

## The Foundations of Evangelism

Happy Sabbath to all.

I have been thinking about evangelism this week. Of course, it is a subject that comes up routinely for us, because it is our Great Commission from Christ. As He has said to us, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” (Mat 28:19)

Of course, it is important that those with whom we share this message, in this generation of spiritual darkness, have a proper foundation laid. Errors fill the earth, even about the very first statements found in the Bible. Many do not believe that, “In the beginning Elohim created the heaven and the earth.” (Gen 1:1) That is the first verse, of the first chapter, of the first book... and Satan has seen to it that most human beings on the planet (for fundamental Christianity is a small minority of the world’s religions) believe something other than this.

It is important, for modern Christianity, that the foundation be laid with regard to the Ten Commandments, those everlasting principles that serve to remind us of the truth of that first verse: that Yahweh is the Creator, and as such He is the one who determines the nature of righteousness as expressed in human thoughts and actions. The Ten Commandments reveal our Father’s character to us, as it would be manifest in human lives.

Also, it is important for modern Christianity that the Jewish religion be properly understood, with its feast days, and its sacrifices, and its emphasis on the earthly Tabernacle. These things are symbols, foreshadowing, of the realities that are being fulfilled for us and within us under the New Covenant, starting with “Christ our Passover [who] is sacrificed for us.” (1Cor 5:7)

But the Great Commission, as quoted above, actually specifies “all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” This does not marginalize all those things I mentioned just now, because as Yahshua said, “If ye believe not [Moses’] writings, how shall ye believe my words?” (John 5:47)

I have been to Bible studies at which the participants expressed surprised admiration that I could speak, from memory, about the details of Elijah’s ministry. I knew, without having to flip to the book, the things that Jeremiah had done. And of course, being Sunday-keepers, they had little conception of the issues surrounding the Sabbath day. Christ is being taught widely enough, but without the foundations, and therefore His character is not being reproduced in the people that claim to be His followers.

Even among mainstream SDAs, they are missing so much of the Old Testament foundations – the New Moons, the appointed times, the principles that govern conditional prophecy and corporate accountability – that they would reject the Savior Himself, who would come to them with the very words that we have shared in their hearing. And in so doing, after all, they HAVE rejected Him.

But, having laid those foundations, the instruction of Christ is to teach those things that He commanded His disciples. Looking at that, just by itself, would make a very interesting and useful study, and perhaps we will do that next week... to see those things that Christ specifically commanded His followers. My point for now, however, is that the work of an evangelist is a bit more complex matter than just speaking about Christ and then asking someone to say the Sinner’s Prayer. It is about preparing a soul to take up

the cross, to bear witness for the Master, to stand in the judgment while sin's remaining residue is cleansed away, and to come into covenant with these others who are being sanctified. This requires some knowledge of Moses' writings, that Yah is the Creator, and Lawgiver, and Judge; and then we show how Yahshua fits in as the Savior, and Redeemer, and Mediator, reconciling us unto the Father.

I can identify two motives, two foundations, for the practice of evangelism.

The first of these, an obvious one, is *agape*. We have received love from our Father, and it is therefore within us. We have received love from an infinite source, and therefore have an infinite supply to share with others, desiring to help them, able to forgive those who have wronged us, and wishing to see them saved from destruction and loss.

The most significant example of this last one, wishing to see them saved from disaster, is a matter of spiritual truth. We know that there is a judgment coming. As the prophet wrote, "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain. Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of Yahweh cometh, for it is nigh at hand: a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains, a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.

"A fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth. The land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them. The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run.

"And Yahweh shall utter His voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for He is strong that executeth His word. For the day of Yahweh is great and very terrible, and who can abide it?" (Joel 2:1-4, 11)

And because of this we say to them from Yahweh, as the prophet continues to declare, "Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto Yahweh your Elohim; for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil. Who knoweth if He will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind Him?" (Joel 2:13, 14a)

The fact that love for others, as we were first loved, is a foundation for evangelism needs no detailed explanation. We know the fates of those who love and serve our Father, and those who will not. And we understand that it is not because Yahweh is an arbitrary and harsh Judge, striking those who stand against Him – but because only those who abide within Him, and are in harmony with His laws, can endure the light that will fill the universe when sin is finally and eternally wiped from the universe. We are being prepared to live in His light – a healing glory to the righteous, and a consuming fire to the unjust.

The second motive, or foundation, for evangelism, is similar to the first. It is similar, but not quite the same, because there are different thoughts, and emotions, associated with it.

The reason why we evangelize due to *agape* is because we have received it from our Father and, having received it, reflect it to the world. The quality of that reflection, however, depends a great deal upon the second factor, and that is gratitude. We love, because we are loved. We dare to express that love, in the face of rejection and unbelief, largely because of gratitude, because of thanksgiving.

Yes, we wish to see others saved from destruction, and brought into truth, but the reason why this has such a powerful impact upon us is because we are aware, first-hand, of the change that the Gospel has made in our own lives. The degree to which we are aware of the extent of that change, and thankful to Yahweh for it, is the degree to which we will be eager to have others share in our joy. As Yahshua said, “To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.” (Luke 7:47) It is not that some are forgiven “better” than others, or even “more” (in a sense) for the wages of any sin is death; all are forgiven infinitely. But those who are mighty in faith are those who truly realize the gift we have been given in Christ.

I would encourage you all, this Sabbath, to read the twelve verses of Psalm 26. It is a psalm of David, who expresses His thankfulness to the Almighty. It is a most relevant chapter for our day, as it speaks of standing in the judgment, of victory over sin (“I have trusted in Yahweh, therefore I shall not slide”), and of his intention to “publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works.” (Psa 26:7) In thanksgiving, King David found the voice of praise – and what is open praise, but a testimony of Yah’s working in our lives? It is a very powerful form of evangelism.

When we speak of the goodness of Yah, we are evangelizing, our own souls, our brethren, and any who will hear. Evangelism is not merely bringing someone into the faith, although that is its most common meaning. It is also sharing the ongoing and everlasting “good news” with those who already believe. In so doing, we edify one another, lighten one-another’s burdens, and destroy for one another a multitude of annoying temptations. In a house that praises Yahweh, troubles will be few. “Self” and its impulses are forgotten, and blessings fill the walls.

Here are some other verses that tell us the power of gratitude, of thanksgiving to Yah:

“I will praise the name of Elohim with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving.” (Psa 69:30)

“So we Thy people and sheep of Thy pasture will give Thee thanks for ever; we will shew forth Thy praise to all generations.” (Psa 79:13)

“By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually; that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.” (Heb 13:15)

We can easily see, in these and other verses, the connection between thanksgiving and the winning of souls that observe these things.

In order to be a true evangelist, one who not only draws others closer to Christ, but is also drawn and perfected himself, one must have gratitude, which indicates an understanding of the things from which we have been saved. This is what keeps pride from welling up when success is encountered, or discouragement from finding root when things do not apparently go well. It is quite possible to be an effective, but improper, evangelist. We have the example of Judas from the Gospels, who was with the others, working with them, leading others to the Savior; but he was not, himself, drawn closer to Christ’s perfect character.

But to be a true Evangelist, we must know – actively – how much better our lives are now, than before the Father and His Son came to dwell within us. Gratitude and praise are the foundation of a proper Christian testimony, and without it there can be no life to our work for the salvation of others.

To look at this from another angle, all of us have sacrificed for Christ and His people. That is a necessary part of the sanctification process. I speak not only financially, but in various other ways as well. And was the release of these things worth it to us? What is the price of a clean conscience, and knowing that Yah is smiling upon us? The favor and blessing of Heaven is worth all things, and is a treasure that can never be taken away. Those whose lives are based on gratitude and thanksgiving become “cheerful givers,” (2Cor 9:7) and therefore capable evangelists, for who can be a proper messenger for Christ, if he or she is always occupied with counting the cost?

Those who would speak for the Master must be filled with a joy that comes from thanksgiving. It is a necessity, especially with the reality of what evangelism is in this dark generation.

Those who bear an uncompromising message, one that involves repentance from all sin before salvation can be experienced, will be rebuked, ridiculed, subjected to arguments, sometimes physically assaulted. Recently, Pastor “Chick” sent out an email with regard to his experience on the Sabbath of July 27th. He described being physically removed from a Seventh-day Adventist Church for trying to reach out and save souls from destruction.

In this generation, little consideration is given to sincerity. Little respect is given to those who conscientiously hold their beliefs, if these beliefs are not commonly held. In this generation, that serpent, that spirit of fear, fills people with the traits of animals, so that they act, and react, on instinct, without the promptings of reason or courtesy. As the Holy Spirit is further withdrawn from the earth, as the close of human probation draws ever closer, we can only expect this to intensify.

Even those who send out emails and post on forums “anonymously” must “steel” themselves for unpleasant comments in response. But it is worth it. Despite what evangelism is in this generation, it is worth it to us to do. We have agape for those people, even the enemies of the faith, who will read our words. It is worth it, because we have gratitude to our Father, whom we serve – not for fear, not merely for some distant, spiritual reward. But we serve Him because we have been re-created in His image, and our spirit is as His Spirit. And if any have not been evangelizing as much as they are convinced they should, if any are not using their time, and talents, to reach out to others, then let me suggest that it is because such a one has begun to forget those things from which we have been saved.

The remedy, the way to begin to “do the first works,” is to choose thanksgiving. The remedy is to decide to praise Yahweh for the love that He has shown us, to remember the things that we have left behind as baggage on the way to salvation. Yahweh can bless us, and use us to bless others, only to the degree that we remember – and are grateful for – the blessings He has poured out upon us in the past, and this shows itself in few ways as clearly as our evangelical efforts.

With agape, with divine love, let us covenant with our Father that our lives will be lives of gratitude. Our words will be of praise, and thanksgiving – individually, within the Body, and out into the world. In this way, the Gospel of Yahshua will find its rightful place in the hearts of the hearers, preparing the way for the work of the Holy Spirit that follows.

Are there any comments or questions on tonight’s study?