

Defining Man's Place in God's Order

Contents

DEFINING MAN'S PLACE IN GOD'S ORDER.....	5
THERE IS A DIVINE HIERARCHY	5
<i>Returning to a Position behind the Starting Line.....</i>	6
<i>A Matter of Balance</i>	6
ALL BELIEVERS ARE PREDESTINED FOR GLORY	7
GENERAL PUNISHMENT AND INDIVIDUAL REAPING FOR SIN	8
ARE WE GROWING IN CHRIST?	8
OUR FOREFATHERS WERE A SEPARATE PEOPLE	9
<i>The Need to Be Separate While Taking the Gospel to Sinners</i>	9
WE NEED SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT.....	10
YOU WILL FEEL ALONE AT TIMES	11
ALL BELIEVERS ARE NEXT TO GOD HIMSELF	12

Defining Man's Place in God's Order

There Is a Divine Hierarchy

Originally God created man to be below God and above all other creatures, including angels, in the universal chain of command established by the Creator of all things.

“But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands...” (Heb 2:6-7)

The commentator Adam Clarke says the following concerning this passage,

“If this be spoken of man as he came out of the hands of his Maker, it places him at the head of all God's works; for literally translated it is: Thou hast made him less than God. And this is proved by his being made in the image and likeness of God, which is spoken of no other creature [not even angels, who are presently ranked above mankind - AJS] either in heaven or earth...”

But this eminent creature – this man patterned after his Creator – sinned in the Garden of Eden and forfeited his high standing. God in grace and mercy countered that gross error committed by man by opening up a way of salvation for him through the gaping hole torn in the side of Christ on Calvary. Man has now inherited eternal life, but he still is, for a little while, lower than the angels until he reaps what he sowed in that fateful moment in Eden. He will have to suffer under the curse called down on all men and women until he literally and fully comes in possession of the “purchased possession,” which is his redemption and restoration to his divinely ordained position below God and higher than the angels. At that time man will regain that which in the beginning was his by divine right.

Returning to a Position behind the Starting Line

In the meantime all Christians, from the gray-haired senior to the newly saved child, are in the process of starting over (although that is not a precise statement: we have had to start from a position of sinfulness, which Adam never knew in the beginning of his days). Because we were sinners, we have had to first accept Christ as our Savior and then begin a lifelong process of growing spiritually. So it is necessary that we receive the nourishment necessary to sustain a healthy spiritual development throughout our life. As the physical body cannot grow without food, so the spiritual body cannot grow without something to fuel that growth.

The nourishment comes from several sources, three of which I have listed here: 1) the preaching and teaching that goes forth from pulpits manned by sincere dedicated pastors; 2) privately reading God's written Word; and 3) this spiritual nourishment can even be ingested by listening to a relatively few televangelists who know God intimately and are well acquainted with His words and His will. But you must be very careful here: not all supposed men and women of God who come in front of the TV camera are qualified to give you the food you need.

A Matter of Balance

At times our pastors of many shades of belief and unbelief have us focus so intently on one awesome, glorious aspect of God that we overlook or overshadow another apparently contradictory one. A case in point is the towering righteousness and holiness of God, on which we concentrate until we neglect His mercy and grace and forbearance. The last three traits are just as much a part of God as are His righteousness and holiness. Or the reverse is rather true: we latch onto the mercy and grace of God so tightly that we forget that He is also a God of vengeance and wrath against the ungodly who persevere in their wicked ways. If He is not the one God He cannot be the other and thus we are left with no God.

Let me repeat for clarity and to take away all excuses: Despite our human tendency toward such an unbalanced view of

the Almighty, God is all of God or He is none of God. If God is not righteous and holy while at the same time merciful and longsuffering, then there is no God; the rejecters of deity have won. It would seem that we are not, after all, the end result of intelligent design; we are not creatures born of the love God had for us from an eternity ago. As some atheistic scoffer has suggested, we are the chance result of a great cosmic hiccup and we have no reason for being and no predestined end.

All Believers Are Predestined for Glory

From the moment God offered a sacrificial animal to cover the sin of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3.21), the forces of Good have been on the ascendancy; they have been on an unstoppable roll, often despite outward appearances. For much of mankind's shameful history evil has seemed to be the winning force, but the outcome of this long battle between Good and evil has never been in doubt. How could the Creator who created, and the Power that ordained all other powers, be overcome by a lesser power? Defeat was never a remote possibility.

Nevertheless all men are under the curse that God pronounced against Adam for the first sin committed by a human in the Garden of Eden. We are reaping now and will continue to reap as long as we live, but our reaping for the first sin and for all the sins we have individually committed in the past does not adversely affect our salvation. Hosea advises us,

“Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for *it is* time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.” (Hos 10:12)

It is by the mercy and grace of God that we are allowed to sow now in righteousness and to reap our old sinful harvest in mercy so there will be no reaping for us of any kind in the Judgment Day.

“For the time *is come* that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if *it* first *begin* at us, what shall the end *be* of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (1Pe 4:17)

General Punishment and Individual Reaping for Sin

In the matter of reaping, the broad brush stroke of the command, “the soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Eze 18:20) and the narrower, more specific brush stroke of individual sowing and reaping must be considered. It is all a matter of God's developing us to take our God-ordained role in His hierarchy of created beings.

Paul warns us, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” (Gal 6:7) Lest we be easy on ourselves and think that the sowing here refers only to sin in general, consider this scripture from the Old Testament:

“And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again.” (Lev 24:19-20; ref., Exo. 21.24; Deut. 19.21)

It is very clear from the Scriptures that we have to reap the harvest of each sinful seed sown. It is also just as clear that we will reap in mercy and we will continue to be saved as long as we believe in Jesus Christ. Just keep the faith no matter what the reaping or how long – keep the faith.

Are We Growing in Christ?

As we have observed, mankind is at present lower than the angels in the divine hierarchy. In this state God is working to perfect us with the goal of eventually bringing us to the place He had envisioned for us when He created us in the Garden. All we who are saved have to take part in the process of growing in grace, in love, in kindness, in knowledge and in likeness to our Master. Without doubt there is much ground yet to be covered in our quest.

But on the positive side we have come a long way since the early days of the Modern Pentecostal movement. Some of us have learned much and in our learning have not forgotten the

basics of how to live and think and act. We have not neglected the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles – and I definitely would not want to go back to the good ol' pre-Azusa Street days that in retrospect seem so pleasant.

In fact, the general era after Azusa Street up to the early 1970's was one in which, after a person was once saved, he was urged to align himself or herself with a good pastor who could give him instruction on how to grow the Way of Holiness.

Our Forefathers Were a Separate People

One fact stands out for what it is worth: The true preachers of the Gospel in that day tried their best to shape and mold their followers into the likeness of Christ. They did not preach politics or stress extreme so-called patriotism or deliver a watered-down message on the goodness inherent in mankind. The Church does not need that. It needs to be taught righteous living. The Church needs to be reminded to love their neighbors and to forgive all wrongs committed against themselves. We need to be reminded again and again how to live in the world without becoming a part of the world.

The Need to Be Separate While Taking the Gospel to Sinners

Admittedly some of the old line Pentecostal pastors did stress being so separate from the world that it hindered getting the Gospel to the world, especially in areas like sports, politics and entertainment. How can we effectively be lights in the darkness if we don't go where the darkness is? Oh yes, the Spirit can draw men and women to our services, but we all know we are also required to "go into all the world," not remain aloof from it.

Jesus Himself went where sinners were to be found. Now don't get the idea that Jesus would have gone into an x-rated movie theater of today; but He would have gone to a sports contest or a PG rated movie. (But concerning the PG movies, they and similarly rated shows on TV have become so lax in what they allow as proper for young minds that if I had young children, I would hesitate letting them watch everything so

labeled. I would have to censor their movie and TV fare. Nor am I sure that Jesus would deign to watch them.) In His last moments with His disciples Jesus prayed to the Father,

“I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil [of the world].” (Joh 17:15)

We Need Spiritual Nourishment

All Christians, from the gray-haired senior to the newly saved child, are in the process of growing spiritually. So it is necessary that they receive the nourishment necessary to sustain a healthy spiritual development throughout their life. As the physical body cannot grow without food, so the spiritual body cannot grow without something to fuel that growth.

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In the matter of a spiritual leader/pastor, all Christians need a person who 1) knows God intimately and walks accordingly; 2) believes that Jesus is the only way to salvation; 3) preaches a relevant Gospel, meaning one that applies to the believer's daily life and fight against sin; 4) believes in water baptism, not as a primary requisite for salvation (read , but because Jesus ordained it; and 5) believes in ONE God, not two or three – ONE God. He may refer to the Father, Son and the Holy Ghost as often as he wishes, but he must teach that the three are indissolubly ONE.

As you search for a church home, pray for guidance because you cannot know a prospective pastor in just a few visits or even a few months, yet all the while you are without a pastor

you are lacking a God-ordained leader. If you are newly saved, your need for spiritual guidance is all the more critical.

It would seem wise to visit several churches a number of times each, while praying that God will lead you and then, after a reasonable length of time, make your choice. And bear in mind that there is no perfect pastor or local church in this life. Let your focus be on whether church and pastor adhere to scriptural teaching and practices and that they avoid harmful entanglements with the world out of which you have just been plucked. If there is no church like that within two or three hour's traveling time, you may have to wait indefinitely before making a choice. But in the meantime, you need to pray much, read your Bible often and wait in meditation before the Lord who can keep you while you are without a pastor or other type of counselor.

You Will Feel Alone at Times

We are different from all species below humankind in our need for relations with others of our species. Yet, despite there being a billion people in the world who are our brothers and sisters and believe in the same God in which we believe, we will experience a feeling of being alone at times.

There is only so much your concerned brother or sister can do to help you in your struggle against "spiritual wickedness in high places." (Eph. 6.12) They can pray the effectual, fervent prayer that you desperately need; they can counsel you and do whatever else is humanly possible, but there is an inherent loneliness in your being YOU. No other human can get into your mind with you nor can they squeeze into your private space and be an addition to your harried self that will provide a twofold barrier against the forces of evil. And you cannot make it without someone to stand with you and *in you*.

Of course no one can adequately fill that need except the Spirit of God Himself who has promised never to leave you alone. Only the Holy Spirit can inhabit your private space with you, and the significant factor in this is that when you suppress and kill the carnal YOU, the Holy Spirit will have greater space in your "space." He will then grow in you and more effectively manifest Himself through you to the world. Only He can truly

witness of Himself and only He can strengthen you within so that you can successfully wage the fight of your life.

You are aware of course that your private little battle against the sin in your carnal nature is a part of a larger struggle: the epic battle of Good vs. Evil. Take assurance in the knowledge that the battle has already been won – even though it is not yet ended. God cannot lose and Evil cannot triumph. This is decidedly a fixed fight.

But this does not validate the doctrine of Unconditional Eternal Security; it only assures you that you can never lose as long as you keep the faith you have in Jesus Christ. To illustrate this last clause, look at the Apostle Peter. Peter sinned grievously when he denied Christ, but Jesus never counted Peter as being lost because Peter still believed in His Master whom he denied in the Master's most trying hour.

No matter how badly you stumble or fall, you will never be lost if you keep your faith in Jesus Christ. I doubt that Peter was consciously trying to maintain his faith in Christ; he only knew that he had sinned terribly in denying the Lord and it tormented him greatly. When you have sinned in this or that manner, the enormity of the sin has no bearing on whether you can be forgiven. All sins are terrible to the righteous Creator of the universe who decreed, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." A "little white lie" will send you to hell as surely as murder, if you refuse to admit it is a sin. The Pharisees of Jesus' day were not lost because of their sins – we all have sinned – they were lost because they did not acknowledge their sins.

Faith is undeniably the victory. Victory does not lie in your being the "master of your fate" or the "captain of your soul" – it lies in the Holy Spirit (Jesus Christ) being both Master and Captain of your entire being. Quit trying to make it on your own; you can only know defeat by such a tactic.

All Believers Are Next to God Himself

We are a part of humankind and that makes us important to God. Further, we are individual members of the Church, which is the body of Christ who is "heir of all things, [and] by whom [Jesus] also he [the Father] made the worlds." (Heb. 1.2)

That we are members of the body of Christ, places us far above the angels of whom the writer of Hebrews says,

“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”
(Heb 1:14)

Therefore, “...lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees” (Heb. 12.120 RSV): We who are saved are the most precious of God's possession. We are right below Him, at His footstool, if you will, and He will never let us be lost if we keep the faith.

