

Immunity From Sin

Happy Sabbath to everyone. Last week was the final one of my Fall semester of teaching, and for the next couple of weeks I will have more time away from work. As a result, I thought it would be a good idea to intersperse some “newer” studies with the review of *Evangelism*, as we have been doing for the last few meetings.

I do believe that this book has much from which we can learn, and I think that the contents we go over can lead to some good discussions, and also fuel new ideas for outreach. At the same time we must examine timely issues as they arise as well, and “hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” (Rev 2:11) This study, which I am calling “Immunity From Sin” is based upon a statement that Bro. Luke made either last week or the week before. The basic idea behind his statement was that we cannot afford to consider ourselves “immune” to the effects of what has befallen the mainstream Seventh-day Adventist Church.

That movement, Seventh-day Adventism, began as a great light to the world. We will not spend too much time now reviewing the history of Adventism, but it will be useful to briefly examine the “setting” from which the warning comes.

Adventism came at the perfect time, with Yah’s perfect timing, of course, both for the world, and for a number of faithful individuals. It came at the perfect time for the world, because Christianity had, to a large degree, become complacent in its doctrines and practices. There was little to no teaching about judgment. There was no sense of urgency to prepare for the soon-return of the Messiah. Some Churches were teaching (as some continue to teach) that some souls are destined for salvation and others for destruction. This had the natural effect of lessening the impact of an evangelist’s work, since the choice for salvation or damnation lay entirely with Yah, and not with the freedom of choice He had given to mankind through grace, or the responsibility for being our brothers’ keepers that had been given to those who knew the Gospel. The world needed the Three Angel’s Message to be introduced at just such a time.

In another sense, the Advent message restored hope to those who were caught up in the wake of the Great Disappointment. These sincere souls were longing to see the creation restored to its sin-free glory, and had sacrificed much in the expectation of the soon fulfillment of Yah’s promises. Of these many, in a genuine show of faith, continued to hold fast to their principles, despite the fact that their expectation had not come to pass as they intended. Amidst the mockery and coldness of others, they searched the Word again and yet again to discover wherein they had erred. These souls were comforted and strengthened by the messengers of Yah, as the sanctuary doctrine, and the understanding of the true nature of the judgment, came to light.

This brief review serves only to show how much has changed in the years since that time. Today the once faithful maiden has become a queen, sitting on a worldly throne and seeking to impose her will upon others, despite their own convictions and sincerely-held beliefs, which are no less valid than those of their own founders.

We know how such a thing has come to pass. It has happened to them just as to the Roman Catholics before them. Gradually, corruption, apostasy and error crept in, being at first mixed with truth, and then replacing truth altogether. The high and holy character of the message, teaching people to prepare

themselves for the judgment – the standard of which was the very and perfect character of Christ, was tarnished. Even though the victory over sin was not always taught with the same force it is under the fourth angel's work, there was still a sense of enduring righteousness for the believer in the earlier days, and not this idea of "daily sinning" and "often falling into sin." Of course, inspiration clearly stated that baptism was for those who had "ceased from sin," and who hated the idea of offending the Almighty with a perfect hatred.

No such thing is done today in that movement. We, few, who remain faithful to the guidance of the Spirit accomplish the will of our Father in this matter. But shall we, who are faithful to such teachings, be subject to the same fate as those who have gone before?

There are many who will say that we cannot avoid it. I can tell you of some of my experiences teaching this message.

When I was in Florida, invited to speak at a meeting of an independent group of former Adventists, one of its members, who seemed at first to agree with my presentation of Righteousness by Faith, came up to me and told me that I should not be so extreme in my position of freedom from sin. He said, "I do not want you to be discouraged when you do, eventually, sin." He likely saw me as rather ungrateful when I called his statement, which he no doubt thought was offered with good intentions, to his thinking, a "curse," and rebuked him for his own lack of faith. The fact of the matter was that this was the very idea I had been seeking to counter with my strong statements, and yet he could not see past his own experiences. He explained that he had once felt as I do, but that it had not lasted. I told him that I was sorry to hear that, but that the Scripture tells us what is "truth," and not what we, in our limited senses and experiences, can perceive. He did not really have an argument to that, but it was clear that he was not able to move past his mindset.

Here is just such another case: I was speaking to an Adventist in South Carolina, who had actually broken away from the mainstream Church for a time, but then returned. He told me that he had once taught the victory over sin much as we do, and even raised up a little movement of like-minded believers, but that this movement fell apart. He believed, he told me, that corruption and apostasy are inevitable, unavoidable, once a movement has existed for a certain amount of time, or reached a certain number of members.

I could give several other examples as well, but they are equally unpleasant, and you should have the idea.

In all these things, Satan would have us be – in a sense – evolutionists. You may recall that one of the principles of evolution, biologically, is that things happen now the way they have always happened in the past. The long, slow processes that first created life are the same long, slow processes that continue to modify it as we march down endless ages. Satan would point out the failures of movements that have come before us and say, "You cannot avoid their fate."

Now, this might almost seem similar to the TRUE statement that inspired this study: We cannot afford to consider ourselves "immune" to the failures of our forefathers in the faith. But there is an important, and key, difference between these two ideas, and this idea is the difference between the Faith of Yahshua, and the artificial Christian faith taught by many Churches today.

Christianity is, to a large degree, a living parable. It is filled with symbols, and truths, and spiritual truths. You may recall a few weeks ago we had a good study and discussion about “what is truth.” Some statements the Messiah made were true in the spiritual sense but not the physical one (such as eating His flesh and drinking His blood) while others were plain and direct (such as “Go and sin no more”).

I recall one of pastor’s teachings from very early on in my involvement with the Church. His teaching (I do not recall if it was a sermon or a more casual statement, but it has stuck with me all these years) was that we must, simultaneously, consider ourselves to be worth nothing – lower than dirt – and at the same time worth the price of the life of the very Son of Yah. We must believe both these things about ourselves at the same time, even though they seem contradictory, or we will not endure in the faith.

Why is this true? Well, if we believe we are worth nothing, and that is the extent of it, then we will take on the world’s version of “humility.” We may speak words of faith, and say, “I can do all things through Christ, of course,” but when it comes time to actually DO something, we may not, because we do not think ourselves worthy to speak, or to act, on behalf of our Father. At the root of this is fear, much as that which caused Moses to anger Yah when he was called to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. (Exo 4:14)

On the other hand, if we believe that we are worth the life of the Son of Yah, and do not retain our understanding that this is merely because HE considers us so, and not because of any value within ourselves for its own sake, we will take on the world’s version of “pride.” We ought to be proud, and we ought even to “glory,” to be eager to speak of our joy, as it is written, “But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am Yahweh which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith Yahweh.” (Jer 9:29)

I say, “Amen!” to that verse, and for more reasons than one. First, I say “Amen” because of what it says directly. We are to glory in our knowledge of Yah, and in that context the word means “to give praise,” “to be boastful,” and “to shine.” Interestingly, and somewhat amusingly it can also mean, “To act like a madman.” So, if anyone tells you that you are “crazy” for the sake of the Gospel, you can say, “I am only glorying in the lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness of my Father in Heaven.”

And second, I say “Amen” because of what that verse means indirectly. Yah says we are to glory in these things that we understand of Him. He says His follower is to be full of praise because “he understandeth and knoweth me.” That statement alone is worth a great deal of joyful study. Yah says that those who are of His covenant, with pure hearts and willing spirits, understand and know Him. It is a mystery HOW we can know Him, but He declares it, and by faith we accept it as true. The Scriptures tell us, much later on, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Yahshua the Messiah, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3)

Not only is it possible to know our Father, despite what many people think, but we DO know Him, and we DO even “understand” Him, if we are one with His Spirit, if we are true to what we have learned of righteousness. As Jody has said, this is through the Son, who knows the Father, and reveals Him to us. There is joy, great joy, to be had in the Family of Yah.

So, we must believe, at the same time, that we are worth nothing, and also worth all, to our Father in Heaven. In holding this contradiction to be true, we become “madmen” of a sort, but live both in the flesh and to the spirit. This is a narrow road, as you might imagine. It is easy (or so Satan would have us

believe) to be turned from this truth to some nearby error. Even the wording of it may be imperfect in human language, and may be something that only the Spirit can teach each one in a way that no words can utter, for it is also written, “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.” (James 1:8) And yet I say, “Be of two understandings with regard to your position as a child of Yah.” You see, that word “double minded” in James’ epistle means to be divided in ones’ attention and intentions. It means to be distracted and even doubtful, so that one is not sure of his true place.

Holding a paradox to be true is not the same thing. We understand that truth exists in ways that seem to contrast, but at the same time the principle is one, not divided. The understanding is uniform, and does not distract us from the character and love of Yah. Because we are nothing, Yah has pitied us, and sent us His Son. Because we are worth the life of Yahshua, our Savior was willing to sacrifice Himself, and the Father was willing to surrender Him, for our sakes. Both sides of the contradiction point to the same thing, Yah’s love, and keep us from distraction, rather than making us wavering and uncertain.

So, what has this to do with the mistakes of the past? It is a very simple idea. In fact, even though I said that words may not be adequate enough to express it, but the Spirit Itself must teach you, if we are willing to hear the Spirit, then it is simple enough even for children to grasp.

Inspiration told us that Yahshua endured every temptation of Satan for this reason: He did not countenance, or consider, the possibility that He would fail. He said, “I shall not fail, nor be discouraged.” He said, “I do always the will of my Father.” Paul, His servant, said, “I have run the race, I have finished my course.” They were Creation Seventh Day Adventists of the truest sort, for they spoke and acted as though their faith was invincible, as though it were impossible for them to be overcome. And Yah responded to their faith with infinite power, to make it just so. And yet, this did not make them ignorant of Satan’s efforts to destroy them. This did not make them arrogant, or presumptuous.

Paul spoke in faith, saying, “I have finished my course,” but He also said, “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” (1Cor 9:27) There is a balanced approach within the paradox, so he said, as we say, “I claim victory in faith, but there is a work to do in maintaining that victory.”

Similarly, Yahshua said to Satan, when being tempted to throw Himself off the top of the temple for the angels to catch, “It is written again, ‘Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.’” (Mat 4:7)

Should we say, “Yah has promised, so there is nothing for us to do,” we would be tempting Yah with our presumption. The 144,000 succeed in all things spiritual NOT because they do nothing, but because they follow the Lamb. Yah has promised that they succeed, not because He has foreseen them sitting back and waiting for some forceful push to righteousness, but because He has foreseen the generation that WILL work His will in the earth. They succeed, and the promises are true, because they have chosen to walk that narrow path that Yahshua has laid out through the darkness.

Like Yahshua, and like Paul, we must be wise, and we must understand the fall of those who came before us. These are not things to fear, and they are not things to dwell upon. They are not things to rehearse often to others, lest those new to the faith (or outside of it) become discouraged by Satan’s lies. But they are things that we must be aware of, and ever thankful that – because we have accepted the promises, and

the promises that we will DO the things Yah requires – He has saved us from the sins of the past. That is our faith, and that is how we speak.

We are not “immune” to the failings of those who have gone before, and yet we WILL not repeat them. It is just exactly like victory over sin. While it is theoretically possible to fall into sin, for Yah has not removed our freedom, it is impossible in practice, for the spirit of Yah is within us to do His righteousness in the earth. But this promise is only fulfilled, is only true, to the 144,000. It is our choice, individually, whether or not we will walk worthy of that company. It is our choice, in the small decisions we make and the large ones, whether or not we will be those who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

This choice comes to every individual in the world, in different ways, and most clearly to those who have heard this message, this great freedom of victory over sin. We must not be slow to speak our faith, or to look for opportunities to share it with others, because this is what Yah’s people have been foreseen as doing. The prophecy is sure, and the victory is guaranteed... but who will share it? Who will come to stand under the banner of Yahshua? That is where the choice lies, for the individuals AND for the Church.

So then, let us each say, with our words and with our dedication, and with our actions, “I will stand under the banner of Yahshua.” Let us speak nothing, and never anything, unworthy of such a commitment; and, while being mindful of the sins of the past, and being watchful lest some snare be placed in our path (for faith is not the same as blindness) let us speak with that invincible, creationist faith. Things are made new for the creationist, while they follow the same, old, unchanging patterns for the evolutionist... and I have given you some examples of this. Yah has called forth a people to show the world a new thing, a new creation, and let us praise Him that WE are they who will – just as we accept His promises as being true for ourselves – fulfill all that He has seen and planned for His people.