

GOD FIRST – SELF LAST

ALL of the Lord's true people, begotten of His Holy Spirit, are beautiful characters as New Creatures: As the Apostle expresses it, "Holy Brethren, partakers of the Heavenly calling." (Hebrews 3:1.) "Every one that loveth Him that begat [the Heavenly Father] must love also that which is begotten of Him." (1 John 5:1.) The fact that the Heavenly Father has anything to do with a human being and in any sense of the word recognizes him – especially if He recognizes him as a son – signifies that there is a nobility of character, an honesty of heart and a consecration of will, whether we be able to see these things in the outward conduct and words of the individual or not. We must assume that they are there – that God, who readeth the heart, sees them to be there. Having confidence in the Divine Wisdom, it is proper for all of the Lord's people to accept each other as New Creatures in Christ, to whom old things are passed away and for whom all things have become new. But, as the Apostle points out, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels"; these good hearts, these consecrated wills, have no perfect spirit bodies in which to operate yet. They can act and speak only through the poor, imperfect flesh, which is consecrated to death.

And oh, how the imperfect tongue and the imperfect body often misrepresent the real sentiments of the New Creature using them! Our stammering tongues fail to express our real sentiments, and we are misunderstood. Our poor brains, which the New Creature strives to exercise in favor of justice and love, often get sadly twisted. The justice we would do, we often misunderstand and do not; and the love which we wish to manifest, is twisted also and misunderstood by others and is unsatisfactory to ourselves. Early in our Christian experience, we may have failed to see our blunders, and frequently have done *injury* where we supposed we had done *good*. Later, as we began to see our imperfect works, imperfect words, imperfect

thoughts and reasoning, and discerned how little we really accomplished of the much we would like to do, we were in danger of being thoroughly discouraged. We needed the very encouragements which the Lord's Word holds out to us – the assurance that God looketh at the heart and not at the outward appearance; and that the pure in heart will be blessed and see God, notwithstanding the weaknesses of their flesh, against which they strive courageously.

GOD FIRST IN OUR HEARTS

Many are the rules and practices which will be assistful to the New Creature while endeavoring to prove loyal and to fight down and overcome the imperfections of his flesh. A great variety of rules might be mentioned, including the study of God's Word, continual watchfulness and endeavor to cultivate the fruits of the Holy Spirit, the **[R5958 : page 280]** remembrance of the Golden Rule, etc., etc. But we now wish to call attention to one general rule which seems to have a broad application to all of our thoughts and words and actions. If this rule be followed, the entire life will thereby be regulated. This rule is – God first, self last!

This is a hard rule so far as the old creature is concerned, and he will rebel against it – especially the latter part – putting self *last*. But the old creature cannot really object to the rule so far as "God first" is concerned; for even natural men realize that there are proper obligations to the Creator; but the New Creature sees this obligation in a special light. It is this special light which led to the making of a full consecration to the Lord, to enlistment under the banner of Jesus to fight a good fight against sin entrenched in the flesh, and to faithfulness in this warfare even unto death. In making this consecration, the individual put God first, Jesus next, and himself as the servant of These and the principles which They represent; and his flesh as devoted, consecrated, given over to death in the service of these principles.

But it is one thing to *recognize* the *principles*, and quite another thing to *apply* them in the *daily life* and in the Church. God first in the home and the personal affairs means that *all earthly interests* and *pleasures* will be subordinated, and that the will of God, the service of God, the honor of God's name, will have the most prominent part in *all* of our affairs *every day* – in *all* of our *words*, in *all* of our *dealings*, in our *very thoughts*.

Extending this principle to the Church, which is the Body of Christ, we perceive that if all the brethren had this spirit, it would imply the very highest ideals and practices in the Church. As the Apostle admonishes, nothing would be done through strife or vain glory, but merely to the glory of God – God first! It would mean that in all the matters of our worship, praise, and Bible study, pride or fond desire and selfishness and partiality and hypocrisy would be far away; for God would be *first*, and we would know that all of these traits of evil entrenched in our flesh are contrary to the will of our God.

APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES

In the election of servants in the Church, the rule of "God first" would mean that each one in voting would seek to vote according as he believed to be *God's will*, entirely ignoring *his own will* and the wills of all others of the brethren. "God first" would also lead him to take an individual stand in that kind, loving manner which the Bible declares to be the Holy Spirit, or disposition of [R5959 : page 280] meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, brotherly-kindness, love. Surely a blessing would follow such an endeavor to put God first, and to forget everything that might be in competition with the Lord in our affection!

As for the latter part of this resolution – "self last," this would mean the very essence of the Apostle's admonition, "Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory" (Philippians 2:3); and again, "in honor preferring one another." (Romans 12:10.) We look back at the

record of the Twelve Apostles, and see how they were disposed to strive amongst themselves as to which should be greatest in the Kingdom. But this striving was before their begetting of the Holy Spirit, before Pentecost. How glad we are to see that such a spirit apparently disappeared after Pentecost, amongst those who received the spirit-begetting! "Self last" might well have been the rule among the Apostles – so loyally did they support the principles of the Lord's Word and uphold and encourage one another in the good work. How we rejoice with them!

But how sad it makes us feel when some dear brethren of our day, who profess to have received the begetting of the Holy Spirit, and whose professions we do not doubt, seem not to have learned this lesson of "self last"! "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." (1 Peter 5:6.) Occasionally, we perceive some disposed to seek office as Elders or as Deacons of the Church, disposed to feel offended if they are not elected to these offices. Oh, what a pity that they cannot take the broader and better view of the matter! We do not question their hearts; we shall suppose that as long as they abide in the Truth, the Lord's Spirit is not taken from them. And yet how little *growth in grace* is implied where a spirit of self-seeking is manifested amongst brethren aspiring to leadership in the Ecclesia!

"WHILE PLACE WE SEEK"

Dear Brethren, let us truly humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, and take whatever His providence metes out to us with full contentment. If for *any* reason the Class chooses us to the position of Elder or of Deacon, let us be thankful to the Class and to the Lord; and let us use our privilege as a gift, as a favor, with humility of spirit, remembering that an elder brother in the Class is a *servant* of the Class. Let us seek to use our opportunities and stewardship wisely, as those who must ultimately give an account. If on another occasion, the Class for *any* reason passes us by, failing

to elect us to a service, let us remember that that is the Class' privilege – yea, each one of the Class is in duty bound to vote according as his judgment shall be respecting the *Divine will*. Should we quarrel with the Divine will? Nay. Should we quarrel with the brethren for exercising their judgment respecting the Divine will? Nay. What should we do? Let us accept the Divine arrangement and be just as thankful of heart, and be just as energetic to serve in the proper ways according to our opportunities. Let us not seek to put stumbling-blocks in the way of those who have been chosen for the service, but rather do all in our power to cooperate with them.

Let the brother of high degree – that has a high position of favor in the Class – rejoice if he is debased and removed from the position. Let him rejoice to learn whatever lessons the Lord's providence may have for him. Let him rejoice to learn how to serve in another position. And let a brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted. Let us receive whatever experiences come to us as being under Divine supervision, remembering that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28.) Let us be on the alert to have *God first*, the interests of His cause, His people, the Church – and our own interests and *ourselves, last*. We may be sure, dear Brethren, that whoever is thus found faithful, in harmony with the principles taught and exemplified by our Redeemer, will have some good place in the Redeemer's Kingdom by and by; and that all the present experiences will be overruled for his preparation for that Kingdom position.

The time for our exaltation is not now. The dear brethren may have exalted us to some service in the Class for which we were not worthy, and the possession of which might have made us heady or otherwise have injured us. The proper thought is that *God is at the helm*, and is able to make our experiences work out blessings to us, as individuals and as Classes. It is for us to be rightly exercised by

the Lord's Word and by the Spirit of our Master, putting ***God first; self, last.***

