

Acting the Part

Happy Sabbath to everyone.

This week's study is called "Acting the Part," and it is about the faith and works of the Christian life.

In a sense, it is a continuation and expansion of a study we did a few weeks ago about taking the "step of faith," moving forward on an inspired project, or making a spiritually sound decision, even if there is not a "feeling" of assurance. The promises of our Father are assurance enough, and even if our senses do not confirm our path we may always rest in confidence if we are sure we are following the right principles.

One of the key passages used to demonstrate the Biblical foundation of this concept was this one: "And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest), that the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off; and the people passed over right against Jericho.

"And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan." (Josh 3:14-17)

This is evidence of a "maturing" faith that Yahweh required of His nation during their journey from Egypt to Canaan. In the first such incident, the crossing of the Red Sea, Moses parted the waters before the people began to cross. Near the end of their journey, the priests bearing the ark were instructed to step into the water before any visible change was seen. After they had made this step, then the obstacle was removed, and the journey could proceed.

This is one of the reasons why as Seventh-day Adventists, we are instructed to always speak with confidence, to speak as if our faith were invincible. It is evidence of our trust in the Father's promises toward us. Now, we have used that phrase several times, "Talk and act as if your faith were invincible." But what does that really mean? It seems to me that we need some further education on this matter, because we have heard at times, even among ourselves, testimonies that do not come up to the golden standard of what this means.

What is an invincible faith? It is a faith that knows no defeat. It is a faith that cannot be discouraged, that never fails, and that trusts in the Father despite what may seem as mounting evidence to the contrary. In fact, an invincible faith is an expression of agape love. If you have not caught it, the characteristics of an invincible faith – which I am listing here – are the same as those found in 1 Corinthians 13, in which perfect divine love is described. We could, actually, modify the passage and insert "the faith of Yahshua," and it would be perfectly accurate, thus:

"[The faith of Yahshua] suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; [the faith of Yahshua] vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. [The faith of Yahshua] never faileth.." and so on. (1Cor 13:4-8)

If our speech is not according to this passage, if our testimony of our lives and victories does not match the pattern laid out by agape, and followed by perfect faith, then it is not a Christian testimony.

Of course, there are temptations. Satan, the world, the flesh, and false doctrines will conspire to say, “You cannot give a perfect testimony, because your thoughts and feelings are far from perfect. You cannot say, ‘I do always those things that please my Father,’ because human beings cannot avoid displeasing Him all the time.”

But these are the doctrines of Satan, and most of the nominal Churches. They are the beliefs of the carnal, natural man, and it is a virtue of the modern world to admit to your “many flaws,” and to try to rise above the horrible person you are to become “normal.”

These things are not worthy of the Christian consciousness. They are not the principles in which we ought to be training our consciences for Heavenly society. We must speak with an invincible testimony, always, without any exceptions; and... this is important... we must also ACT as perfect Christians, despite what these negative factors are intending to press upon us... trying to force us to bow our knees to the beast (which is what accepting this mindset would really accomplish).

Now, you might say... “How are we to do this, to act as perfect Christians?”

According to Yahshua... we are just to do it.

This is not a light answer, to dismiss the question. This is Biblical doctrine. Consider the following Scriptural witnesses:

“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” (Rev 2:4, 5)

To the earliest age of Christianity following the crucifixion, the testimony of Heaven was to beware slipping from their first love – from the initial fervor and zeal that they had experienced under the former rain, where opportunities were opening before the brethren, and hearts were being won.

And yet, since there had been some of this falling-away into complacency, the solution was very simple, far too simple for the worldly mind to take seriously – repent, and do the first works. That is, confess and forsake the growing inactivity, and then go out there and DO the things that have been placed before you from the beginning.

The work of the Church has never changed. Times have, and methods – certainly communication methods – but the work of the Church has been an absolute constant, and will remain so until the worship of earth is joined with the worship of Heaven. And so, the testimony declares, if ever you should think you are uncertain of what to do next, if ever darkness seems to gather around you, if ever doubts and temptations seek to lead you away from your commission...

What does it say to do?

It does not say to sit and wait for inspiration. It does not say to think really hard about what might have happened to cause the problem in the first place. It does not say to lead a series of “revivals” in order to

stir up feeling in the congregation, or to change the tone of your sermons, or to look around and see what the other “successful” churches are doing. No... it says to turn away, to turn back, and do those good old first works. Just do them. The inspiration will come. The cause of the initial slide into complacency will be revealed. The revival will occur... but only after this step is taken – to step into the Jordan. To act the part.

But I said there were witnesses. Here is another:

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.” (Mat 5:16)

The testimony of Yahshua, which His Church is also to bear, is, “I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.” (1John 9:4) It is not, “I must believe the doctrines of Him that sent me.” That is good, and necessary, but it is not the instruction of Heaven with regard to the testimony we bring to the world. The world does not care what, and cannot be saved by, the doctrines you believe – except as those doctrines affect your visible testimony and actions. And as it is written, “If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” (John 7:17) IF we do His will, then we shall know of the doctrine. We may have heard the doctrine before. We may have learned the doctrine, but we will not “know” the doctrine of Yahweh unless we do His will.

Do the first works. Do the will of Yahweh, and as your testimony is, so shall your faith also be.

Now someone may say, “But wait a minute. Are you talking about justification by works? We know the Bible tells us that justification is by faith alone. And what is this about ‘just do the works?’ Didn’t Christ say to clean the inside first, and then the outside would be clean?”

Certainly, if one wished to remain in the valley of indecision, of inactivity, he could seek to “counter” the words of the Biblical witness with verses such as the following: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.”

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.” (Mat 23:25-28)

Well, we had best avoid the doctrine of blind Pharisees at all costs. But truly, the things I have shared with you tonight are Scriptural – in fact, they are foundational to the true Christian faith – and the Scriptures do not testify against themselves.

There is a difference between what the Pharisees were doing, and what the Christian is instructed to do. The Pharisees were, to a large extent, seeking to build up and maintain an earthly kingdom. They were not interested in sanctifying themselves, either outwardly OR inwardly, but only of continuing to give a proper “show” to those who respected them. They were not above “extortion and excess” in order to fulfill their desires and objectives, and in this their character was clearly revealed. Their outward actions

were NOT the “first works” that are described in Revelation, because those works are sincere, and for the purpose of uplifting mankind from sin and selfishness.

The instructions of Christ are for those who are seeking righteousness for its own sake, not to gain any earthly advantage, or to obtain the praise of men. Those who truly do the first works, regardless of whether or not their feelings confirm it, are those who cry out to the Father and Son for their Holy Spirit, who ask to be filled, and who then begin to go forward, believing that they have received those things for which they have prayed.

The Pharisees did not say, “Lord, purify me, and perfect my character,” before going out into the world. No, according to the parable, they said, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.” (Luke 18:11)

The Pharisees trusted in their own righteousness, and felt no need for the righteousness of Yahweh. They did their works in pride and self-sufficiency, not in an attempt to truly fulfill the will of the Creator. And since they did not do it with the proper motive, they did not “know of the doctrine.” I may speak more of what this specific “doctrine” is in a future meeting, but for now it should be apparent that when Yahshua instructs us to do the first works, to speak an invincible testimony, to act the Christian, and all this despite our heart’s emotionally susceptible promptings, He is not instructing us to be hypocrites, but instead to be trustful.

As I began by saying, the promises of our Father in Heaven are assurance enough. We do not rely upon ourselves, on our works, or even on our feelings about our works, to be accepted. So this is not justification by works we are discussing here. We pray for acceptance, and it is the promise of Yah that He will accept those who come to Him. This is the basis for our faith and testimony, not the works that we do thereafter.

We ask, “Father, make me clean, and acceptable in your sight.” When we have done this, with true belief that He will honor our request, then we will have made the inside of the cup clean. But we do not sit around contemplating the cleanliness of our cups. With the assurance that we have, indeed, been made clean – that we have, indeed, been justified –we go forward (feelings or not) with the “first works.” Then we decide to speak according to our belief that our faith is invincible, and then we will say the right thing, and then we will DO always the right thing, that which pleases our Father. This is righteousness by faith. This is victory over sin.

The Pharisees and Sadducees wanted nothing of this dependency upon Yah’s continuing justification of their persons. They said, “God gave us instructions. We follow them as best we can, and so we are righteous.”

The Christian says, “I have prayed to God for acceptance, and I believe He will receive all who come to Him. Therefore, He has called me righteous, and I will joyfully follow the instructions He has given.”

The solution to uncertainty, to doubt, to temptation, is to turn away, and to do the works of Christianity – to act the part. We cannot be afraid of the word “works” just because it is at the heart of so many false doctrines, and misunderstandings of the balance between faith and actions. Let us do as our Savior did – let us work. Let us act as He acted, and see that we shrink back from nothing of His example, for it was

written, “that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.” (Mat 5:20)

It is not so much their works that were wrong, it was their motives, and their beliefs that their own righteousness would save them. But we are not of such. It is Christ, and His righteousness, that has saved us, that “hath translated us into the Kingdom of His Dear Son.” Let us rejoice in that knowledge. Let us rejoice in that assurance. And thus assured, let us DO the will of the Father, so that we may “know” this doctrine – this glory, unto everlasting life.