

Zahakiel: It's time to begin. Pastor, please offer an opening prayer.

Pastor Chick: Dear Father in Heaven, we are thankful for the week that we have lived in Your victorious LIFE. As we assemble here for this convocation, we ask for Your Spirit to refresh us with "Truth as it is in YAHSHUA" and we thank You in advance for that outpouring in YAHSHUA's holy and precious name, AMEN.

Adriel Dean777: Amen, Amen

Ruthline: Amen.

Zahakiel: Amen.

Naraiel: Amen.

Barb: Amen

Elyna2: Amen.

Peter: Amen

Daphna: Amen

Lucan: Amen

Zahakiel: Happy Sabbath to everyone. Tonight's study is called "Buried With Christ" and, somewhat unusually for me, it begins with a quote from Ellen White. Here is a passage we have often found to be very relevant when speaking with Seventh-day Adventists about the Victory message:

"Not one should be buried with Christ by baptism unless they are critically examined whether they have ceased to sin, whether they have fixed moral principles, whether they know what sin is, whether they have moral defilement which God abhors. Find out by close questioning if these persons are really ceasing to sin, if with David they can say, I hate sin with a perfect hatred." [Letter 26, 1887, quoted in Manuscript Releases Vol. 6, p. 165.3]

Typically, I will rely on the Scriptures for support of each point I present in these studies. In this case, however, not only is the above quote supported in total by the Scriptures, but each element is worth our consideration from a Biblical perspective.

We have, among us, candidates for baptism in the CSDA Church. Some have been acquainted with the message for years, while others are relatively new. I will address this distinction before the end of the study, but I think it is worth examining this quote from Mrs. White in such a way as to provide

instruction for these candidates, as well as encouragement for our covenanted members. Perhaps we will carry this topic forward into our Baptismal Study class in the morning, but for now, and for all, let us break this down into its constituent parts, see the Biblical basis for them, and understand what it all means for each individual's experience.

Looking at instructions given to the Church, indicating the need for a critical examination, here are the things that such a baptismal investigation seeks of its candidates:

- 1) That they have "ceased to sin."
- 2) That they have "fixed moral principles."
- 3) That they have no "moral defilement."
- 4) That they have the testimony, "I hate sin with a perfect hatred."

One at a time...

1) The first thing that a baptismal examination seeks to establish – the very first thing – is that they have ceased to sin. This is the central purpose of the examination, and Mrs. White repeats it for emphasis at the end of the statement, "Find out... if these persons are really ceasing to sin." Truly, there can be no excuse for any Seventh-day Adventist, who respects the inspiration of our latter-day prophets, to disbelieve or reject the Victory message. There can be no plainer language than this; therefore, the only reasonable-sounding explanation for an SDA not believing that Christ abiding within causes one to "cease" from sin is that they have never read these words, or that it has been explained away by a modern Sadducee.

This is where the testimony of the saints becomes vital. It reveals the truth, so that ignorance is swallowed up by knowledge, and it provides a living example, so that sophistry and deceitful explanations lose their power. Every Bible study given by a born-again believer should end with a living testimony. It should never be, "learn these Bible verses, and the answers to these questions, and that is it." It should be, "Because of the promises that these Bible verses reveal, and because of the answers to these questions, the life of Christ may be yours, as it is mine, and it will keep you from sin even as it keeps me from sin."

Those who cannot give this testimony ought to be the students, not the teachers; and this is precisely why it is the first thing listed as the purpose for the Baptismal examination. All who are buried with Christ in baptism are called to be evangelists and teachers of the Gospel... not to be experts in theology necessarily, but to be able to earnestly and faithfully say, "What has been done for me is being offered now to you." "Come and go with me to my Father's House," as the song says.

It is necessary, then, for both the soul being examined for baptism, and every individual with whom he or she will speak thereafter, that the individual knows and has accepted what Christ offers – a life completely free from the experience and guilt of sin. One remains a "sinner" only by virtue of his or her past, for which Christ has already paid the price, (Rom 3:25) and not because of any present violations of Yahweh's Law.

We have seen many verses that declare Victory over sin, therefore we need not spend a lot of time here. One passage that I might share, however, is this one, which Paul writes to his fellow Christians: "Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." (Rom 6:18)

Paul may have written some complicated things, which even his fellow-apostles at times struggled to understand. (2 Pet 3:16) This was not one of those things. To the baptized he wrote, not that they would someday be free from sin, not that they might eventually be free, or that they were free in some spiritual sense that did not affect their behaviour... he wrote that they, being already made "free from sin," became "servants" of righteousness. A servant of righteousness is one for whom righteousness is the master. What the righteousness directs, the servants obey. Righteousness being what it is, obedience can never be merely for obligation, or the fear of punishment, or the desire for a reward.

In the verse right above that one, Paul writes that "ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you." (Rom 6:17)

Righteousness is a doctrine of the heart, and because of that its mastery is complete. It is an accomplished reality, with the saint "being [already] made free from sin" as one called a Christian, so that they are all now "servants of [thus, obedient to] righteousness."

In baptismal examinations, the Church is not so much interested in "the correct answer" to the questions being asked, but rather the character of the one answering the questions. As John writes, we "try the spirits, whether they are of God," (1John 4:1) not the recall or cleverness or eloquence.

One who has ceased from sin will say so, clearly, unambiguously, unashamedly, just as one who has been cured from any deadly disease will rejoice in his newfound health.

2) The second thing for which the examination is purposed is to determine whether or not the candidate has "fixed moral principles."

What does this mean? Ethics, worldviews... these are internal, the way that people see themselves and their place. Morality is about behaviour. True "Religion" as the Bible defines it, which is the basis of a Christian's morality, is about how people treat each other... especially the poor and the defenseless.

When asked which was the greatest commandment, Yahshua said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind [...] And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." (Mat 22:37, 39)

James, greatly assisting an English-speaking audience that has been taught to consider love only an emotion, adds to this that such "love" is only revealed to be genuine when it manifests itself in practical, useful ways. "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, 'Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled,' notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?" (James 2:15, 16)

What good is it? While James was speaking specifically of faith in this passage, the love that is the root of that faith is revealed in just the same manner. One may think he has faith, and Agape love. He may believe himself a friend of God; and yet, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan, he may pass by the needy on the street, and never extend a hand of true brotherhood, because, "It's just a Samaritan. It's not somebody like me." Who is thy neighbour? Any "excuse" not to love one's fellow man as one's self reveals a lack of fixed moral principles, because they fluctuate, they change, based on circumstances, moods, or emotion.

In another sense, many who will be lost have deceived themselves into thinking that their piety is so complete that their works have done the Creator a service. "Have we not fed the poor? Have we not built a church? Have we not given up obvious vices? Have we not cast out demons? Have we not done all these things in Thy name?" And yet, even though they did the "things," they did not have "fixed moral principles" either. Their actions were the result of selfish, impure motives, which "loved" from a distance, but never as Yahweh loved them.

Thus, an examination of this aspect is intended to reveal two things.

a) That their morality is based on the character of Yahshua, and does not change with the times; they will act on their understanding of what is right, regardless of circumstances, and b) That such actions as they do perform are based on pure motives that reckon the "self" dead, and the good of others as foremost.

3) The third thing that a baptismal examination determines is that they have no "moral defilement."

"Now," one might ask, "isn't this the same thing as ceasing from sin?" We don't want to read too much into the "letter" of these quotations, but it is worth noting that something that is "defiled" started out pure. It is something that is spoiled, corrupted, or ruined. A moral defilement, then, I understand to be something that is wrong with the morality of the individual because of deception, the corruption of a pure principle, or a false teaching about holiness.

Clearly, because she wrote much about repentance and the forgiveness of God, Ellen White did not mean that a baptismal examination must certify that an individual has "ceased" from both known and unknown sins. Through a life of sanctification, unknown sins become known, and they are put away.

Like Isaiah, however, this portion of the quote indicates that one must "cease to do evil [and then] learn to do well." (Isa 1:16, 17) If a false teacher spreads lies about the nature of Yahweh, or His plan of salvation, it will disrupt the progress of those who are attempting to learn to do well. They will, because they respect this teacher, accept darkness for light, and error for

truth... and not everyone who seeks baptism into the Body of Christ will have necessarily understood and forsaken these errors from the past.

In bringing someone into the Faith of Yahshua, it is critical that they learn, not only the truth about being dead to self, and having a testimony of victory, but also, what the principles of Heaven actually are. A born-again Christian, who has never learned that drinking alcohol is wrong, would not consider it a "sin" from which he needs to cease. And yet, his moral decision-making will be "defiled," because it has been corrupted by a misconception.

No child, seeing a drunken individual, would naturally think, "This is what Christ would do," and yet, in some Churches it is taught that "all things in moderation" really means "all things," even that which is harmful, and may easily lead to excess. Indulgence in unhealthy foods, as another example, is not something often covered in Sunday- or Sabbath- morning sermons; yet habits form as a direct result of morality, and defiled morals will inevitably result in unwholesome habits.

An individual who has accepted such ideas as these may be sincere, but will be much slowed in his own sanctification, and will not be able to set a useful example for others. The Church would not condemn someone whose morals are defiled by misunderstanding and error (indeed, the Church does not condemn anyone at all) but could not baptize someone who clung to obviously erroneous beliefs and actions. There must be agreement among the Church's members what the "standards" are of the Christian life – guidelines of sanctification, if not actual tests of fellowship, and educate its baptismal candidates on what is pleasing to Yah.

The religion of Christ, it must be remembered, is not just a "spiritual teaching." It is a practical faith that affects every aspect of life, from diet, to dress, to work ethic, to attitude, to language – and it is here, in an examination of moral defilement, that critical errors in any of these areas will be revealed.

4) The final thing for which the Church is instructed to seek is that the baptismal candidate has a testimony that he or she hates sin "with a perfect hatred."

Mrs. White's statement cites King David as the source of this utterance,

but it sounds a little different in its original setting. We find it in the Book of Psalms, in which he writes, "Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O Elohim. Depart from me, therefore, ye bloody men. For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain. Do not I hate them, O Yah, that hate thee? And am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them mine enemies." (Psalm 139:19 – 22)

Ellen White's prophetic gift revealed to her, on a spiritual level if not a linguistic one, that the Old Testament does not make much of a distinction between "sin" and those that are identified with sin. She is therefore perfectly justified in applying this statement to sin directly.

As Bro. Luke reminded us last week, the word in Hebrew for "sin" and "sin offering" is the same. When Yah sees the "sin offering" being consumed, He counts it as the destruction of the sin itself in symbol. Similarly, while we know the saying to "love the sinner and hate the sin," from the perspective of divine justice, those who cling to their sin will be identified with it and destroyed with it.

Here, David is identifying those who blaspheme Yahweh with the sin of blasphemy itself. Writing in the Spirit, he who was known to weep over the death of his enemies (2Sam 1:11, 12) nevertheless hated the sin with which they were polluted.

Furthermore, as we have seen in studies of "perfection," the Bible has two different words for this concept. The first means completeness up to an expected level, and the second is a fully formed, mature perfection. The "perfect" here is of the second type. David's hatred of sin is complete, developed, and lacking nothing for intensity. What displeases Yahweh displeased him, and what Yah rejects, he also rejected.

We must also recall that, just like love, hatred is a choice, an acceptance of one thing over another. As it is written in one place, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:26)

Christ does not say that one is to have powerful, negative emotions towards one's own family before he may be considered a Christian. Rather, compared to Christ, all other obligations, even to one's own physical life, are an unequivocal second. In hating sin with a perfect hatred, it is not the emotion of hatred that is being described, although like love, powerful emotions will undoubtedly arise, but rather the consistent choice to reject, and turn away, from all that is "sin" with the same fervor that one turns toward that which is loved.

It is a description of the life of repentance that Christ Himself lived, consistently and resolutely turning from evil. In the decisions that one makes, the hatred of sin is revealed. It is not in declarations that, "I hate this..." or "I hate that..." but rather the choices of Christ's character, of whom it was prophetically written, "Butter and honey shall He eat, that He may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good." (Isa 7:15) Because He has fed, spiritually, on "good things," represented often in Biblical language as butter and honey, (Job 20:17, Num 14:8, etc.) He knows to choose the good. Those who have accepted Yah's call to be His children likewise feed on Spirit, and life, and come to the same conclusions.

I wish to speak briefly, as this study itself draws to a conclusion, about the matter of "timing." The Scriptures describe a class of people who are "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." (2Tim 3:7)

Inspired writings have told us that in these last days, there will be some who unite with the Church, and need to learn in days what others required months to learn. This is actually a powerfully encouraging statement; it lets us know that the saving truths of Yahshua are able to be learned in a short time. What others have discovered through long study, and prayer, and experience, others may receive, through their connection with these veteran saints, quickly. Those who have been in the Church since an earlier hour of the prophetic "day" will not feel this to be a dishonour on their own learning process. On the contrary, they will rejoice that their labours are able to bear such fruit, and that Yah has blessed them with the ability to communicate, in such a potent and effective way, the life-giving words of salvation.

But there is also a warning here for those who have been connected with the truth for a long time, and have not surrendered entirely to its light. The

longer that one stands in the light, and does not yield to its transforming power, the more “desensitized” he or she becomes to its illuminating rays. This is made even more dire when one considers the reality of the spiritual conflict in which we are embroiled. When one draws near to the Creator and His Church, Satan takes notice. Entering into the “due process of Law” makes an announcement to the universe that one’s name has come up for judgment, and it is then – as never before – that the devils embark upon their destructive ministry with regard to that person.

Inspiration has written to those who have discovered that they are in sin, instructing them to “flee” to Christ. Salvation is perfect, and Christ loses none whom the Father has given to Him. Why, then, is it necessary to “flee?” It is because Satan takes note of those who are drawing near to Christ, and will exploit every opportunity to disrupt, distract, and destroy, such souls. In fact, were it not for the holy angels, anyone who heard the Gospel message with the slightest bit of interest would be immediately slain.

The longer one hears the voice of the Spirit calling to full surrender, and yet drifts in place, or moves “gradually” closer, the more opportunity the Enemy of souls is afforded to prevent such a surrender from ever taking place. That is dangerous ground on which to stand. Hearing the Gospel is a call to understand the immediacy of the situation, to understand the “sinfulness of sin” that has stained them, and to “flee” to Christ, knowing what salvation is, and what the converted soul will manifest, as revealed by this description of the nature of a baptismal examination.

To those who have heard the words of life, and become familiar with the CSDA message, it is for you to choose, immediately, to “flee to Christ,” and surrender fully to His loving invitation. Note that I do not say, “Surrender fully to the Church.” It is not the Church that receives such decisions. The Church is the confirmation, the blessing, the reward in a sense, for entering Christ. Being a Church member is the result of choosing to let Christ in, when He stands at the door and knocks. (Rev 3:20) To those, then, who have heard this message, and have become convinced that it is the truth of Heaven, my advice is to enter quickly into the secret places of the Heavenly Temple with the Father and Son, and not to leave until you have come to agreement.

Adriel Dean777: Amen

Zahakiel: The longer you have known this truth, the more urgent it is that you heed this advice,

Elyna2: Amen

Zahakiel: for the soul has become “familiar” with its power, and Satan has had much time to consider your case, learning what works best to keep you from saying, “I surrender all. I surrender forever.”

It is written not to let the sun go down on one’s wrath. (Eph 4:26) How much more, then, should the sun not go down on one’s indecision concerning salvation?

And for those of us who are members of the Body of Christ, each of us have a ministry to pursue, including toward those baptismal candidates with whom we speak. In one of our recent Baptismal classes on Sabbath morning, Pastor said that he was being a “good pastor” by revealing the truth about the choices before our candidates, about matters of everlasting life, and everlasting death. It is our responsibility, loving and solemn, to speak about these matters of life and death.

Let us all, then, knowing these things, and being reminded of what Christ seeks from those with whom He seeks to become “One,” be both hearers and doers of the Word, showing ourselves to be good brothers, and good sisters. Let us love the souls of our fellows, and speak of these matters, encouraging, exhorting, and teaching, so that those who are with us will obey from the heart those things that they have learned in the School of Yahshua, and be buried with Christ in baptism, to arise justified, to live the sanctifying life, and to be just a day away from glorification.

Are there any questions or comments about the study tonight?

Adriel Dean777: Amen

Peter: Amen.

Zahakiel: If there are not, then I'll ask Bro. Luke to offer a closing prayer.

Marie: Amen

Elyna2: Amen

Lucan: Dear heavenly Father. We thank you for crucifying our old selves, through which we have ceased to sin. We thank you for cleansing us of moral defilement and instilling your perfect hatred of sin. We thank you for replacing it with a love for, and service to, righteousness that can never be diminished. May your Spirit be with us as we testify truly to the life you have given us freely. In Yahshua's name we pray, amen.

Zahakiel: Amen.

Barb: Amen

Elyna2: Amen.

Gloria Bailey: Amen.

Peter: Amen

Naraiel: Amen

Adriel Dean777: Amen, Amen

Pastor Chick: Amen.

Ruthline: Amen.