But we wish to do the Lord's will; and we have given ourselves to ascertain what that will is in order that we may render intelligent obedience thereto. In our Lord's case He had no such imperfection to overcome as we have. At the time of His consecration He loved His neighbor as Himself, and He loved God with all His heart.

When we consecrate ourselves, we agree to do this; but we do not know what it means; just as St. Peter "wist not" what he said at the time of the transfiguration in the Mount: "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." (Matt. 17:4.) Neither did the two Apostles know what they were asking when they requested Jesus that they might sit the one on His right and the other on His left hand in the Kingdom. Our Lord said to them, "Ye know not what ye ask." – Matt. 20:22.

Since at the time of our consecration we do not fully understand what we do, therefore we do a great deal of running to reach the mark. This our Lord had no need to do; for He was perfect. At consecration He was at the mark of perfect character, so that had He died at any subsequent time He would have received the reward of the Father, who said, "This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:17.) At His baptism our Lord was at that mark of character which merited the promised reward of the Father, and to which we must attain before we can secure everlasting life, either on the plane of glory or otherwise.

Stephen, who was martyred very soon after Pentecost, must have lived habitually near to the Lord; for he, like Nathaniel, was an "Israelite indeed" in whom was no guile. The fact that the Truth of

God came to such as these men means that so far as their heart attitude was concerned they had been very near to the Lord under the Law as their schoolmaster (Greek, pedagogue,) so that when brought to Christ they could quickly learn of Him. So it appears to be with us now. The differences in our natural education in right and wrong, in truth and error, are such that we cannot tell just how long it will take for each to attain to the character-likeness of our Lord and thus to prove worthy of eternal life.

"PUT YE ON THE LORD CHRIST"

We have suggested that the Lord's people, at the time of their consecration and begetting of the Holy Spirit, are not ready for the Kingdom, but require development, which time alone can accomplish. Notwithstanding this suggestion, is there not a sense in which God's people are regarded *perfect* at the time of their consecration – at the moment of their acceptance? Our answer is, Yes; they are *counted* so, but are not so actually. The flesh is reckoned perfect so that God can accept their offering. **[R5082 : page 258]**

But at this time the New Creature is merely a babe in Christ and has not yet attained to the stature of manhood. Therefore, the necessity exists for entering the School of Christ and for "putting on Christ," as the Apostle expresses it. We begin to put on Christ after consecration, and after our begetting of the Holy Spirit. The babe grows into a child, and the child into a man. (Eph. 4:14,13.) The work of growing up into Christ is necessary before the child of God would be fit for the Kingdom. The difference between a babe in Christ and one fit for the Kingdom is that the latter has been tried and tested and has proved himself to be an overcomer.

When our Lord Jesus was at Jordan He was an overcomer. (Heb. 10:9.) He was perfect and had correspondingly a larger appreciation of what He did than we have respecting our course when we consecrate. But He tells us, "Fear not, little flock," "be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." – Luke 12:32; John 16:33.

Yet even in our Lord's case, while He was an overcomer at the moment of His consecration, He really did not win the prize of the divine nature until the end of His race-course, until there had been *demonstrated* a sufficiency of worthiness for that high exaltation; and we know that the Father continued tests of obedience even unto the death on the cross. It was not until after this that our Lord was fully accepted as an overcomer, to whom it was granted to sit with the Father in His Throne.

THE GREAT TEST IS TO REMAIN AT THE MARK

The possession of perfection necessarily means that one is at the mark, as in the case of Adam. The test is, not whether one can *reach* the mark, but whether one will *remain at* the mark – "having done all, to *stand*." (Eph. 6:13.) When we reach the mark of character which God approves in every sense of the word, let us *continue there*. When our Lord came into the world He was perfect, loyal, at the mark – God's standard, perfection. Whether or not He would be moved away from the mark by the contradiction of sinners against Himself, was to be proved. But none of these tests led Him to abandon His determination to continue at the mark. So it should be with us – to the best of our ability.

The Spirit of God is the same whether manifested in Himself or in angels or in men or in New Creatures. We do not find the Spirit of God manifest in the majority of men, because of sin. We would find the Spirit of God manifest in angels. We should find the Spirit of God very manifest in the saints, who should carry with them into the new relationship all that they have naturally of the character-likeness to the Lord. The graces of spirit exhibited in the Lord's people are properly to be considered fruits of the Holy Spirit; for their possessors have become New Creatures, have entered into the race for the prize of the high calling. Some saints might be able by reason of natural qualities to make more rapid progress than would others in developing and perfecting these fruits and graces of the Spirit.

"RESPECT UNTO THE RECOMPENSE OF THE REWARD"

Sometimes the question arises, Should not the Lord's people preferably strive for character-likeness to Christ, with no particular desire as to what the Lord's reward will be? We answer, No. We should have "respect unto the recompense of the reward." In order to have the proper respect for the reward which God promises, it is necessary that we hold it up before us continually, and that we never lose sight of the prize.

Our Lord Jesus does not deprecate this looking at the prize. Listen to His words: "Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine Own Self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." (John 17:5.) Thus He prayed to the Father for the reward which the manifestation of His obedience would bring. So it should be with us; not that we have a right to insist that our efforts be rewarded, but that we should think of the blessing which God has promised those who love Him, as "exceeding great and precious." Many in the nominal church do not see these things.

Let us keep the goal distinctly before our eyes. Doubtless the Lord meant the knowledge of the prize to serve as a stimulus for our upbuilding and strengthening. We look for "glory, honor and immortality"; and it is right for us to seek for them. Any other attitude would be false modesty. If the thought that it is presumption for us to aspire to the high calling comes before our minds, let us remember that our Lord wants us to be so inspired by the "great and precious promises" that we will work for these things which He has set before us, and that it would be presumption for us to *refuse* what He *offers* to us.

FREE MORAL AGENCY A FACTOR IN CHARACTER-DEVELOPMENT

Character may be viewed from two different standpoints. When Adam was created, he was a man of great and good character – "crowned with glory and honor." He was perfect, the image of God. There is a difference, however, between a character thus *given*, and one that is *developed* and *tested* by the exercise of *free will*. Our Heavenly Father desires that His intelligent creatures exercise their wills. Therefore instead of giving Adam a part of His own character-likeness and eliminating that which we call moral choice, He chose to give Adam His character-likeness, including free moral agency. "So God created man in His own image." God foreknew the fall of man and all the circumstances connected with it. He knew that the permission of evil for a time would ultimately result in great blessings for all. He knew that the time would come when every creature in heaven and in earth would be obedient to Him, not only because there was no opportunity of doing otherwise, but from *choice*.

Those who are appreciative of God's character should desire to have this character-likeness. Only such will merit everlasting life amongst either angels or men. God is testing along these lines the worthiness of those who are on trial for life eternal. Hence, "The Father seeketh such to worship Him" as "worship Him in spirit and in truth" – intelligently. – John 4:23,24.

WE MUST "LOVE RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATE INIQUITY"

In the formation of character, we see that the lessons which we learn in the School of Christ are very helpful to us. Originally, man was made in the image of God. Yet in us the image is blurred, indistinct. Those who learn the lessons now and appreciate them to the full will be given no further trial. Those who have not had a sufficiency of opportunity will have a full trial in the Age to come. Under the discipline, the chastenings and the rewards of that time, they will learn

how much better is righteousness than sin, Truth than error. They will develop in the character-likeness of God, which Adam lost, and will see the exceeding sinfulness of sin. They will learn both to *will* and to *do* righteousness. All who fail to learn this lesson will be judged unworthy of eternal life.

We see that the angels willed of themselves whether [R5082 : page 259] they would be obedient, or be disobedient and enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. All the holy angels, who are now in favor with God, are such as have had their testing and have come off victors. Their example will prove more and more a lesson to us as we come to understand it. As a result of this knowledge, we see in God the noblest sentiment that could actuate our Creator and Father in dealing with His creatures; and we are glad that we have chosen to do His will concerning us.

Finally it is important that we should keep in mind the fact that since true love on our part will manifest itself in *obedience*, then *disobedience* is an evidence of a *loss of love*, as viewed from the Lord's standpoint, a deflection from loyalty, a failure to endure the tests. We must agree that the Lord's standpoint of judgment is a reasonable one. Should one ask, How would it be if we should disobey through ignorance? The answer is, that the Lord has made provision against our ignorance: first, He has given us the Word of Truth, "that the man of God may be perfect [perfectly informed], thoroughly furnished unto all good works"; and second, He has promised to supply such helps to the spirit of holiness and the understanding of His Word, as will enable us to do what is pleasing in His sight. – 2 Tim. 3:17; John 16:13,14.

Love is the crown of all graces, "the fulfilling of the Law." Without a fervent, glowing love, it will be impossible to render obedience or to stand the tests for development and crystallization of character arranged for by Divine Love. Our Lord tells us that He was beloved of the Father; and the Father Himself declared, "This is My

beloved Son." We can readily see why our *Lord Jesus* was greatly beloved, for He expressed and fully manifested the Father's love. But it *astounds* us to know that this same love is exercised by the Father toward *us!* "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon *us*, that *we* should be called the *sons of God!*" "The Father Himself loveth you"! – I John 3:1; John 16:27.

LOVING OBEDIENCE BRINGS JOY AND PEACE

Let us, dearly beloved, be more than ever careful respecting the Word of the Lord; let us not by negligence give evidence of a decay of love. Our Lord points out that His continuance in the Father's love, as the well-beloved Son, with all which this implies, was because of His *obedience* to the *Father's will*; and that following the same line, He must require that *we* should be obedient to Him if we would *abide* in His *love* and share His Throne and glory. – John 15:10.

Our Lord's instructions and commandments are not intended to terrify us, nor to deprive us of happiness. On the contrary, "These things have I spoken unto you that *My joy* may be *in you*, and that your joy might be *filled full.*" (John 15:11.) Those who give surest evidence of living nearest the Lord well know that obedience to the Lord's words, together with the privilege thus obtained of abiding in Him and His love, is the greatest joy, a joy which wholly outweighs all the trifling pleasures which the world has to offer. It is the joy and peace which "passeth all understanding," which rules in the heart, and which brings with it the promise, the assurance, "not only of the life which now is, but also of that which is to come." – I Tim. 4:8.

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