

An Idol of Yahweh

Happy Sabbath to all.

This week's study, entitled "An Idol of Yahweh," is a follow-up of sorts to a statement that I made last week, where we were discussing finding our true motivation by looking at ourselves honestly, and also at the things that motivated the Savior.

One of the things I said during the preliminary parts of the study was this:

"We saw that, for those in the world, much of their motivation comes from fear of punishment. Even religion is treated this way, with "everlasting hell" being held before them as the price of failure to attain holiness in this life. Some are motivated by fear of rebuke or correction, either by Yah Himself, or by His various representatives. If you think about it, this is really a kind of idolatry, and thus a violation of the second commandment."

In a very real, and very dangerous, sense, it is possible to worship an image of Yahweh, without worshipping Yahweh Himself. This is an error that would be impossible to detect in a "worldly" religion, but for those of us who are truly following in the principles of our Father, with the goal of perfecting Yahshua's character, the symptoms are not difficult to detect.

As we all know, the second commandment reads, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in Heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them, for I, Yahweh thy Almighty, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments." (Exo 20:4-6)

It has been pointed out in several commentaries on the Old Testament that one of the defining and unique characteristics of the religion of Israel was that it had no "thing" that represented God in any kind of an earthly form, and in fact forbade any attempts to create such a thing. This is a very important principle for us to understand as well, because what this did, even thousands of years ago, was separate true Judaism (and true Christianity thereafter) from those religions that were based upon the natural senses.

While it is true that some Eastern religions also worship no physical "thing," if they worship anything at all it is some disembodied force or energy, and not a person at all.

The ancient pagan religions had statues of their gods, or objects that represented their gods. The Temple of Yahweh had no such representation. The closest it had, in fact, was the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the Ten Commandments. This is significant for us, particularly for Seventh-day Adventists, who hold that the Decalogue is a written transcript of Yahweh's character, unchanging and eternal as He is. It is fitting, therefore, that the 10 Commandments are placed in the Ark, which serves as the "throne" for the presence of Yah.

We read this set of verses from the Book of Kings: "Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto king Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of Yahweh out of the city of David, which is Zion. And

the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of Yahweh unto his place, into the oracle of the house, to the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubim.

“There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when Yahweh made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt. And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of Yahweh, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of Yahweh had filled the house of Yahweh.” (1 Kings 8:1, 6, 9-11)

At times of great spiritual significance, Yah would manifest Himself, His own glorious presence, as a cloud of glory. While it is not described in any great detail, it is certain that it is nothing that human hands could approximate. In fact, it would be inappropriate for our Father to give His people anything that represented Him, for the very fact that human beings tend to reduce things to their simplest form in an effort to understand them.

This is the very reason why the pagans split the forces of nature into distinct categories, so that they would have a god for the sun, the moon, the rain, the crops, for health, and so on... an endless pantheon of deities that could be petitioned and even (to an extent) controlled by means of sacrifices and rituals. Should human beings believe that there was some physical representation of Yahweh that we could create and utilize in rituals, we would forever injure our ability to truly grasp those aspects of His nature that He DOES reveal to us.

If you have read the classic mythologies of nations like Greece and Rome, there are legends of human beings who are able to make deals with, and at times outsmart, the gods by exploiting the limitations natural to their characters.

As Paul said to some he met during his ministry, “Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.” (Acts 17:22) That word superstitious doesn’t mean exactly the same thing now as it did when this verse was translated; what Paul was saying there is that the men of Athens were too “fearful of the spirits,” where “spirits” could mean anything from a demon to a god. The men of Athens were too full of various gods, having altars to all the gods they knew, and even an extra one “just in case.” Paul utilized this altar to the “unknown god” to introduce to them the concept of Yahweh, but unfortunately, he did not win many converts to Christianity.

Now, what we are looking at today is this very question, “Why did Paul fail to win many converts in Athens?” It was clearly a very spiritual place, as even the modern world uses “spiritual,” but the problem is that the flawed religion of the people had crippled their sense of wonder when it came to the truly spiritual, the truly divine, nature. This is of relevance to us, today, as we examine ourselves, and as we seek to teach others.

Specifically, if we are uncertain of our place within this movement (member or not), or – as the quote from last week indicated – motivated by fear of failure or rebuke, avoiding responsibilities or sanctified communication, then we may be suffering from this Athenian affliction. This would mean that there is a fault in our religion, in our connection to the Father and Son. We would be in violation of the second commandment. Now, there is no condemnation for those in Christ Yahshua. Discovering an error is not

a condemnation, it is an opportunity to be cleansed, and cured from the affliction that has beset us. But this involves acknowledging the fault, confessing it, and putting it forever away.

As we have seen, Yah's temple contained nothing that represented Him – nothing on earth, or in Heaven, or in the ocean could properly represent Him, for we would focus on what our “senses” tell us of these creations, and Paul specifically warns about this: “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse, because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

“Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves, who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever.” (Rom 1:20-25)

Now, there are two things going on here. First, Paul says that the “invisible things... are clearly seen.” This sounds contradictory, like foolishness, and yet the apostle is not using the term “seen” in its strictly sensory meaning. When someone explains something to us so that we can understand it, we commonly reply with, “I see.” Sight, in English and perhaps most human languages, gives us a connotation of understanding mentally, and not just registering visually. Biblically, sight is a symbol for understanding, just as it is in the language, and in Paul's Greek, the word he uses for “seen” specifically means “to perceive clearly, to understand.”

This leads to the second thing. The things that our senses cannot see of Yahweh, they are “clearly understood” by those who wish to understand them; but those who have turned away from Yah, they continue to have a need to worship. This is one of those things built into human beings – a need to worship. Even those who claim to worship no gods will revere wisdom, or science, or themselves, and set it/them up as a “higher power” that holds all the answers, even if we do yet know what questions to ask.

Even those who have turned away from Yahweh will worship something, even if that something is an animal, or a statue, or an idea. Yahweh says this of the idolatry that results from turning away from His true worship, “As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets, saying to a [block of wood], ‘Thou art my father,’ and to a stone, ‘Thou hast brought me forth,’ for they have turned their back unto me, and not their face, but in the time of their trouble they will say, ‘Arise, and save us.’” (Jer 2:26, 27)

Those who claim to be faithful to the words of Scripture would say, “Of course, we are not guilty of these things, worshipping a stone, or a statue, or anything other than God Himself,” but the fact of the matter is, people make mental “images” of Yah all the time. Overtly, this is easy enough to understand. What they call “God” will differ greatly from the portrayal that He has given Himself through His Word, and through the example of Christ and His Spirit.

The God of some “Christian” religions is arbitrary, inconstant, and either tolerant of sin or (in the ditch on the other side of the narrow way) quick to condemn. The God of some Christian religions inspires, or at

least approves, measures that He has explicitly forbidden in the past, such as the use of force or civil authority in the resolution of spiritual matters, or the reliance upon “numbers” as a measure of the Gospel’s influence and success.

But even for those who understand this spiritual application of the second commandment, and commit to avoiding these pitfalls, Satan has created another layer of images that can be placed as stumbling blocks before the people of Yah.

As Giselle pointed out during one of our studies together, “fear” is something that takes place in the imagination. If given power, it becomes an “image,” for our imagination is the place in our minds where we make images. And if we, by acting from fear, should worship that image, we are as surely violating the second commandment as if we were bowing to a statue of a bird or an ox.

In addition to the various other kinds of idols that Paul mentions in Romans, He also says that some “changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man.” Now what does this mean for us? If we make our Father into an image of corruptible man, trying to please men, we are just as surely violating the second commandment. If we do not say, as the apostles did, “We must obey God rather than men,” then we are putting those men, whoever they are – whether they are judges, or pastors, or anyone else – in the place where only Yah should be, and we let fear and not love be our guiding principle.

As we saw in a recent email, whenever a “hard question” arises for a Church, a controversy, the people tend to go to their spiritual leaders. And they, those ones who are not after Yah’s own heart, will do their best to lull them back to sleep. But if these individuals were true Protestants, they would not let the voice of their consciences be so easily quieted.

It is true, most certainly, that our Father has given us certain men to act as teachers and guides. We have been given a council of brothers and sisters, each with unique gifts and insights to bring to the Body.

And if we should take the counsel that has been given to us to heart, and truly appreciate and apprehend the light that has been given (both the greater light and all the lesser ones) then we, all, are thereby transformed into a “type of Christ,” and no image will ever stand between us and His genuine glory.

Those who are not yet mature in Christ will continue to choose something to represent Him. We have seen even the potentially beneficial gifts that our Father has given to us misused in this way. As Adventist, we have been blessed with certain writings from our pioneers, and from Ellen White, whom we consider to have been an inspired writer. And yet, there are groups who are simply unable to read these works for principle, for Yah’s voice IN them. They cannot see beyond the “letter” of what was written despite the very nature of those writings.

Consider, for example, if someone were to leave Christianity, and go back to Judaism, because a prophet once said, “My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven.” (Psalm 89:34-37) So it is with many who watch for a Sunday Law around every corner, heedless of the fact that it is Sabbath-keepers who, like the Pharisees and Sadducees of Yahshua’s day, have become the persecuting power in this latest turn of history’s wheel.

Those who continue to have faults in their religion will never feel “comfortable” in their place in the Body of Christ. Some may never feel the need to truly unite with the Body, because they do not understand the reality of our Father as a Covenant-making and Covenant-keeping God. They worship an “image” of Him conjured up by their own minds, and reinforced by the teachings of popular, corrupt, Christianity. Some, once they have entered, are unable to place the appropriate amount of weight upon the various guiding factors that Yah has given to us: principles, prophets, insights and inspiration. They have a distorted view of Yahweh, and therefore they cannot let the Word Itself, and all that it means, be the true standard of belief and behavior.

Of course, because of the things we have been born into, and the things around which we were raised, we will not have a naturally perfect vision of the spiritual world. Yahweh knows this, and He accounts for it, giving each of us who are willing the opportunity to develop “spiritual eyesight,” that allows us to see Him in such a way that the invisible things are “clearly understood.” But we must be willing to, as has been the theme of our last few studies, look honestly and clearly at ourselves. We must be willing to “see,” to clearly understand, our errors of the past, our cherished misconceptions, and our need to know, and worship, the true God of Heaven.

If we can do this, then we cannot be easily turned out of the path. The most wicked and cunning temptations cannot turn us from the sure Way that our Father has laid out before us, and that the Son of Yah has walked before us. Let us commit, let us even make a covenant, to know and to serve Yah, then it will be fulfilled of us as it is written, “For finding fault with them [because of the flaws in their faith], He saith, ‘Behold, the days come,’ saith the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not,’ saith the Lord.

“‘For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ saith the Lord; ‘I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.’

“In that he saith, ‘A new covenant,’ he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.” (Heb 8:8-13)

This world, with all its stains and its sorrows, is weary of existing so far from the love of Yah. It is growing old, and it is ready to vanish away. But our Father has made for us a way of escape, a way of clear sight, and true understanding. He has made for us – and of us – us a tabernacle, a Temple of Yah that is free of images, so that, being thus free, it can experience the true manifestation of His glory as it did in the days of Solomon. In that day, the Temple of Yah (both the Church corporately and its members individually) will be filled with the bright cloud, even as it is written above, and the work of Salvation will be at its glorious end.

Are there any questions before we close?