

## Article of the Month

June, 2020

# ***Christians: The Singular Versus the Plural***

### WHAT?

This month's title should arouse some curiosity! Our point in this article is that a Christian must learn to think of his place before God from two perspectives. (1) We must focus on our OWN personal development and service to God. [Philippians 2:12, 13] (2) But we must also focus on the fact that no Christian stands alone. We are each a part of "the BODY of Christ" — a unit consisting of all the individuals who make up Jesus' Church. [I Corinthians 12:12-27] Christians are thus singular and plural.

We will fail if we think that we can function outside of the fellowship of fellow disciples — no matter how successful we may be in developing a Christ-like character. The fact is, a Christ-like character is a character *vitaly interested in others* and in working with others. There IS NO INDIVIDUAL Christian in the strictest sense — a Christian *doesn't stand alone*. While our responsibilities toward God ARE individual, our functioning and our affections must be corporate. We are "our brothers' keeper."

### PERSONAL CONCERNS

We, in the natural traits of our humanity, quite automatically think, "How am **I** doing? How is **MY** salvation progressing? What does the Lord want **ME** to do and be?" We think in the singular (self) or the personal. These questions are not illegitimate. But they are too narrow. When God called us, He called us to be members of "The Christ." He didn't call us just because He likes us and thinks we are special. He called us to BE A PART of something larger. Our individual welfare and salvation is dependent upon how our corporate attachment functions. If we do not fit into "the body," we simply do not fit at all!

It is very difficult for us to change our thinking in this direction. It is natural for us to put self first in our minds! But the change of thinking, the renewing of the mind, is an imperative part of our being considered successful in our Christian development. (Romans 12:2) We must get over the Babylonish traditions which suggest that there are the "saved" individuals and the "lost" individuals. Now in the Gospel Age, before Christ's Kingdom is established, God is saving a "body" of individuals — NOT rescuing

one-by-one the good and nice individuals and separating them from the bad and incorrigible individuals. THAT will be the work of the Millennial Kingdom. (Matthew 25:31-46; Acts 3:20-23) In other words, He is saving a GROUP — He is BUILDING a GROUP; He is CREATING A “NEW CREATION” which is a GROUP. He is not currently involved in the saving of worthy INDIVIDUALS (even though individuals make up the group). Face it, no one is worthy — NOT ONE individual! (Romans 3:10)

## GOD’S “FAMILY”

The Gospel or Christian Age (basically the time between the two advents of Jesus) is for the **pre-creation vision** which God had in His mind of making a personal and intimate “family” for Himself — a “New Creation” — beings who would share His very nature (the Divine Nature), and, so-to-speak, sit around His table with Him. Jesus was the very first to attain this stature. (Hebrews 1:2-4)

It is said of this “New Creation” that they are those which “He hath chosen [as a group, not as individuals]...**BEFORE** THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.” (Ephesians 1:4) This is even earlier than when God planned for the ransom given by Jesus! Jesus’ sacrifice was planned “**FROM** the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8), not “**BEFORE** the foundation of the world” when God conceived His idea for His Church. In other words, this sacred group was so vital and personal in God’s planning that it came before anything else He designed! Paul gives it its name in II Corinthians 5:17 and in Galatians 6:15.

“New Creatures” in Christ are called NEW creatures because their creation — even though **planned in advance** of EVERYTHING ELSE — is **made AFTER** the “old” creation. The “old” creation included the angels, the physical universe, the earth, and man. But the New Creation does not begin to be created until Jesus’ baptism in A.D. 29 when Jesus was begotten of the spirit to a new nature — the very nature of God, “**Life in himself.**” (John 5:26) Until then only God had that kind of nature — “immortality,” or life which depends on no external source, not air, water, food, time, nor permission to live. It is indestructible! It is THIS KIND of nature which God proposes to give to His “New Creation.”

The “New Creation” is “**built backwards!**” In the “old” creation, God created intelligent beings by giving them a body first, and then the development of a mind or character in that body. But with the “New Creation,” He develops a CHARACTER first, and then He gives it a body (an immortal body) fit for the new character. This is why Paul says that we are “transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:2) God is building “New-Creature” minds or characters before He gives them immortality BECAUSE He must TEST each member of the New Creation in advance. Once He gives immortality, it will be IMPOSSIBLE to exterminate that being from the universe! If it were to “go bad,” it could not be eliminated — something God *cannot permit*. God’s New Creatures must be such as are infallibly righteous FOREVER. For this reason, the New Creation is created IN THE BODIES of old creatures — human beings. The New Creature is initially

a “state of mind.” But God accepts this “state of mind” which He has begotten in us as being real and legal. It is, indeed, the beginning of something “new” which has never before been attempted — the making of someone totally new INSIDE of something old!

### “FIRST FAMILY” of the UNIVERSE

We have seen the primary purpose of the New Creation — a Divine, personal “family” for God. This intimate relationship of character and nature will be restricted to this “Divine Family” consisting of God, Jesus, and 144,000 individuals which God will have developed since the crucifixion. (Revelation 14:1)

But the New Creation will not be an idle “sit-around-the-table” group! As God is eternally creative, so will be all who are in His family. What all this family will be involved in during the “ages to come” is not specified. It need not be known at this time. (Ephesians 2:7; 3:21) But the “first assignment” for this special group will be to fulfill the promise God made to Abraham that in Abraham’s seed, all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Paul tells us that this Church, this New Creation, will be counted as being “the seed of Abraham.” (Galatians 4:28) Thus, as Revelation 20:4 explains, this “group” will reign with Christ for a thousand years to accomplish the “restitution of all things” which Adam and his race lost after the disobedience in Eden. (Acts 3:20, 21) This will be eminently appropriate. The New Creatures, having been human in their past, will be especially sympathetic to mankind’s frailties during the period of bringing people back to perfection. The New Creation will be, beyond doubt, a very sympathetic high priesthood. They will be the “saviors” on “Mount Zion.” (Obadiah 21; Revelation 14:1)

### BACK TO OUR ARTICLE TITLE

Once we have come to appreciate why this group (variously called “The Church,” the “144,000,” the “Bride” of Christ, etc.) has been in the making, we can see why it **MUST** be group-oriented. It is responsible not only (not even especially) for its own development as individuals, but it is responsible to THE VISION for which it has been created. It must be involved in helping its fellow members attain their success. The success of the Divine plan for mankind **DEPENDS UPON THE COMPLETION OF THIS BODY!** (Romans 8:19) This “body” **IS** the promised Messiah — the anointed deliverer of mankind. It is not one individual; it is a “body” of saviors. It must have as a priority how it will work together, as a UNIT, for being made ready to bless all the families of the earth. It must respect that its various members have been carefully selected and chosen by God, Himself, to be a part of this unified “body” of saints. If these saints are special

to God, should they not be special to each other? Should they not be so vitally interested in the success of each other that interest in each other's welfare will be predominant with them?

We may not have been cognizant of the "plural" nature of the "Lord's Prayer." It is no accident that Jesus uses plural pronouns throughout this prayer:

**"OUR Father who art in heaven...  
Give US this day our daily bread;  
And forgive US OUR debts as WE forgive OUR debtors;  
And lead US not into temptation, but deliver US from evil."**

Jesus has ever in mind that this prayer is for the corporate Christ. While its various requests affect us individually, the prayer is FOR the welfare of the "body."

Jesus wants US to think in the collective — in the plural. When he was asked by the Pharisees, "Master, which is the great commandment in the Law?" his answer was twofold: (1) "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." (Matthew 22:37-40) But then Jesus, without being asked, adds more to his answer: (2) "This is the first and great commandment. And the SECOND IS LIKE UNTO IT, THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF."

***THERE*** is the corporate or plural admonition. We DO NOT stand alone in salvation. Our love extends to our neighbor equal as to ourselves. Now, in the Gospel Age, we, as Christians, are vitally concerned with the development and completion of ***OUR BODY*** — the "Body of Christ." And without this consuming concern, we will never find success in our calling. Loving our neighbor (or, in this case, our fellow-members in Christ) is the absolute antithesis of having self-centered concerns. Thus, even our personal character development we do *so that others will benefit!* The singular becomes a part of the plural!

Jesus adds, "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets." In other words, they are the SUM TOTAL of God's plans and purposes. Both commandments hinge on the word "love." It does NOT mean self-love! That psychologists call "Narcissism," and they consider it a mental disorder.

"God is love (agape)" according to the Apostle John. Therefore, every bit of His plan centers around this personal characteristic of His. "Agape" is the Greek word which refers to *a love not hampered by emotion*. It is a principled love. It is love which has as its only objective **the eternal best for every creature**. Thus love (agape) cannot be singular; it is, by its very nature and definition, plural. It takes everyone else into consideration.

## SUMMARY

This month's article has been repetitive in its concepts. But that is of necessity. We have so long, and so naturally, been concerned with self, that we have made salvation a personally-centered objective. And we cannot eliminate our personal part in the matter. But, for the sake of success in our pursuing "the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14), we might not want to miss Paul's point. This IS NOT PRIMARILY ABOUT SALVATION FOR US ON A PERSONAL BASIS. This is about a "***high calling***" — a call to something SO LOFTY that it has been a "mystery" hidden from generations. (Colossians 1:25-27; 2:2, 3; 4:3, 4; Ephesians 3:2-7; 6:19.) And that "mystery" IS that Christ is a "body" of individuals — a body of individuals that will be God's personal Divine family and which will save the world from sin and death on a wholesale basis!

That "body" has both the need and the privilege of working with itself NOW in order to edify itself in love in order to ATTAIN the "mark" for which it was called. The concept is so transporting!

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